

Theatre of Social Commitment: A Study of Edward

Bond's Select Plays

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Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Chapter I

Rejecting Absurdism: Bond's Appropriation of Realism 1-19

Chapter II

Towards a Rational Society: *Lear, Saved* and *Bingo* 19-39

Chapter III

Socialism in Postmodern Context: *The Sea, The Woman,*
and Early Morning 40-59

Conclusion 59-64

Bibliography

Introduction

The present thesis aims to examine the central concerns in some important plays of Edward Bond, one of Britain's greatest living contemporary dramatists, who associates himself with the experimental theatre of the 1970s. His powerful debates about moral standards and his stylistic pluralism constitute the distinguishing features of 'a new theatre' whose intended purpose has been viewed as an attack on British complacency. A time when his plays were censored, he made known a new stage vision that aimed at challenging self-satisfied attitudes through concrete visual images meant to illustrate the cruelty and moral degradation of contemporary life. Bond is an expert at creating surprising theatrical metaphors that are acted out in a direct way in order to materialize the evils of society, namely, 'what society does when it is heavy with aggression'. As the dramatist is firmly committed to humanistic values, he enjoys protesting against social and political injustice in a loud voice. He believes, "Theatre is a way of judging society and helping to change it; art must interpret the world and not merely mirror it" (Bond, 1994: 34). For this reason his works lay emphasis on the contradictions of a class-structured society, disclosing its destructive effects on individuals and drawing attention to the impossibility of any social improvement as long as political action is

ineffective. Preoccupied with the contradictions of a society based on class, the dramatist highlights the social, economic and political factors which shape the protagonists' consciousness. Although themes such as dehumanization, violence or alienation are frequently dealt with by his contemporaries, Bond's viewpoint on the mission of theatre is totally different, "I write about violence as naturally as Jane Austen wrote about manners. Violence shapes and obsesses our society and if we do not stop being violent we have no future" (Bond, 1994: 34).

Bond has therefore not departed from his conviction, already stated in 1972, regarding his Marxist conception of the theatre: "Art is the confrontation between justice and law and order" (1972:7). Bond's work has challenged the nature of our humanity and the dangerous social consequences of injustice. In an age of illusion, rampant consumerism, and addiction to diversion, his plays command us to look at how we are blindly corroborating in the destruction of our environment, our society, and our humanity. Bond's works and dramatic theories provide a blueprint for the re-vitalization of drama and its place in society. His work restores drama's central role as a voice that cries for justice in a world where the tyranny of authority is becoming increasingly elusive and unchecked. Since he feels himself as undeniably a part of an active and innovative period in modern British theatre, Bond wants his plays to include messages having universal validity as regards social as well as political issues. Trying to create a distinctive voice in theatre and being firmly committed to

humanitarian values, he tries to reflect as much as he can on the controversial appearance of the modern world. He includes deeply rooted problems of today's world in his description and truthful representation of the issues concerning human life. In his attempt to present representations of the reality of modern people, he makes suggestions in a politically responsible manner. To underline people's needs is almost an obsession for him. His concern for the complexities of his fellow citizens leads him to define the inevitability of close interest in the way individuals are to be viewed in a society, as expressed by the protagonist Trench in *The Worlds* (1979) : "What you invest in a man is what you get from him" (13).

By examining the notion of investment in man in his plays, one can deduce that the playwright firmly emphasises 'what modern societies need' more than anything else. Bond believes that this problem cannot be avoided continuously and focuses on the significance of organizations in societies whose cause of existence depends on this purpose. He is obviously in favour of organizations working hard to eliminate the destructive effects of corruption resulting mostly from mismanagement. Not being content with the process the world has been undergoing, Bond wants more effective policies to be applied, and believes that there is still a possibility to do so. He puts forward his ideas connected with this issue in *The Worlds* as follows: "If we knew what we are,

the world would change very fast” (44-45). He adds that the “world that can’t change loses all that it has”. (67)

The present thesis makes an attempt to foreground the above stated concerns of Bond and articulate their dramatic expression with a view to present the dramatist’s work as an important intervention of a socially aware consciousness. The first chapter is an attempt to reveal Bond’s dislike for the ‘theatre of absurd’ and his ‘appropriation of realism’, which is different from earlier realists and more akin to that of Brecht. Bond’s theatre is primarily concerned with his attempt to ‘use the theatre for social change’. In attempting to use the theatre for this purpose, Bond is obliged to write plays which achieve at least three basic theatrical goals. First, the plays must engage the spectators, second, they must explore the fundamental problems of society in such a way as to convince the spectators that social change is necessary and possible, and lastly, they must provide behavioural models the spectators can use in working for social change. The chapter brings to focus Bond’s outspoken didactic intention of reforming the society through a rational theatre that tells the truth, a feature that links him to the great tradition of the theatre of ideas. At the same time, Bond draws on a great variety of sources for his craftsmanship in theatre. His concentrated theatrical images suggest the concreteness of Shakespeare’s imagery and his dramaturgic method derives from Artaud, Brecht and Beckett. Moreover, his great skill at controlling the realistic dialogue is reminiscent of

the enigmatic theatres of Chekhov and Pinter. He offers serious thoughts on big topics in a dramatic way and can be compared to dramatists like Brecht, and in his aggressive presentation of the human condition, he is reminiscent of Shakespeare. In an age of pessimism Bond's greatness lies in showing that when we look at life closely it is unbearable to see what people suffer, but that is where we have to find our strength and should never turn away. If we do, we lose everything.

Chapter two concentrates on Bond's 'rational theatre' which emphasizes that it is not the acceptance through which human suffering and injustices can be relieved but effective action. Bond calls his theatre 'rational theatre' in the sense that it says there is a meaning to history, there is an explanation for human miseries and that we can discern a pattern in history and ameliorate the human condition, "I call my plays rational but they are often very passionate and very emotional plays, because passion and emotion are part of a rational life" (Bond, 1972:9). To eliminate the irrationality in the society Bond emphasises the characters' humanistic and pitiful response 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"(1972:11). Thus, he repeatedly stresses the need for awareness and action in his plays, this interdependence of idea and act being his most persistent theme. In each of the major plays analysed in this chapter, that is, *Lear* (1971), *Saved*

(1965) and *Bingo* (1973) at least one character comes to see society as irrational, and then acts to make it somehow rational.

The third chapter is an endeavour to highlight Bond's use of postmodern techniques in plays like *The Women* (1978), *The Sea* (1973) and *Early Morning* (1968), to criticise and eliminate the irrational order of the modern societies. Bond uses techniques like ambiguity, incoherence and fragmentation of both the language and the setting of the plays, non-linear progression of both events and the characters. Besides these, there is a dreamlike quality in his plays and the intrusion of phantasy mixed with realism. Bond's drama is reminiscent of the Balzacian richness, panoply of characters and situations that makes no pretense to a naturalistic milieu theory. Bond strikes us as remarkable because on the one hand he uses postmodern techniques, but at the same time he moves beyond it to criticise postmodern phenomenon for its incapability to understand the human thought's ability to comprehend objective truth. He also criticises postmodern writers for their rejection of the ability of language to represent reality. He insists that language represents the reality truer than ever when depicted dialectically.

The conclusion sums up the main ideas presented in the thesis and highlights Bond's contribution to the idea of a theatre committed to social change after absurdist and postmodernist theatres have run their course. Bond may well be credited with being one of the most powerful dramatic voices in

possession of an indomitable will and artistic skill to prove that theatrical art can still perform the function of raising consciousness and help create a better society.

Bond's Rejection of Absurdism and Appropriation of Realism

Edward Bond is one of the most prominent British dramatists of the contemporary times. He belongs to the realist tradition of G B Shaw and John Galsworthy, adopting a realist mode of dramatic presentation and a commitment to the socialist ideals. For him dramatic art justifies itself only if it encourages people to see themselves as responsible members of the society. Bond has rightly been called a 'rational dramatist', an epithet that marks him off from the absurdist tradition of Europe. Rejecting the absurdist proposition that posits absurdity as the necessary and universal condition of man, Bond strongly argues that humans, if they wish, can create a rational society based on justice and equality. His socialist theatre attacks what he calls 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 the free market system is best because it

appeals to the man's natural aggressiveness. Another factor that makes Bond reject the absurdist theatre is his faith that men's destinies are inseparably bound with their social and historical context. He foregrounds the significance of historical context through dramatic presentation of individuals. Bond's plays often thematically incorporate the very social and cultural contradictions, which the strategies of plays and their formal innovations address in different ways. By constantly bringing into question the function of literature, Bond's work can uncomfortably challenge an audience's unexamined habit of attending the theatre. The desire to speak for a society is increasingly present in Bond's works and his dramas address audiences in the process of change through rational action. He makes public that human nature does not support evil and is not destructive in essence. He believes holding up a mirror to various aspects of human life and believes that theatre cannot be dissociated from the processes going on in the world with regard to human relations. Bond has been preoccupied with concepts such as war and violence in connection with the nature of human relations. He makes known the existing conditions at present and to offer solution to problems faced by the individual, prerequisite for what Simon Trussler termed as "neo-naturalism" (1968: 130). The main objective of new naturalism is to present the interrelations between violent human action, and the responses of nature to such action is presumably to direct the audience's attention in the play. Just as the relation between man and nature is put forward

with prominent significance, so is the need for people to have confidence in one another stressed as an integral part of the core of human relations in view of the principle of new naturalism. Bond's naturalism blends traditional theatrical forms with modern stagecraft and could be described as socio-political realism. In his plays he has constantly turned to crucial periods in the history of the world, to examine the social, ethical and political roots of present situations in order to alter them in the future.

Edward Bond calls his theatre 'rational theatre' in the sense that it says there is a meaning to history, there is an explanation for human miseries and that we can discern a pattern in history and ameliorate the human condition, "I call my plays rational but they are often very passionate and very emotional plays, because passion and emotion are part of a rational life" (Colin Chambers, 1880: 24). Bond disliked the theatre of the absurd because it is fundamentally pessimistic and, therefore, cynical theatre. Its ultimate effect is to destroy in people a confidence and trust in themselves. "I call my theatre the rational theatre for this reason: it is in opposition to the absurd theatre" (Chambers, 26). He deals with the problem of irrationality because they are the problems that break the society. And when he deals with irrational subjects, as he often does, it leads some to imagine him as an irrational or the one writing for the theatre of the absurd. He is not interested in the theatre of the absurd at all, because according to him, it is culturally disastrous and that life is not absurd, but the

society is. He contends that if life is absurd, then everyone knows that we are some sort of freaks in some corner of the universe and we are all going to destroy ourselves. For Bond, the only justification for going to theatre is that it is a public institution in which our problems are made clear, are made real for us, and at the same time we are given hope and confidence in order to change the situation in which we find ourselves: “I would like to be able to create individuals on the stage...to be able to present people in such a way that you can understand their social relationship and be able to read the rest of their society in them, to understand them as living processes” (Chambers, 27). Bond’s plays tend to get connected to things like the theatre of the absurd but this is not true, because if a play like *Bingo* (1973) ends with a suicide, it does not mean it is a pessimistic play. He sees it as the working out of the rationality of the society. So *Bingo* is a demonstration of the working out of the rationality of society which are rational and coherent and from which the audience can learn. Bond believes “if an optimistic play is one where the people come at the end and say hurrah, that is a false optimism. All one can do to write an optimistic play is to show that human activity has meaning” (Ian Stoll, 1976: 417), which all of Bond’s plays display. His plays must be judged by the truth that has been demonstrated in it, and his plays demonstrate some truth about our lives. The optimistic tendency of Bond can be discerned in plays like *Bingo*, *Saved* (1965) and *Lear* (1971) where it is quite possible for audience to learn

something at the end, “to go out in order to start a new life” (Bond, 1973: 167). Bond wanted his play *The Sea* (1973) to be an optimistic play, to be able to reassure people about their ability to cope not only with their private problems but also with their political problems, “that human beings have the strength to do that, provided, they have the political will” (Glenn Lonely, 1976: 45). He wanted to create in audience a genuine confidence in their ability that would encourage people to realize that they can find meaning in their activities and lives. Bond’s optimism rests on his belief that “destruction is finally petty and in the end life laughs at destruction” (Bond, 1973:168). It is important to understand that Bond, often seen as a nihilist whose plays are filled with images of violence, retains a stubborn faith in humanity, what he calls the contradiction of “humanness”. If Bond looks into the abyss, he also points to something beyond. As he points out “you have to see how people deal with the crisis, but in the end you cannot despair. If you are going to despair, stop writing” (Michael Billington, 2008: 27). If his plays are staged and enacted in the way in which they are written what comes across is a colossal affirmation of life. Bond says, “Writers of the theatre of the absurd in our time write only from weakness because they are trapped in the decadence of our time and have no rational view of the future or of anything else” (Bond, 1978: 2).

Characters that are dramatic irritants rather than catalysts, that seem to thrive on stasis, that pursue information in a random, careless fashion, are the

characteristic traits of the absurdist theatre that could easily describe Bond's Pam, and, more especially, Len (character in *Saved*). Bond wants to write a play "out of nothing," where this is to be an elimination of "dramatic confrontation" (Bond, 2000: 71). The purpose of the approach, however, is not anywhere like the one Bond ascribes to Beckett, whom Bond sees as utterly apolitical and thus a useless artist. "I am made weary by the theatre of Beckett," he writes, "because it is written with great care and artistry yet nothing comes of it except pity" (Bond, 1996: 23). Bond's work is to be a rational art based on a coming socialist utopia: "what art conveys is that human beings envisage perfection, that their condition makes the search and creation of that perfection morally necessary, and that the often seemingly arbitrary and absurd events of history have meaning as part of this creation" (Bond, 1978: 13). Rather than walk a tight rope with the absurd, Bond's works tighten a didactic grip on his art, resulting in obviously preachy, sometimes clumsy "answer plays". With his aversion towards absurdist art, Bond is annoyed by an early critic of *Saved* who states, "Morally the production offers a blank cheque to the audience's imagination" (Bond, 2000: 92). Bond counters in his notes that "the moral involvement of the play is stressed" (Bond 92). Plays that write moral blank checks for the audience travel a path not desirable to Bond, whose goal is for the political stimulation of the audience. Citing Beckett, as he often does as a negative example, Bond believes that plays without moral function only lead to

artistic prostitution and a capitalist commoditization of art. “The philosophy of the absurd claimed to be moral statement about foundation...It took political violence and separated it from any judgement...If you live in a society where a banknote has meaning... then everything else has a meaning ... derived from money” (Bond, 1994: 31). Bond wants art to have social purpose and moral strength. Anything else plays into the greedy, corrupting hands of capitalism. He states, “the philosophy of the absurd is a philosophy of the rich which they require the poor to live. Beckett has written... pages bought for a thousand pounds. . . . That is an act of violence,” (Bond, 1994: 31). Certainly, many of the flexible tools of modern theatre come from the absurdist theatre, as witnessed by their successful use by Harold Pinter and Caryl Churchill, but Bond cannot forgive the absurd for its refusal to explain itself. As Jenny Spencer aptly asks, “what would have become of Bond as an artist, had he not had such a frozen contempt for Beckett?” (1992: 9). Bond expresses his stance in explicit terms, “there can be no good play which does not praise life” (Bond 2001:181).

Bonds contribution to the contemporary dramatic literature lies in uncovering cultural and theoretical issues that make his works so challenging. What distinguishes Bond from many of his socialist contemporaries is an insistence on writing literature and keeping his eye on posterity, and what distinguishes his plays from the dominant literary norm is their passionate

concern for the future, and the revolutionary vision they impart on its behalf for audience. W B Worthen sums up this concern of Bond as follows:

Bond succeeds in making his audience see deeply into the minds, and comprehend the motives, of human beings who are not only practically unable to talk but also incapable of understanding their own motives. . . . By illuminating their speechlessness and letting us see into their tormented souls ... Bond shows us that these people too are full human beings, capable of the noblest emotions and actions (1992: 98).

Bond's strength as a playwright is his cautious optimism. He recognizes that human beings aren't totally perfectible, and he also knows that any movement toward the regeneration of society will be extremely difficult, that the consciousness of an entire society cannot be changed immediately. Regardless of the difficulties, however, Bond is determined to demonstrate the value of one's action. Thus, he repeatedly stresses the need for awareness and action in his plays, this interdependence of idea and act being his most persistent theme. The subjects he deals with are not minute, they are full scale, and they are about the future of our society. As he puts it, "Whether I deal with them well, others must judge" (qtd in Malcolm Hay 1980: 22).

As far as Bond's dramatic technique goes, it can be seen as originating in some of the vital critical debates on artistic experimentation in the twentieth century. Of special significance is the Brecht-Lukacs debate of the 1930s which

gave shape to the theories of realism that defined a dialectical definition of reality. In his version of social realism, demonstrated in his early plays, he does not side with either Brecht or Lukacs to the exclusion of the other. While Lukacs prefers realist drama, Brecht prefers new epic constructions with theatrical alienation effects. Lukacs' contention with Brecht, in one regard, is the same as Bond's problem with Beckett, he finds in Brecht an unnecessary stylization of art, an attention to modernizing forms over historic content. As Elizabeth Wright states, "Lukacs . . . wants to see real contradictions emerging from a single unified narrative, but this has to be done without betraying the hand of the artist" (1968: 74). Brecht, on the other hand, "uses demystification, not to get at the real, but to get a proper relation to reality, for it is in that relation that human values take shape" (Wright, 1989: 73). Bond sides with Lukacs on the idea that the political art work is best cast in the mode of social realism, containing the historic contradictions within the work itself. Bond, even with his high regard for the working class, realizes the audience needs to be assisted in gaining the correct political consciousness. In approaching the audience, Bond operates in Brecht's camp. To Brecht, Lukacs' social realism is just stuffing new content into the old form of 19th century representation models that promote illusion and empathy. Brecht's epic theatre, with its alienation effects, creates "human social incidents . . . [as] something striking, jolting, or discomfoting, its aim is to bring the spectator to a heightened

awareness of certain aspect of human social reality” (qtd in Bela Kiralyfalvi, 1990: 23). W B Worthen finds Bond’s experimenting with form to elicit new relations to subject matter and audience to be similar to Brecht’s. Here it is a matter of vaulting over Beckett to get to Brecht. “How can we read the openness of the scene in Bond’s theatre not as the vaguely hostile and indifferent emptiness of the absurd, but as an attempt to disentangle realistic presentation from the oppressive social practices that form the physical, institutional, legal, domestic environment - in a word the social environment” (1992: 91). Worthen’s question discredits absurdist dramas by reducing their affect to “indifferent emptiness” and in suggesting that Bond’s dramas require a special Brechtian type of disentanglement to get past the absurd.

Thus Brecht has been called upon to foster the distinction between the “classic” and “critical realism”. Both denote a reflection of reality that produces recognition but classic realism naturalises or conceals the convention on which it depends, obscuring dynamic contradictions that could lead to radical change. Brecht’s adaptation of critical realism was defined by him in these words, “our conception of realism needs to be broad and political, free from aesthetic restriction and independent of conventions: if reality alters, to represent it the means of representation must alter too” (Brecht, 1964: 107). Brecht’s insistence that “time flows on” and “methods wear out” recuperates the experiments of modernism for the realistic project. Like Brecht, Bond attempts to orient the

audience towards action with active participation instead of passive consumption. Both view reality as historical, contradictory and subject to human intervention and write in order to change it. Both are interested in the relation between history and the individual, and the relationship of a play to their audience. Both acknowledge that lived experience of reality is mediated by ideology in ways that affect the capacity for action. Like Brecht, Bond uses the technique of historicising. Some of his plays are set in foreign countries while some others are set in unidentified ones. Some of his characters are historical figures like Queen Victoria (*The Women*) and the Japanese poet Basho (*Narrow Road to the Deep North*). By means of historification, Bond aims to break down the audience's sense of identification with characters and places. Thus, the audience is driven to focus on the socio-political factors underlying the events in the play. Like Brecht everything in Bond's theory is dedicated to an ultimate end of replacing an 'illusionistic theatre', with the 'theatre of objectivity' and science. To this aim Bond focused on sociology, which is a scientific investigation of human behaviour. For Bond "what happens in society has identifiable cause and the theatre should disclose them objectively" (Tony Coult, 1979: 47). Before assuming the political responsibility to change the society, the audience should first identify the social defects and their origins. Like Brecht, Bond makes use of alienation effects to create such awareness. The A-Effect is designed for attaining a perspective towards the political and social

matters presented by the play. Bond uses A-Effect as a means to create a new human consciousness that is in line with Marxism. He asserts that the audience should be first made “uncomfortably aware of weak spots in the society” (Katharine Worth, 1981: 206). This political awareness can only be achieved by leaving the habitual manners to assess the world:

This is political awareness and it can only be achieved by leaving the habitual manner to assess the world. They (audiences) judge and in judging extend their self-consciousness because they have not merely responded to a situation or a character in the socially prescribed way but have been made to see the aspects of the situation or character which the socially prescribed responses blots out (Bond, 1978: 13).

Bond searches for an audience response that is “political and not shaped by social imposition or sensitiveness of bourgeoisie” (Bond, 1977:18). The A-Effect includes images of violence that are shocking, irritating and unexpected. Bond directs the audiences to observe the social evils from a different perspective. The challenge or problem for the audience is two-folded. There is an escalating violence in Bond’s plays which makes very tough demands on the audience, and there is no apparent escape from it. Bond believes that we must not write clever speeches but words must be means of action. Art to Bond is a close scrutiny of reality and therefore, he puts on the stage only those things that happen in our society. There are often violent things in our society, and when

they occur he depicts them as truthfully and honestly as a sincere artist should. But he is not interested in violence for the sake of violence. Violence is never a solution in his plays, just as violence is never a solution in human affairs, “violence is a problem that has to be dealt with” (Ian Stoll, 1976: 115). In Bond’s plays violence is a defensive strategy to survive in an unjust and irrational system. “People turn to violence as they are deprived of their physical needs. Since man is alienated from his natural self, he becomes nervous, tense and begins to look for threats everywhere” (Bond, 1972: 10). He always tries to relate the problem of violence to society and doesn’t see it just a theatrical technique. Bond’s plays recuperate with incidents that insist on rational approaches in life by denouncing the irrationality which is the cause of violence in society. He is aware of the fact that violence is an overriding social phenomenon in the modern society. So the presentation of violence on the stage disturbs the audiences and generates a socio-political alertness. He describes images of violence in his plays as ‘Theatre Events’. “A theatre event in his dramaturgy is a complex movement of social analysis” (Jenny Spencer, 1992:17). Theatre Event corresponds to another Brechtian dramatic instrument ‘*gestus*’, which is an essential part of epic theatre. John Willet defines it “as carrying the combined sense of gist and gesture, an attitude or a single aspect of an attitude expressed in words and actions” (1998: 107). Similar to the Brechtian concept of ‘*gestus*’ Bond’s ‘Theatre Event’ reflects his presentation

of an individual in relation to the society and his character's attitude under a certain political system. This system is mostly a capitalist system, which involves the relation between the restrictive system and the individual's reaction to the system. He protests against the capitalistic claims, that man is inherently violent, and states that, "it is just in certain situations that people can be violent. So our problem is not to deal with the weaknesses of human nature, but to create a society in which it is possible for people to function in a way which would be normal for them" (Stoll, 416). Brecht near the end of his life summed up the primary purpose of his career: "I wanted to take the principle that it was not just a matter of interpreting the world but of changing it and applying that to the theatre". (John Willet, 1994: 129). In a similar vein, Bond in the preface to his play *The Bundle* explains his purpose in working for the theatre, "Theatre can co-operate with all those who are in any way involved in rationally changing society and evolving a new consciousness" (Bond, 1978: 13). Although Bond shares with Brecht his critical aim and several of his epic methods, their thematic concerns differ in historical situations and their strategies are not identical. The most important distinction between Bond's and Brecht's theatre lies in the specific material reality of the plays themselves, in the different rhythm and references that Bond constructs for audience. Bond's wide choices of genres and rich theatrical idiom have a particularly British inflection. It registers in the colloquial accuracy of Bond's working-class

figures and the epigrammatic wit of his mannered aristocrats. Bond writes, “The tragedy of the twentieth century is that Brecht died before he could complete a lost period of plays; the plays he would have written as a member and worker of a Marxist society. The loss is very severe. But we have to write plays” (Bond, 1978: 34-35).

In many respects Bond’s career as a playwright recapitulates earlier debates about the use of “realism” in political art. Bond’s drama is reminiscent of the Balzacian richness and variety that stand at the heart of Lukacs’ vision of realism, a panoply of characters and situations that makes no pretence to a naturalistic milieu theory, but instead claims to penetrate the laws governing objective reality to uncover the deeper, hidden, mediated, not immediately perceptible network of relationships that go to make up society. Bond’s stance toward the ‘experimental’ realism of Brecht is well described by Fredric Jameson in these words:

The spirit of realism designates an active, curious, experimental, subversive in a word, scientific attitude towards social institutions and the material world; and the “realistic” work of art is therefore one which encourages and disseminates this attitude, yet not merely in a flat or mimetic way or along the lines of imitation alone. Indeed, the “realistic” work of art is one in which “realistic” and experimental attitudes are tried out, not only between its characters and their fictive realities, but also between the audience and the

work itself, and not least significant between the writer and his own materials and techniques (Qtd by, W B Worthen 1992: 90).

This account of Brecht forecasts much in Bond's work, particularly its position in the culture of the contemporary theatre, its attitude toward that theatre and toward the relationship between the stage and the audience. And although Bond has frequently adopted the style of Brecht's drama, his theatre pursues Brecht's more urgent assault on the practices of the stage, particularly the rhetoric implicit in, and its construction of a "realistic" social audience. Bond's theatre generally avoids the scenic integration characteristic of realism, the space of a Bond play is usually open and spare, like the unlocalized space of Brecht's theatre, but without Brecht's theatricalizing technology, the placards, film screens, turntables. Bond's repudiation of scenic integration makes the stage-space of his theatre unusually difficult to read. This is particularly true of plays like *Saved* (1965), where Bond is recognizably working within the realm of a sociological realism, but a realism in which the material and social environment might seem almost entirely to have disappeared. Bond works to set his "scenes in public places, where history is formed, classes clash and whole societies move" (W B Worthen, 1992:93). He invites his audience to read the open stage as resisting the integration of the material and of a single mastering perspective on the action. Bond's open stage works to resist realistic notions of environmental causality. He divides the stage-space and interrupts linear

narrative to break down the integrating force of the realistic scene, to build alienation into the play's structure. Not surprisingly, he follows Brecht in characterization, showing characters in their various social roles and in various social situations, rather than developing a character from the single perspective. Objects too, in Bond's theatre, gain meaning not through assimilation to a pervasive scene or to the internalized motivation of a given character, but from their use in a specific situation, as he suggests in *The Popes Wedding*, (1962) where he calls for a dark, bare stage, littered with a few objects to indicate location. The objects onstage develop a public history, one that this theatre asks us to learn to read. We learn to know what things are by their texture. Texture is evidence of truth. Bond uses the term "texture" to locate both characters and objects in history. For texture also "concerns what someone does," and "when the character is treated as part of the play's texture, it's placed in its social context. Instead of being abstract and spiritual, it becomes political and is seen to be a matter of class" (W Worthen, 1992: 92). By asking us to read actors and objects as moments in a public history, Bond hopes to alter our habits of interpretation, the ways we read ourselves and the physical world we create. He hopes, finally, to provide an image of the world where the audience act.

It is worthwhile to compare Bond's use of theatrical space with Harold Pinter's. In creating the scenic environment in *Saved* there is a similarity between Pinter and Bond. The boarding house in Pinter's *The Birthday Party*,

(1957) however, is set up differently than the house with a rented room in *Saved*. The examples of the two playwrights' perceptions of reality are emblematic of their dramatic focus, Bond sees broadly, socially, analytically; Pinter sensually, personally, experientially. In the sense of defamiliarizing the stage environment, Bond is perhaps more Brechtian than Pinter. The notion of Pinter's stage environment is that "the stage displays its objects, but they fail to cohere, to claim a self-evident and natural relation to the characters and to a larger dramatic world" (Worthen, 83). It is not solely or mainly Pinter's scenic objects that fail to cohere, but the dialogue and action of the characters onstage that create the instability. Bond dislikes Pinter's dramatic approach, "which like Beckett's creates the experience of the situation being mysterious and of there being some hidden value within the mystery" (Bond, 1995: 143). Bond is not impressed with Pinter's use of dialogue, the famed Pinteresque speech with its razor sharp exactness, its casual repetitiveness, its spill into threat, and its pauses. For Bond, this is all just a style of generalities and evasions. He comments, "Pinter is following a dead-end" (Bond, 1998: 86). Again he describes his idea of characters as, "I don't like the theatre of discussion where people sit down and talk intellectually about an idea, because I don't think that is what theatre is about. Theatre involves the whole person on the stage" (Christopher Innes, 2002: 152). Bond's use of dialogue in *Saved* may allow some audience members to come to the conclusion that it recalls the patterns of

an urban class, but this ignores Bond's skill as a critical realist shaping material to create a "specific form of a specific content" (George Lukacs, 1964: 19). The form of cliché, so often apparent in the dialogue in *Saved*, seems to actually indicate the level of the character's intellectual capacity.

The most vital thing about the structure of Bond's plays is to show the relationship of human beings to their society and the sort of society in which they live. Bond believes that is the real problem of human beings because we fail to solve it, and it will just blow us to bits. The only sort of structure according to Bond which is good is the structure of the 'epic theatre', and it is interesting that all writers who have been aware of the importance of the social problems have written in that way. It is a consequence of seeing modern problems properly. Bond believes theatre should reassure them about their strength to alter the society. The problems have to be handed over to the audience. This is because our problem is created all the time, constantly recreated. He believes justice is not achieved simply by saying who is guilty. If that were so it would be much easier to solve our problems. Bond's dramas primarily deal with what is truth about the lives we are living, in spite of all the obfuscation and obscurantism that is heaped on individuals in our society. If a dramatist can cut through all the myths that people are brought up to believe and put on the stage at least some of the truth about society then he is pursuing the path of a good theatre. As a prolific playwright, Bond has introduced his

comprehensive theory of the condition of the individual in relation to the society within a political framework. In his theory, society means “the establishment”, the social order and the individual. Bond’s commitment is to socialist ideology based on which he has formed the theory of his theatre. His socialist world-view establishes a ground for his perception of the individual and the society. Bond’s vision of the individual and society has fundamentally been influenced by Marxist ideology. “His achievement has been a theatre which is Marxist in that his characters are the product of social processes whose motivations and actions found their energy in social relationships”(Coult, 1979: 35). Bond argues that there can be no modern art which is not socialist. He believes that “art is not universal, ideal statement that appeals to all people, but is class derived and historical” (Patricia Hern, 1996: 10). As a politically conscious playwright he observes the socio-political framework of the era and the society he lives in. He comes up against the fact that injustices and political repression are prevalent in the society. Bond attempts to present these socio-political issues to get a political response from the audience. “Art without politics would be trivial” (Hern, 13). Bond wants to create a new political consciousness through which members of the society will be able to recognise the injustices and irrationalities which afflict the society. Before assuming a political responsibility to change the society, the audience should first identify the social defects and their origins. Bond’s concern is not only with how individuals perceive and understand their

historical situation in which they are placed but also with the ways in which that gained perception effects their capacity for politically correct action. As the damaging effects of a class structured society are reiterated from play to play, Bond's emphasis on appropriate human response becomes increasingly focused. All of Bond's plays provide narrative context that calls for social change, situations that demand some moral actions from the character and the audience as well, but none of Bond's character is automatically endowed with enlightened vision, they come to it through the concrete social interaction in the play.

In Bond's plays the individual reacts to the irrational system in two ways, complying with the system or revolting against the system or those who stand against the oppression of society and others who fail to resist the oppression. People who comply with the system can be the most violent of all other citizens because they are encouraged by the authority. They make use of all the technology and power and "their use of power is justified as being for the sake of the well-being of society" (Bond, 1978: 9). Bond asserts that a rational society can only be achieved by morally healthy individuals who resist the cruel system. Bond's characters resist the system either in a silent revolt or in an actively political revolt. Fromm declares that "the drive of freedom is inherent for human nature; while it can be corrupted and suppressed it tends to assert itself again and again" (1962: 57). Therefore, "they either become violent to

defeat their frustration or accept the power of the system over them; they cannot conceive of existence by defying the social order” (Richard Sacharine, 1976: 196). Bond’s Len in *Saved*, the Gravedigger’s Boy in *Lear*, Leonard in *In the Company of Men* (1996), and other characters in a number of other plays provide a means to understand Bond’s aesthetic and political purposes. Len is a jumpy young man incapable of bravery; the Gravedigger’s Boy is the earnest young man destroyed too early by total war; Leonard is a needy, spoiled youth destroyed by big business. There is a sense in these young people that they are just starting out; inexperienced in the social situation, they are doomed to be failures. Richard Sacharine dubbed such characters as “Bond Innocents” (Sacharine 147). They are optimistic and inquisitive souls, identifiable in art and life.

A difficulty in the characterization occurs in how Bond utilizes the character type politically. Bond’s political ardour is intense. Characters, such as innocent by-standers during war, may be eliminated with only some regret. Although all of Bond’s characters are in some way victims of unjustly ordered society, their subjective response to it notably differs. In *Bingo*, class position separates Shakespeare and the Son, but both find their situation intolerable. Shakespeare internalises his anger in guilt, despair and suicide while the Son externalises his anger in self-righteousness and murder. In *The Sea*, Even’s isolates himself from society in order to save his sanity and Hatch loses his in

the effort to fit in. Bond himself explains the kind of characters he tends to create:

My plays exploit the difference between the two worlds, taking the character from one world to the other. . . . All my characters have to struggle in two worlds, (rational & irrational) they have to take the journey from one world to the other world. If they don't do that, they are destroyed. The imagination in our postmodern worlds has to rethink the ways in which it can negotiate its travelling from one world to the other" (Bond, 1997: 104).

Bond's main characters in their struggle against an overpowering society come to understand their predicament and mankind's need for social justice. Willy in *The Sea*, consoles Rose with this understanding, "If you look at life closely it is unbearable. What people suffer. . . . It is all unbearable but that is where you have to find your strength. . . . So you should never turn away. If you do, you lose everything" (Bond, 1973: 44). From this understanding most of Bond's characters go to accomplish some form of positive social action. Len in *Saved* begins to act positively by living "with people at their worst and most helpless" (Bond, 1965: 5). Arthur, in the last act of *Early Morning*, sees clearly what his position is and is then able to act. In other words, he wants to get out of heaven and escape from society. Lear makes the first attack on society by starting to tear down his wall but he is quickly shot. Willy and Rose in *The Sea*, young strong and united, go off determined to change the world. Wang in *The*

Bundle manages to successfully change the society. Bond's position on the hero is expressed by Wang "To judge rightly what is good to choose between good and evil that is all that is to be human" (1978:78).

The ultimate assumption, to be inferred both from Bond's themes and characters, is that he rejects absurdism and lays down his plan of a rationalist theatre, through what he calls 'action models'. One of the striking features of his theatre is his creation of bleak dramatic situations which nevertheless lead his heroes to emerge with the blooming hope of restoring these situations. The sense of possibility has come to be vital in Bond's plays; it is something they return to time after time, in the teeth of what audiences had thought was hopeless. Those plays which transmit the idea of total resignation are not the paths travelled by him, quite the opposite; he is anxious to show that this model is inadequate for the modern audience. Instead of turning to resignation and protection, Bond's characters turn to a readjustment of their behaviour and to a new action in consequence, even dying for a just cause. Their coming to knowledge and action requires difficult steps, and during the course of the play they move through the clearly discernible phases of pride, suffering, perception, and finally, a willingness to act. In the dynamic relationship between the play and its audience, Bond wants our experience of change and understanding to open our own eyes; and he may shock us into a very important thing--- recognition of ourselves and our society. This recurrence of action model

ultimately points to his deep rooted faith in the man's ability to overcome the difficulties emerging in the confrontation between the irrational society and the individual. Bond's instruction is clear and straightforward, to say deliberately to the audience, "you mustn't be afraid. You must be conscious of the dangers but nevertheless be conscious of your strength" (qtd in, Hay and Roberts, 143). Bond has successfully dramatized his lifelong preoccupation with action both with his themes and characters. His greatness in the twentieth century lies in the fact that he persisted in the human ability to cope with the social dilemmas in an age in which pessimism is a fashion. His theatre is an expression of the possibility of building a rational society and, ultimately, a contribution towards demonstrating the challenges in the way of achieving that goal.

Edward Bond's Rational Theatre: *Lear*, *Bingo* and *Saved*

Edward Bond's plays try to make his audience reflect on the fact that an acceptance that mistakes have been committed is not enough; one has to proceed towards action and change. Bond's theatre rejects acceptance and insists on action, because he believes modern society is increasingly irrational, arguing that justice, allowing people to live in a way for which they are evolved, is increasingly denied by the society. Only the theatre which offers the immediacy of enactment in a public context would seem to answer Bond's sense of urgency. This perceived need for immediate action is also the source of Bond's major quarrel with Shakespeare. Like Shaw, Bond reveals his irritation with bardolatry (exceeding praise for Shakespeare). Despite his admiration for *King Lear*, Bond felt that it suffered from one major accusable flaw, the preaching of resignation. "The social moral of Shakespeare's *Lear* is, endure till in time the world will be made right. That is a dangerous moral for us" (Bond, 1971: 9). According to Bond, Shakespeare does arrive at an answer to the problems of his particular society, and that was the idea of total resignation, accepting what comes. What Bond wants to say is that this model is inadequate, that it just does not work. "Acceptance is not enough. Anybody can accept. You can go quietly into your gas chamber... you can sit quietly at home and have H-bomb dropped on you (Bond, 1971: 7). Shakespeare's *King Lear* epitomized the best and the worst in western culture, Bond loved the old king for his insight,

but hated him for neglecting to act on it. He feels that the Shakespearian Lear could not get out of his problems simply by suffering the consequences, or by endurance or resignation. He had to live through the consequences and struggle with them. Bond's rejection of acceptance is clearly based on the fact that it is insufficient to reflect on the reality, so he wished to intervene in it through the power of action. This optimism is tempered by realism, for he knows that any change will be dawdling and painstaking. Nevertheless, in an era in which solipsism, nihilism, and defeatism are all too prevalent, Bond's views challenge people both to recognize corruption and to accept responsibility through action. Bond's greatness lies in his attempt to confront the greatest dramatist, "Lear was standing in my path and I had to get him out of the way" (H Klein, 1989: 71).

Bond in *Lear* plunges into the past to search for rational order, his intention "to write is that we now have to use the play for ourselves, for our society, for our time, for our problem" (Bond, 1970: 24). By relating *Lear* to 'ourselves' he feels an overwhelming need to focus on the society that Lear had subjugated and tyrannized, rather than on the Lear's personal hardships. Bond wants to show that a man is capable of learning and realizing the mistakes he has committed, and by readjustment of Lear's behaviour. *Lear* is structured as an epic drama which enables Bond to present in a series of small-scale scenes Lear's learning progress from moral blindness and inhumanity to moral insight

and humanity. In the beginning of the play, Bond presents us with a powerful symbol for the restriction of freedom, for oppression and for authority--- a wall. The wall testifies to Lear's authoritarian regime, where the "centralisation and brutalization of the use of power" (Lou Lappin. 1987: 77), has become institutionalised. Ironically, due to Lear's self-delusion, the wall, for him, symbolizes peace and security. "My people will live behind this wall . . . live in peace. My wall will make you free (p. 3-4). This declaration is followed by Lear's shooting of an innocent workman, "He has a grudge. I took him off this land" (p. 3). Furthermore, Lear may claim the building of the wall to be an altruistic gesture towards his people, but we soon detect that his apparent benevolence is a rather self-absorbed gesture to glorify his memory, "When I'm dead my people will . . . remember my name, no, venerate it!" (p. 7). Warrington (Lear's councillor) tries to prevent Lear's irrational enforcements. He warns Lear when he demands more workers for the construction of the wall, "we can't take more men. The country would be derelict and there'd be starvation in the towns" (p. 16). Lear ignores his advice. Warrington tries to stop the war that Lear declares against his daughters, "we could refuse this war. We're old, sir. We could retire and let these young men choose what to do with their own lives" (p. 8-9). In his despotism he does not tolerate any criticism, not even from his daughters, whom he also considers as his enemies, "I knew you were malicious. I built my wall against you as well as my other enemies (p. 7).

His destructive policies provoke the revolt of his daughters and the final insurgency of Cordelia, but they continue the ideology of Lear's regime, where justice is subordinated to power, and "when this happens power takes on the dynamics and dialectics of aggression" (Bond, 1971: 11). When Lear is disposed of his power he contemplates a world in ruins, but is still so self-deceived that he does not understand that the horror around him is a consequence of his own destructive policies. Bond concentrates on this theme, violence caused by a repressive power system, where humanity is lacking and where violence originates more violence. Lear asks about his daughters, "Where does their vileness come from?" (p. 9), unable to comprehend that the terrible violence is the product of his system. Fontanelle has already suggested the answer. As she and her sister are left alone, their plans for the overthrow of their father's regime hardening, she says, "Happiness at last! I was always terrified of him" (p 8). Bond implies that violence is a whirling cycle that breeds more and more, until it is not hampered entirely. Therefore, he suggests "Those who are mistreated by wrong policy often resort to violence . . . They are engulfed by a social climate in which the need for justice becomes the desire for revenge and the need to create becomes the necessity to destroy" (Int. John Tusa, 2003:74).

After Lear's overthrow by his daughters and his subsequent lodging given by the Gravedigger's Boy, he wants to forget the burden of the past, "I could have a new life here. I could forget all the things that frighten me the years I

have wasted” (p. 39). Yet the bygone haunts him in the figure of the grief-stricken Warrington, who reminds him of his own miserable condition “He’s dead! I saw his face! It was like a stone! I shall die!” (p. 22). Bond does not sanction his Lear the peaceful retreat of the farmhouse, because he has to pass through additional suffering in order to swot. Lear is cognizant now of the violence which occurred on the farm (murder of Boy and the rape of Cordelia), but he does not yet grasp the foundation of it. All the images (caged animal) which cause Lear’s distress are connected with death and violence, and they will finally help him to comprehend the mistakes he committed and to understand why violence erupted, “I killed so many people and never looked at their faces. But I looked at that animal” (P. 54). After the mock trial under Bodice and Fontanelle’s authority, Lear finds himself in a prison-cell and the ghost of the Gravedigger’s Boy appears, which functions as one of Bond’s dramatic devices to demonstrate that Lear is still divided between his memories of the Golden Age (past) as a powerful king. The Gravedigger’s Boy tries to persuade Lear into resignation, to live in peace with him, “We will go back to my house. It’s quiet there. They will leave you in peace at last” (78). The ghost wants to prevent Lear from helping people who suffer under Cordelia’s reign, “Send these people away. Let them learn to bear their own sufferings . . . They suffer and no one can give them justice...that is the world you have to learn to live in” (p. 94). Lear’s attitude to the Ghost of the Gravedigger’s Boy is one of

paternalism, yet indirectly he intends to protect his own past. The gradual decaying of the Ghost signifies Lear's progress in comprehension. Lear becomes more aware of his guilt, when Fontanelle denounces him "For as long as I can remember there was misery and waste and suffering wherever you were. You live in your own mad world, you can't hear me. You've wasted my life and I can't even tell you. O God, where can I find justice?" (p. 56). In the autopsy scene Lear sees dead Fontanelle, and the sight of her body brings him to understand that man is not inherently evil, "She sleeps like a lion and a lamb, a child. The things are so beautiful. I am astonished... If I had known this beauty and patience and care, how I could have loved her" (p 77). Although uncertain of his exact responsibility, Lear becomes more aware at this point that he is indeed guilty for the evil of his daughters. When Bodice, Lear's other rebellious daughter, is brought in by a soldier, Lear tells her that he killed Fontanelle, "Look! I killed her! Her blood is on my hands! Destroyer! Murderer!" (p. 74). As Richard Scharine points out, "Lear's recognition of his responsibility in the spiritual death of his daughter is his first step in the journey from fancy to moral maturity" (1976: 205).

Eventually Lear assumes the role of an apostle who talks to the multitudes who come to listen to him, when he tells them a fable about a bird who was locked in a cage (p. 74-75). Bond wants to show the audience that words are insufficient if not followed by action, "We talk to people but we don't

really help them. We shouldn't let them come here if that's all we can do" (p. 90). When he becomes convinced that Cordelia does not know what she is doing by continuing the construction, he determines to write to her caveat about the consequences. For the first time Lear asserts himself over the protests of the ghost of the Grave Digger's Boy, "I can't be silent... I must stop her before I die!" (p. 81). The wisdom gained through suffering tells Lear that "lives are awkward and fragile ... we have only one thing to keep us sane: pity, and the man without pity is mad" (p. 98). When Cordelia goes on to insist that the wall must be built, Lear yells, "Then nothing's changed! A revolution must at least reform!" (p. 97). As Lear disowns his part from the oppressive system, there is no incentive for the Ghost's existence, it has to die. As Hilde Klein has aptly remarked, "The ferocious demise of the Ghost, torn by squealing, angry pigs, specifies Lear's past violent system and his terrible distress in his headway to insight"(1989: 71-78).

Lear's speech after the Ghost's departure encompasses his learning process, "I see my life, a black tree by a pool. The branches are covered with tears . . . The wind blows the tears in the sky. And my tears fall down on me" (p. 86). This speech expresses both woe and clear vision. Out of this new understanding Lear gropes forward to the wall with the intention of demolishing it. Though an impossible undertaking, this is not a futile gesture. It is a heart-rending gesture, because it outlays Lear's life, yet it is a gesture full of

sanguinity. If there is only one person to compete against the system, there will be the possibility of altering it. One of the workers who are to withstand the erection of the wall “looks back”, (p. 88). He has understood the undertone of Lear’s endeavour. Bond wants each member of the onlookers to be the person who “looks back” and to proceed to action. If we change human consciousness, if we assume the idea of accountability as Lear does in his final recognition, then an amendment in society is possible. Bond’s *Lear*, and in general all his plays, are conceived in order to provoke a change in the audience by changing their consciousness. When he goes to tear down the wall he takes Susana with him and wants her to go back to tell the people about his attempt. His aim is to display to other people the possibility and necessity to take a revolutionary action. The gesture he makes is neither final nor futile. It is the demonstration of Lear’s integrity to those he leaves behind that action is necessary and conceivable. The play’s conclusion is a measured account of the difficulty of action in an unjust society but it also demonstrates that action is the only moral retort in such a situation. It would be superficial to suppose that any greater optimism than this could reasonably be shown at the end of such a sombre and realist work. Lear has been responsible for the direction of the harrowing state at all costs; he has to live with the consequences of that in the lives of the people around him. His own suffering is easier to bear than theirs. And he has to face the fact that he can do nothing himself to change things. Changing himself

does not change his society. All he can do is live out an idea, the idea of pity, and this is all he can appeal to at the end of the play. Bond's *Lear* seeks to present a king who acts and who is therefore a more practical hero for the contemporary world. Bond notes that Lear lives his life by dying in it. The ending implies one of Bond's primary views, action will lead to change, acceptance will not.

If *Lear* is a demonstration of Bond's preoccupation with the theme of displaying action as the only and viable model of relieving society from irrationality, *Bingo* (1973) deals with the life of an artist who in order to secure his own financial interests, risked the lives of those who expected patronage from him. *Lear* insists upon the strength of human beings and their ability to deal with the difficulty of changing the world, *Bingo* according to Bond:

Sets out the consequence of ignoring obvious implications in the pursuit of those things which assert a cynical and corrupt view of man and society. It shows a man ignoring his own truths, a writer denying his own integrity, someone allowing gulf to separate what he knows from what he does. (Hay & Roberts, 1930: 183).

Bond in *Bingo* raises the questions about the social responsibility of the artist in an unjust society. Bond maintains the primary function of the artist is one of helping to understand the society, "A lot of people assume this role. There is always some embarrassment when an artist uses it, but it is inescapable" (Bond,

1973: 22). The life of a great writer is used in order to talk of the life of anyone. In his Introduction to *Bingo*, Bond tells of having been bothered by the apparent contradiction between Shakespeare's life and his art. Bond believes that "Art is always sane. It always insists on the truth, and tries to express the justice and order that are necessary to sanity but usually destroyed by society" (Bond, 1977: 7). According to Bond, Shakespeare's plays show this need for sanity and its political expression, justice. Yet Shakespeare's life seems to be another matter, and Bond objects to Shakespeare's involvement in the "Welcombe enclosure" (A land deal signed by Shakespeare to secure his own interests). Shakespeare's crime, in Bond's view, is that he sided with landowners who wanted to enclose the common fields at Welcombe near Stratford. A large part of his income came from rents (or tithes) paid on fields, some important landowners wanted to enclose these fields and there was a risk that the enclosure would affect Shakespeare's rents. He could either side with the landowners or with the poor who would lose their land and livelihood. He sided with the landowners. They gave him a guarantee against loss. When the townspeople wrote to him for help to fight against the enclosures, he did not respond. For Bond, this decision is completely inconsistent with the sanity and justice Shakespeare stressed in his plays. Bond uses this part of Shakespeare's life to demonstrate his belief that the artist cannot afford to be inconsistent. For Bond, the artist's life must be as close as possible to the truth of his art.

Shakespeare is shown to understand the effect of the enclosure on the people but his need for security is greater, “Will you reach an agreement with me?”(p. 20). Shakespeare weekly avoids saying yes, but speaks Combe’s language by the end of the sequence. Thus in *Bingo* Bond sets out to show that our society is irrational and therefore dangerous and it maintains itself by denigrating and corrupting human beings. Bond argues that the demands of capitalism force people to act in aggressive, self-interested ways that conflict with their innate human values. He maintains that the proper role of art is to work against this corrupted version of society. “Art always insists on the truth, and tries to express the justice and order that are necessary to sanity but are usually destroyed by (capitalist) society” (Bond, 1965: 5). Shakespeare’s plays show this need for sanity and justice. “But how did he live? His behaviour as a property owner made him closer to Goneril than Lear. He supported and benefitted from the Goneril society with its prisons” (Bond, 1973:5). Shakespeare’s dilemma in *Bingo* is that he is caught between his artistic sensibility and his financially motivated behaviour.

In *Bingo* Shakespeare’s inability to act is a kind of madness. His work is the evidence that he was under no crippling illusions about human nature, but he loses control because he won’t carry his insights into his day to day life. His refusal to oppose the enclosures is a public sell-out to his own financial security, but his final despair is brought on by the decaying of his close personal

relationships. He makes no significant attempt to protect the Young Woman from yet another whipping or from hanging, and Judith's reproaches seem quite justified: "You sit there and brood all day... I feel guilty if I dare to talk about anything that matters" (37). Shakespeare's arrogant counter to this is, "You speak so badly. Such banalities. So stale and ugly" (p. 32). He has, like Bond's Cordelia, an acute sense of justice, which is not so much reduced as institutionalized and removed from any contact with life. And all the time, being Shakespeare, he observes the truth but does nothing to fight his despair: "I spent so much of my youth, my best energy... somewhere to be sane in. It was all a mistake. I howled when they suffered, but they were whipped and hanged so that I could be free" (p. 63). Shakespeare had the individual choice whether to oppose the enclosure or not, had he opposed it and joined the peasant's collectives, he might have healed the broken connection between his sense of justice as a writer and as a man, and he would have had less reason to kill himself. Bond has Shakespeare realize his social error in siding with the rich over the poor in an enclosing of land, "What it costs to stay alive? I'm stupefied at the suffering I've seen. . . . How can I go back to that? What can I do there?" (p. 26). In his understanding of his social error, Bond does not make Shakespeare also see his more personal error, his hurtful, unbending dislike for his own daughter. He coldly tells her, "Listen . . . When I ran away from your mother . . . I was so bored, she's such a silly woman, obstinate, and you take

after her . . . I treated you so badly. I made you vulgar and ugly and cheap. I corrupted you” (p. 41). Bond assesses Shakespeare’s crime as his political inability to act; the greater crime is how he treats his own child. Judith Shakespeare doesn’t go mad, but her human responses are so ground down at the end of the play by her loveless existence in Shakespeare house that she might just as well be. Her desperate scrabbling for a will as her father lies poisoned is, heartless and unnatural, but is, after all, perfectly attuned to her culture.

Towards the end of the play Shakespeare is filled with self-contempt because he ultimately realizes that he is a “corrupt seer” (Bond, 1973: 7). He knows he has helped to make society irrational with his behaviour regarding the enclosure. Another of Shakespeare’s contributions to the irrational society in Bond’s play is his responsibility for the cruel nature of his daughter, Judith. He apologizes to Judith for corrupting her, for making her “vulgar and ugly and cheap” (p. 42), and he tells her he is filled with hate for her and for himself. The self-hatred he feels is caused by a self-awareness of his lack of action. He seems to realize at once his responsibility for the gibbeting of the Young Woman, the general violence resulting from the enclosure, and the degradation of his family. His comment “Was anything done? Was anything done?” (p. 43) discloses an awareness of a desire for action. At the end of the play Shakespeare is filled with disgust and a Hamlet-like self-reproach, and poisons himself. Yet his

decision to commit suicide does not give the play a flat, pessimistic ending, because Bond has permitted Shakespeare to act positively before his suicide. In fact, Shakespeare's action saves the revolt against the landowners. It is just before Combe, the wealthy landowner, enters the bedroom that Shakespeare learns of the death of the Old Man, his loyal servant, killed by his own son. The leader of the opposition to the enclosure, the Son confesses to Shakespeare of having killed his father mistakenly, and therein he has jeopardized both his life and the life of the movement for open lands. The Son insists he will not give himself up, that he will continue to fight for the land because "Outside a me they'd give in" (p. 49). Shakespeare, of course, could end this defiance merely by telling the truth to Combe, who now enters and asks Shakespeare if he "saw or heard anything. I'm told you were there" (p. 50). Shakespeare however, responds that he has seen and heard "Nothing" (p. 50). In so doing, he protects the Son. The lie seems a minimal gesture, but in saving the Son, Shakespeare also saves the revolt against the enclosure from collapsing completely. Shakespeare's gesture and his self-judgment are clearly more significant than that frantic search for the will which concludes the play and appears to give the work a pessimistic ending. Bond maintains that to say that *Bingo* is pessimistic is "a total misunderstanding of that play, because it says that Shakespeare may be the greatest dramatist of all times, but he is subject to the same laws as you and I or the man who drives your bus" (Karl- Heinz, 1976: 412). As in *Bingo*,

an artist is forced to confront the guilt he feels for not being an active member of society. In Bond's view, Clare's flaw (in *The Fool*), like Shakespeare's, is that he detaches himself from the social world. "They either prefer attachment to objects or escape into madness. Shakespeare passionately cares for his property. In *Bingo* and *The Woman*, Shakespeare and Heros, attach their passions and emotions to objects.

A human being needs a culture to attach him to real things in the outside world. When this doesn't happen, his unattached passions and emotions become self-parasitical. He either simply goes mad or enters a state of false inventiveness which is unable to imagine the real . . . because it finds it meaningless or unbearable or he attaches his passions and emotions to substitute objects. He heaps possessions round him. He marks things as his possessions, his money, his property. (Bond, 1975: 205)

When Shakespeare begins to accept his part in the perpetuation of evils, he returns to his house to die and even here the figures, who, because they exist, pose questions he cannot answer, intrude into his bedroom. For the only time in the play and as a gesture of acceptance, Shakespeare acts to demonstrate his understanding of his own betrayal. He kills himself. The divisions in his life have become vivid to him, by the end, and he cannot live with that knowledge. He lives in a society of self-righteous security, on the one hand, and insecure poverty on the other; the financial and domestic security, is recognizably our own, and

that which we expect law and order to maintain for us. He gives the man (Shakespeare) an inner strength which is gradually eroded as the play progresses until it is clear that suicide is his only release from life. While Bond does not approve of suicide, what else could Shakespeare do? Bond's answer is harsh "He had no reason to live. That's the judgment that one would make about him, that he compromised himself so much" (Hay, 59). Shakespeare, like Bond's Lear, slowly becomes aware of his political errors but, unlike Lear, is not given redemption by the author. Shakespeare, apparently both the man and Bond's fictional character, is condemned by him for his disregard for humanity. It is in Shakespeare's self-recognition of his own callousness at the end of the play that Bond acknowledges a positive change in the man.

In *Saved* (1965) Bond attempts to show how the restrictive socio-economic system of capitalism damages the social relationships and alienates the individual from other people around and from their environment. Bond is concerned with individual's distress in the capitalist system. According to him, the capitalist system disregards human dignity because of the unjust class divisions and the inequitable distribution of wealth. For Bond social institutions constitute the superstructure of the society which are designed to reinforce the base of the system. It is these social institutions that corrupt the individual in

order to make dutiful and law abiding citizens. He maintains that, “social morality is a form of obedience for the many victims of unjust organisation. It gives them a form of innocence founded on fear - it is never a peaceful innocence. It is a sort of character easily developed when power relations are at their starkest” (*Lear*, 1977: 6). Bond suggests that the irrational and cruel system is the product of capitalism and the social institutions in the modern society. In Bond’s view, social institutions as the superstructure of the capitalist system are supposed to protect the existing property relations. In *Saved*, the system of law exemplifies this situation. The norms of the society in *Saved* are economic rather than moral and humane. Therefore, they are essentially restrictive rather than aspiring. The play is a logical and passionate account of life lived by the people, engineered to fit the needs of a technologically fuelled society. It is about the lives of a group of a working class people in South London, where the family relationships become indispensable for Bond. The family relations are displayed through the relationship between Pam and her parents. The relationships in this family are deprived of emotional intimacy and compassion. The fault is seen to be both theirs and societies. They have been reduced to animals by their way of life. Pam doesn’t have a work and leads an aimless life. In such a bleak and monotonous life, family members

appear as total strangers to each other. Pam does not introduce her father to Len. She is indifferent to Harry and unconcerned about what he is doing. The emotional gap between the father and the daughter is noticeable even at the very beginning of the play. Pam cannot stand even her parent's existence at home. She says to Len "I hope I never see' em again" (p. 35). After Len has settled in Pam's house as lodger, he learns that Pam's parents Marry and Harry have not spoken to each other for so many years. Len wonders the reason and asks Pam about it, "They ought to be shot ...Ow did it start" (p.37). Pam cannot remember when and why they stopped talking to each other. She disassociates herself from their problems. She doesn't feel that she belongs to the family; she is utterly alienated from her parents. The silence between Harry and Marry is an extreme example of the alienation in the family. As a critic points out, "The play offers a gradual and continuing estrangement suffered by Pam's parents" (Scharine, 1975: 125). Pam explains to Len the course of the relationship between Harry and Mary, 'E puts' er money over the fire every Friday" (35). Mary and Harry are merely two strangers attached by financial bonds, living in the same house rather than a wife and husband. Pam cannot learn familial values in her own family. Thus she is deprived of motherly feeling for her baby. The baby first appears in the play with a cry in the stage direction. "Slowly a baby starts to cry.

It goes on crying without a break until the end of the scene. Nothing happens until it has cried a long while". Pam ignores the baby's cry. Mary warns her "why don't yer shut that kid up". Pam's simple pretext avoids the responsibility, "Juss cry's louder when i got near it" (47). Pam didn't even try to comfort the baby. She denies building up of any sort of intimacy with her baby. She offers Len to take away the baby with him, which alerts Mary to ask "would, t yer miss". Pam retorts as a dehumanized being "that Racket" (54). Pam cuts her baby off emotionally. Hence the baby ceases to be a living being but a "racket" for her. Like Pam, no character except Len, regards the baby as a human being. The baby doesn't have a human name and is referred to everybody as 'It'. Although Fred is the baby's father he feels no moral responsibility for it. Pam gives the baby aspirin in order to numb it so that it will not cry around Fred, "Won't wake up till tmorra. It won, t disturb yer" (68). For Pam the baby is just a means to keep Fred. The baby is not a human being for Fred's friends either. After Pam has left the baby in the park, Fred and his friends torture it by pulling its hair, pinching it, spitting on it and so on. They don't recognize the baby's human identity. The baby is compared to an animal with no feeling; so Pete denies its right to live. Finally, he and his friends kill the baby by stoning it without feeling any pity or remorse. The gang's need of self-assertion

comes out violently in the baby stoning action. They begin to take pleasure from hurting the baby. Barry says “less’ve a go! I always wan’ed a do that!”(78). Barry experiences an explosion of the aggression evoked by the alienating and dehumanizing restraints of society. They do not judge their actions according to their moral values. To quote Scharine, “Society has taught men that they must be restricted or they will kill. Therefore when the restrictions are lifted they do kill” (Scharine, 87). Bond explains that the boys’ attitude stems from the legal system, “Existing law protects property relations that are manifestly unjust. So our system of justice protects injustice” (Ian Stuart, 1992: 131).

The murder of Pam’s baby signals the crisis point as the enraged beastliness of the workers breaks forth in an act of violence, violence that is, as Eagleton notes, “natural because human beings are cultural” (Eagleton, 127-135). The child’s death eases the pressure and the images of animality and violence decrease and become less intense in the rest of the play. After the baby killing only Fred among all members of the gang is imprisoned. As the system is designed only to punish, there is always a scapegoat to assume the crime. “It is necessary to look for scapegoats for outside explanation” (Loney, 1976: 37-45). It is an ironic situation that Fred is the only one caught of the entire group that tortured the baby to death. The other murderers have got off scot-free. Fred

takes no blame for the death. He hides the truth of his group's involvement from the police. He blames the fact that he is young as the reason the police will not believe him. He also blames the baby's mother, Pam. She should never have had a baby; she should never have brought the baby to the park. "Yer ruined my life, thass all. Why the bloody 'ell bring the little perisher out that time a night" (83). The death of a baby symbolically points to the sterility in the society, which is expressed by Len long before the event "No life growing up here" (52). The death of a baby in *Saved* is an act of violence in which a gang of youth seems habitually to indulge. Nor is it surprising that a child should be their victim on the lower depths of a social scales where the brutalized derives a certain sense of superiority from brutalizing those still more powerless than they. Social morality in the play consists of not high humanistic ideals but obedience to the law, and evading the punishment in any possible way in case of disobedience. Pete earlier describes with relish his deliberate running-down of a small boy. He is pleased since the event has been judged as an accident, so he has evaded the punishment. In Pete's case, there is not an enemy or physical threat which provokes him to be violent. Pete kills the boy as a result of a sudden urge to destroy. It is a trance like action similar to the one which Fromm calls 'ecstatic destructiveness'. Suffering from his state of ineffectiveness, man can try to overcome his existential burden by achieving a trance-like state of ecstasy. It is not directed against an enemy or provoked by any danger or insult.

He wants to prove his power and effectiveness by grasping another person's right to live. His friends listen to him with envy and admiration, and none of them reproaches Pete. They are all in need of assuring their existence. To convince his friends to stone the baby, Pete says "Yer don not get a chance like this every day" (79). Killing a living being is an opportunity for Pete to be effective, and to get out of the burden of daily life imposed by the system. Pete does not feel any remorse for having killed someone; instead he is proud not to have been punished. He and friends scorn the legal organisation. They act in compliance with the anonymous authority which defines what is good or bad on the basis of penal sanctions. It is not nature but the system that directs people to be irrationally aggressive.

What Bond asks us to see in *Saved* is an image of social structure as a hierarchy of aggressors and victims, where the weak brutalizes the weaker, until the existence of whole is jeopardized by the murder of a child. The murder of the baby is presented as one of casual acts of violence which the gang of youth are indulged in. Nor it is surprising that a child should be their victim on the lower depths of a social scales where the brutalized derives a certain sense of superiority from brutalizing those still more powerless than they. "Our society has structure of a pyramid of aggression and as the child is the weakest member, it is at the bottom" (Bond, 1971: 9). A system in which the most deprived will kill to escape the fate of being a victim, and where the scapegoat for this society

is inevitably the weakest and the most expendable of its members. The purpose of the play, as Arthur Arnold suggests, “is to lay the corpse of the baby upon the doorsteps of society, to impress upon the audiences that the youths who stone the baby to death are no less victims of the society than the child”. (1972: 15-19). Their aggression has become an extension of the violence inherent in the system which governs their lives. Bond puts the stoning into *Saved* precisely because he finds it revolting and intolerable; but he finds what happens to the baby no more revolting than what happens to its mother and father, Pam and Fred, even though they remain alive. He knows that we would normally assume that their lives, even in deprivation, were ‘better’ than the state of the dead baby. Indeed, as Bond suggests, “the stoning of a baby in London Park is a typical English understatement. Compared to the cultural and emotional deprivation of most of our children, its consequences are insignificant” (Bond, 1965:13). Where Bond succeeds, however, is his skilful evocation of that degraded quality of life in which the stoning of a baby can occur. Where the working class condition is a chronically disgruntled existence, unemployed, alienated, frustrated; where the only comfort of the wretched is the consolation that “There’s always someone worse off in the world” (27). He states that “his intention is to shock the audience into examining the source of violence in the contemporary society” (M Patterson, 2006: 409-419). Violence is a response to the obstacles in the social order to the satisfaction of the existential needs of

effectiveness. Bond wants the audience to realise this social phenomenon. The ending is crucial to the way we understand the beginning. If we contrast this with his attitudes in the first and second scenes of the play, his malice towards Harry and the hopes for suburban cosiness he expresses to Pam, we can see how he has adapted himself to living there. In the penultimate scene, Len had found it possible to talk to Harry momentarily; to be honest and direct with him. “The members of the family need Len because he is the only human being they know-because he’s the only one who has learned from the park killing” (Bond, 1971: 88). Bond has Len examine the chair, and try to hammer it, and sit and think about it, and finally mend it. He can, indeed, bear to live there; for Bond, that is a triumph of the human spirit. Bond, the experimenting dramatist places Len on the edge of things, “is it really enough that Len’s mending chair at the play’s end displays a spark of hope in the world, showing that Len “has not lost his resilience, he mends the chair” (Bond, 1977: 309). Len lives with people at their worst and most hopeless and does not turn away from them. “I cannot imagine optimism more tenacious, disciplined or honest than his” (Bond, 309). If the spectator does not take this position, she or he is the one found lacking. “[H]e has not learned to clutch at straws” (Bond, 309). Thus Len enacts in the final scene the role he has developed throughout the play, and “the family is brought from discord, quarrels and anger to “a silent social stalemate” (Bond, 1977: 311). At the end of the play that is the best Len can offer. He is told by

Harry that to leave will solve nothing. As Bond glosses it, Harry says, “If you go out of this house ... You will open the front door, you won’t find yourself in the street, you will find yourself in a house exactly like this”. So that for Len, there is no escape. All he can do is preserve his integrity, preserve his humanity.

The conclusion to be drawn from all the three plays is that it is a new theatre which aims to eradicate the violence in the society by propagating a doctrine based on pity. Bond emphasizes the need for awareness and action through a study of inaction. The message is clear not in speculation about moral principles lies salvation, but in one man’s active help for another. His plays suggest that if the chain of destruction is to be broken at all, strong and rational men are necessary. Above all, they must be men who are committed to regenerating society. He wanted to show that human nature doesn’t exist independently of the society which forms it, and that there is a continuous interaction between the two. The problem of the characters of Lear, Len, Arthur, Evens, Basho, Shakespeare, and Clare in their respective plays is that each wants a beautiful soul that floats free of his dirty involvement in the world. Each character attempts to exist independent of society, but since, as Bond believes “one’s social activity determines one’s nature” (1965: 7), each character is actually attempting the impossible. Refusing to be part of social activity, each remains unaware of his actual human nature. No matter how much they may try to get rid of their past, the past haunts and compels them to

confront the present history heads-on. For Bond if they are symbols of culture, then they represent an indictment of a culture at odds with nature. The understanding of Bond's theme of awareness and action reveals that his work is one of the most consistent rejections of pessimism in contemporary literature. Bond as an optimist shows the moral autonomy of individual, and the fact that they can achieve moral sovereignty under a good society, but they are struggling to create such a society. This is the foundation of Bond's socialism. In each of his plays the protagonist displays his forte to redress and reform the society through logical action. Although these actions may appear to be insignificant to the readers but they are inevitable for the characters. By expressing their will through these small gestures, Bond proposes that life can be lived prosperously, no matter in what way difficulties it offers. Therefore, rational theatre attempts to provide a way of life that is free of contradictions, a society whose values are governed by fellow feeling and sympathy for the downtrodden. This theatre is in search of societies whose values are human rather than directed by social morality. The aim is simple to make the society free of violence, which can be achieved only through the rational attitudes of strong men.

Socialism in Postmodern Context: *The Woman, The Sea, and Early Morning.*

Douwe Fokkema in his essay, 'The Semiotics of Literary Postmodernism' places Bond alongside heavyweights Pynchon and Barthelme as examples of postmodern writers "celebrating imprecision" in their various works, creating works of "fantastic fabulation" which "mix levels of narration, fuse different worlds of experience and seem to undermine the referential function of language by offering too much of it" (Fokkema, 1997: 36). Two features that Fokkema mentions stand out in regard to Bond's work, the creating of fabulations within his social realist plays and the offering of "too much" in his use of language. The most notorious of Bond's fabulations is *Early Morning*, whose "dramatic force . . . [comes from] the inventive shock of the whole fable" (Cohn, 1981: 189). The appearance of fantasy in the midst of realist representations happens in other works of Bond as well, such as the appearance of the ghost in *Lear* (1971) and the scene changes in *Coffee* (1995) from a bare room to wilderness and back again. A dreamlike quality is permeated in many scenes in Bond's plays, such as the scenes of Shakespeare in the snow in *Bingo* (1973). Nightmare effects also come forward, especially in aggro-effects, evidenced in the feverish pitch of the violent bashing of Olly in *Olly's Prison* (1993) and overly theatricalized killing of the baby in *Saved* (1965). For Bond, fantasy exists within the rationality of theatre logic. Dialogue in his work is mixed. Dialogic rhythm in his epic plays is disrupted by Bond's use of worn-out methods of exposition, his inclusion of idiosyncratic poetry, and the intrusion of often left field political messages.

Such elements notwithstanding, Edward Bond is one of the most articulate critics of postmodern culture which he considers as the historic time in which a three-fold structure of “people, technology, and authority” operate in tandem. The purpose of three-fold model is to locate postmodernity against its historical backdrop. Although he employs some of the vocabulary of post-modernism, cites Saussure and Chomsky directly, and seems to have been influenced in some respects by Foucault, in his opening reference to “the history and present state (known as post-modernism) and of the relationship between people, technology and authority” (Bond, 1996: 17), yet his critique of postmodernism is informed by his belief in a dialectical progression of history. Bond’s work *Notes on Post-Modernism* does not specifically refer to the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe, but points to a close connection between those events which prompted the ‘End of history’ debate. Bond’s contention is that “Socialism has not failed but many of the things which socialism was intended to struggle for have been produced as it were out of the hat by technology, as if science had played a trick on history” (Bond, 1996: 72). He sees technology as the spirit that moves the social world. Authority organizes technology in social arrangements that assist people as they interact with the boundary, the outer world. The boundary is Bond’s term for the outer world that is given definition by people and, especially, authority, which gives the world meaning. Bond believes that the human brain has a Faustian overcapacity that desires to interrogate the boundary as well as the triad of technology, people, and authority. During most of human history, Bond believes, “human behaviour has been based on meeting physiological needs”

(Bond, 1996: 4). These needs were the “foundation of technology, organization, and morality” (Bond, 1996: 24). As a result of this human capacity to question boundary is gone, “the invisible hand” (Bond, 1996: 28), has taken over, it cannot serve as a boundary for human interrogation and growth. Utopia in postmodernity is no longer a possible vision. On the scene of Bond’s postmodernity appears the character from paradise lost, the devil. The devil is introduced into postmodernity to explain technology’s errors, notably situations of terror unleashed upon humanity in Eco-disasters and modern warfare. Bond warns of a fourth element being possibly added to the triad of people, authority, and technology, “the devil will not be a medieval apparition invoked at need, but an autonomous robot-Satan with a permanent seat at our councils” (Bond, 31).

Bond as playwright writing in postmodern times is adamant in his hatred of capitalism, his prophetic belief in a socialist utopia that will end violence and his proposing the proper dramatic means of creating effective socialist theatre are remarkable. Bond wants the new postmodern drama to be iconographic as well as iconoclastic. As iconoclasm, the image is contrived in its signalling the evils of capitalism. The future postmodernity will have for Bond the possibility of a “technology without an economy,” i.e. a world without capitalism (Bond, 29-30). Bond argues that the moment of late capitalism has had dire effects upon the human mind’s essential capacity, the result of a fundamental disruption of the relationship between people, the boundary, and authority due to technological developments. The situation of late capitalism is precisely not hopeful, since it has done away with the category of hope and replaced it

with commodities. Bond maintains that the affluence of the age does not help, the real world breaks down and we invent a world of fantasy and violence. The response that theatre can make to the condition of postmodernity is a simple one. What is needed is nothing more than what postmodernity renders impossible, “the use of interrogation in post-modernity” (Bond, 1996: 52). Bond states that a “work of art is like a machine which does not grow obsolete because it changes what it produces. It does this by changing its relation with its consumers. It is like a machine which learns new languages” (Bond, 65). As a post-modern playwright Bond thinks that reason and sanity which could save us can be recovered only through children’s unspoilt imagination. In his essay “Our Story”, he says:

The imagination must seek to create the world as it is, not as market democracy wants it to be. That is what makes us human. But often the imagination seeks blindly, reacts without understanding, and the chaos worsens. There is conflict in us and in society. Words change their meanings, crime becomes law, violence becomes policy, and we have no way – no story, no drama – of stopping it. A world of misery opens before us.
(2008: 93-113)

As a playwright committed to the socialist ideals, Bond is deeply perturbed at some of the dominant trends which have come to characterise postmodernism. Like some eminent critics of postmodernism such as Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton, Bond is deeply critical of postmodernism as a cultural, intellectual and aesthetic phenomenon and regards its radical scepticism with suspicion. At the very heart of postmodernist theory lies the rejection of human thought’s ability to comprehend objective truth. Jean Baudrillard

quotes approvingly the words of the 19th century philosopher Frederick Nietzsche: “Down with all hypotheses that have allowed the belief in a true world” (2005: 149). This view is rooted in postmodernism’s rejection of the ability of language to represent reality. Bond’s objection to this is that not only does language reflect reality in a constantly ‘true’ and unmediated way, but also because the linguistic ‘problem of representation’ can only be solved historically. Marxists defend this from the standpoint of dialectical materialism. Jameson views the postmodern “scepticism towards metanarratives” as a “mode of experience stemming from the conditions of intellectual labour imposed by the late capitalist mode of production” (1984: 47). He insists upon a Hegelian immanent critique that would “think the cultural evolution of late capitalism dialectically, as catastrophe and progress all together” (1991). In the same way Terry Eagleton makes a persuasive case for the contemporary political importance of tragedy in the situation of postmodernity. Eagleton observes that tragedy has, since the rise of the bourgeoisie, been degraded into an ideological tool of middle class interests. As a confirmation of the status quo, tragedy has often served as what Fredric Jameson calls an “*ideologeme*” (1981: 87). Terry Eagleton’s defence of tragedy as a crucial artistic intervention appeals to his conviction that tragic action actually embodies a form of dialectics. Edward Bond thus constitutes a form of contemporary tragedy informed by dialectical thinking and this makes him a respondent to Eagleton’s call for a politics of contemporary tragedy.

The Woman (1978) is Bond’s critical response to the condition of postmodernity. Tragic thinking is, for him, a political intervention into the modern world

precisely because the modern world renders tragic thinking more and more impossible. He insists that mythic thinking today is ideology, it does not interrogate and thus does not humanize. For Bond tragic experience is degraded into an ideological tool. It is not the evacuation of emotion but the means by which inhuman acts are legitimized. In *The Woman* Bond fashions a drama in which the tragedy of the gods collides with the tragedy of humanity; the latter finally triumphs, and myth is displaced by history. Despite the historical setting, *The Woman* is a tragedy concerned with the function of ideology within postmodernity. This play shows the conflict between Greece and Troy over the “statue of the Goddess of Good Fortune,” a material embodiment of destiny emphasizing the paradoxes of imperialist ideology and the concept of national destiny as it is embodied in contemporary nations. This is not an attempt by Bond to represent Greek religious practices, it is a dramatic representation of modern colonialist, nationalist ideology and how it figures itself through the rhetoric of destiny. Bond shows two societies Athens and Troy in the throes of an absurd struggle not for Helen but for the stone statue of the Goddess of good fortune, which Priam, king of Troy, had originally stolen from the Greeks. From the beginning, Heros is obsessed with the statue, “we haven’t got the statue to give us the good fortune to win the war” (175). Heros lives a logic that dictates that the Trojans will be defeated because they are holding the supreme goddess “against her will” and such actions demand the “greatest misfortune” (175). Heros wants the statue back and he is willing to offer the Trojans peace should they return the statue. It is precisely this nationalistic, ideological thinking that Bond’s tragic action works through and

transcends. Through the characters of Heros, Bond presents ideological and dialectically questioning attitudes towards human reality. Heros embodies the mind of authoritarian fascistic thinking. His obsession with the statue is an unquenchable drive, an irrational desire that masks itself behind rationality; he will divide the ocean into squares and have the island's fishermen search them one by one. His authoritarian tyranny reshapes the island life, and the populace now lives in fear. Even Nestor and the Greek soldiers would be more than happy to leave, "The Athenians don't even want his statue," (253). His obsession is the dramatization of an ideology, the ideology that shapes the bourgeois consciousness around the interminable, nostalgic search for a lost object. Heros comes to represent the false consciousness of the narcissistic ego. There is a useful contrast between Hecuba's literal blindness that is a symbolic vision and Heros's imaginary vision that is an ideological blindness.

Contrary to Heros, his wife Ismene enacts the combined elements of radical doubt and innocence that Bond imagines as the truth of the humans, free of ideological encumbrance. Liberated from her captivity, Ismene is tried for treason and refuses to defend herself. She explains that she was not coerced to denounce the war, "In Troy I saw the people suffer. Young men crippled or killed, their parents in despair and dying of disease. . . . I shall do all I can to stop this. . . . If the sight of them hadn't made my mouth dry I would have sung it!" (211-12). Asked whether she has any doubts about her proclamations, she insists that she has "many doubts" (212), but she means that she is

driven now to denounce the war through this radical sense of doubt, doubt that, for Bond, is central to a tragic consciousness.

There is an appeal against the waging of war, which is humanistic appeal. . . . She believes that world is fundamentally a rational place and therefore simply to record the truth is a valuable thing because it becomes part of the experience of other people and change them. What she does is more than just make an appeal; she does affirm a belief in the values of faith and understanding and reason. (Coult, 1978: 116).

She is awakening to a new kind of consciousness, one that is open to the experience of suffering, one that doubts, and that seeks to denounce this suffering with a song erupting not from the centered position of her ego. When Ismene reveals that her doubt and awareness of suffering have provoked her desire to sing, she refuses to swerve from her actions no matter what the consequences. Ismene has realized the radical innocence, the ontological doubt, and the ability to question authority that Bond sees as essential factors in our self-humanizations. Ismene is a figure for the artist, committed to confronting reality and declaring the truth at all costs.

Both Hecuba and Ismene emerge as free thinking characters in the play, capable of a tragic consciousness that refuses the ideology of war. Hecuba is a figure of reason in the midst of irrationality. While she wants peace, she does not trust the Greeks because they are clearly fools enslaved to an ideology of national destiny. Meeting a Greek envoy, she demonstrates how far she is from Heros's thinking, "Perhaps I shall just destroy the statue. . . . Only a fool would stay for a statue that didn't exist, but only a fool would have

sat out there for five years” (188). Left alone with Ismene, Hecuba further demonstrates her ability to see through nationalistic ideology, such as Ismene’s insistence that the Greeks are trustworthy because Athens is a republic. Hecuba comments, “As to Athens a republic. Well, your husband’s family is the richest in Athens and money buys power. Shall we tell the truth?” (191). Hecuba flatly insists that Heros “will burn Troy to the ground” (191). The tragic action of Hecuba’s blinding in one eye to block Heros out of her sight ends with the realization that she can still see him. She tries to blind her other eye. Hecuba’s blinding does not give her the intimation that she has achieved any kind of reconciliation with her circumstances. Far from being historically aware, Hecuba has instead simply closed her eyes and her mind. Her journey on the shore of an island, “half outside the world” (246), is an hopeful break from the past through the creation of a new world of peace, liberty, and freedom, but this new world is immediately undermined by the intrusion of the old, the past they all seek to escape, represented by the statue of ideology. Hecuba reveals that this realm of freedom is still inhabited by the war when she says, “it’s the last day of the war that destroyed my city” (258).

Both Hecuba and Heros are torn between a desire to escape the effects of the past and an irresistible drive to relive what has happened. Heros is trapped by an image of the statue in his mind, “One day I’ll look over the side of the boat and see it smiling up at me from the bottom” (246). While Heros is imprisoned by his own mind, he is aware of his irrational obsession and can compare it to Hecuba’s, “I must close the past! . . . Not all that rational. But you cover your eye. That’s not rational. I look at the face that Priam

kissed and it's a mask" (246). Hecuba's blindness is not a deeper understanding and acceptance of the significance of human life, but rather a willed blindness towards the past, "The dead are dead, the past is past, my children are gone. Ismene, don't remind me!" (242). Hecuba has cut herself off from humanity "I left the world when my children were killed" (241), but as Ismene points out, "the world comes here" (241). Despite her jaded attitude and her attempts to deny the past, when Heros arrives Hecuba accepts that she has no choice but to face her history and open her eye. The imagery of Greek tragedy informs Hecuba's expectations, "If I were a priestess a god would come down now and tell me what to do. Instead, my enemies come and I must be ready again. Yes, ready for all my old anger to sweep through me, like the fire in Troy" (242-43). When she does open her eye, she realizes that she has long been blind and did not know it, "I thought I could choose! O Ismene that day has come back!" (244). In the realization that she is really blind, Hecuba comes to a self-humanizing recognition of where freedom lies, not in the refusal of the past, but through a confrontation with necessity. Eventually, Hecuba realizes that Heros, quite simply, "must be killed" (252), but that it must happen in a way that will not bring the retribution of the soldiers upon the islanders. Hecuba exploits Heros's obsession with the statue, she claims that the goddess sent her a dream announcing that the winner of a footrace around the island will be the man who finds the statue. For Hecuba, "this race between Heros and the slave marks the last day of the Trojan War" (258). Yet its resolution is not saturated with the sense that the universe has ever determined these events. In fact it is the opposite; the only justice here will be made

by human beings. Hecuba hands the slave a sword she has concealed on herself, "This is your only chance," she says. "I take it!" (266) the slave replies and kills Heros. Hecuba seems to open, for a moment, a space of contingency, in which the slave can act, by turning the ideology of the ruling class against the ruler. Yet what follows is still more important, Nestor and the soldiers make to take up their swords, but Hecuba intervenes. Her logic comes to this, "There was one winner and one loser. One is dead. Don't disturb it" (267). Nestor's response is both cryptic and evocative, signifying his own struggle to understand his reaction to the events, "But I say to myself, shouldn't I ask what is justice?" (267). The only justice here, the only truth, is that which humans manufacture through their own activities. It does not come from above. It is in this way, by effectively changing the narrative, that these characters defeat the ideology of destiny embodied in the statue of the Goddess of Good Fortune. In the conclusion of the play, the ability to cheat is shown to be the capacity to produce liberation. It is an escape from metaphysical thinking into a secular, historical world. Heros stands for the classical values of beauty and order, opposed by a miner who stands for a new order, for a new proletarian direction of history. It is vital to Bond's intention that Heros's irrationality should appear to lead inevitably to his death, because through this Bond seeks to illustrate the idea that the irrational carries within it the seeds of its own destruction. The Dark Man (miner) is identified as the representative of a new working class consciousness. It is he who kills Heros, because the death must seem the result of historical process rather than tragic. This is not the subjection of human beings to blind historical forces that transcend the human,

but instead the refusal of transcendence through the insistence on the human as historical. Hecuba and the miner are both Heros's victims, combating his tyranny by killing him. Their motivation is not revenge, it is a revolutionary action. Bond shows them acting out of the logical development of history.

In *The Sea* (1973) Bond shows the destructive effect on people's happiness of a capitalism whose deepest values are non-human and whose methods of working are therefore unjust. It also shows the consequences of class rule through keen observance of the economic pressures and social tensions that generate what might be viewed as merely eccentric behaviour. Mrs Rafi's theatricals and aggressive wit, Even's drinking and ironic awareness, Hatch's paranoid fantasies, Hollarcut's feigned compliance, and Mrs Tilehouse's fainting spells not only evoke laughter, but represent the strategies through which each character more or less successfully copes with the stresses of living in a rigidly class structured society. In *Lear*, Bond was concerned with different kinds of political oppression and the violence he showed was exclusively political in nature. In *The Sea*, Bond shifts the focus and shows a more characteristically English form of repression, the operations and influence of a rigid class structure, which is carefully worked into the whole fabric of the play. Bond is concerned to show the effects of a rigidly sectionalised society on its victims. In the struggle to find a way of living that accepts 'the need to love, create, protect and enjoy', many of Bond's characters find themselves in more or less bitter conflict with a society based on classes.

The main class conflict in *The Sea* is between Mrs Rafi and Hatch, and what brings it to a head is the corrosive influence of commerce on human relations. Mrs Rafi practices a form of mental and emotional violence on all those beneath her, as Rose says late in the play, “the town’s full of her cripples” (162). Her main victim is the draper, Hatch, a tradesman who uneasily straddles the two worlds, that of the working class and that of his genteel middle-class customers, to whom he is obliged to display an attentive servility. Mrs Rafi is an elderly, well-to-do type who seems to delight in ordering merchandise from Mr. Hatch the draper and then refusing to take it when her order arrives. Her fickle superiority is thus driving Hatch towards bankruptcy, and so it’s no wonder that, when Mrs Rafi tells the draper to send back an enormous quantity of velvet she has ordered for some curtains, the draper snaps and loses all control of his mental faculties. In one exchange, Mrs Rafi demands to see his range of gloves; she is rude about all of them until she finds a pair that seems to her liking. She tries one on, and then decides to test how it would wear by banging her fist down on the counter so hard that it splits the glove. Hatch can barely restrain himself, and we begin to see his other side. This relationship further deteriorates, on hearing Willy’s story of Hatch’s refusal to render aid, Mrs Rafi descends on Hatch, upbraids his lack of “Christian duty” and refuses her newly-arrived, very large order of drapery fabric. Under this added strain, Hatch loses his tenuous hold on sanity, cuts the material to bits, wounds Mrs Rafi with his shears, and flees. Hatch is already plagued by paranoid visions of men from outer space coming to invade the earth, but the continuing servility of his business relationship with Mrs Rafi eventually drives him very

much more mad. Her refusal to accept the velvet curtains she had ordered triggers the collapse of his sanity, but not before he has attempted to communicate to her the psychologically precarious position of the small businessman, “I’m in a small way of business Mrs Rafi. I’m on the black list. I had to pay all this before they sent it. And I made such a fuss about delivery. All my capital has gone into it... it couldn’t set up in the largest towns. No capital” (136). Unable to give direct expression to the antagonism he feels, Hatch redirects his hostility towards his fears of an alien invasion of England from outer space. If for Hatch Willy is an alien, Evens is equally suspected because, in removing himself from society to his hut on the beach, he has rejected the same social pressures that constrict Hatch. Evens has found a solution which Hatch is still grappling with. Evens and Hatch represent two extreme poles of social response. As Bond explained, “my play is pointedly about sanity and insanity, and the town represents the dilemma of entrapment. The 80 year old man, Evens, is the sane one. The rest are manic about their entrapment” (Hay, 1978: 141).

The conflict between Hatch and Mrs Rafi is won by neither Hatch who goes off his head, trapped by the contradictions of his professional life, and Mrs Rafi comes to realize that it won’t be long before she will be senile and hated, and therefore treated as if she were mad. But Hatch’s feelings related to his position as a draper in a community where Mrs Rafi dominates, hating her fellow-beings, and putting as many of them as she can through the performing hoops of her church pageant. Hatch’s feelings that things are, somehow, amiss, run directly counter to the official view as do his passions. When he

interrupts the self-indulgent ceremony of scattering the ashes of the drowned man, his social superiors see him as the type of unfeeling vulgarity, but his words ring true. “I don’t know if you’re all ghosts or if you still have time to save yourselves” (166). Indeed, the only people who can escape madness are the two survivors of the storm that killed Colin. His friend Willy and his lover Rose are both open to change and to learning. It is to Evens, the man outside society, which Willy turns for help, but the decision, does not turn to tragedy as it did of Scopey. If Alen was a total dead-end for Scopey, Evens perhaps has something to offer Willy. Evens is himself conscious of the fact that he is a dying outcast, who is helping the unformed younger people to cope with a world, but his speeches can never ring wholly true because Even’s life is, in its way, shallow and self-regarding. “The old man on the beach has weaknesses and he indulges in the luxury of admitting this without doing anything about it. Perhaps he can be excused more easily than other people in the play but perhaps he should condemn more than any of the others (Hay, 1980: 151). Bond doesn’t want us to be easy on him, “he is a man of enormous potential. . . . And he has done nothing with his talent” (Hay, 149).

The sense of possibility is vital in Bond’s plays, it is something they return to time after time, and realise dramatically in the teeth of what we had thought was hopeless. Len can stay with the family and not be destroyed by the experience. At the end of *The Sea*, Willy is about to leave to get married; he has a final conversation with Evens which makes him wonder if, like Evens, he too should stay, “Should I stay in town? Work hard”. Evens retorts, “No go away. You won’t find any more answers here. Go away and

find them. . . . I've told you these things so that you won't despair. But you must still change the world" (169). Willy is caught between two characters of inaction, Evens and Mrs Rafi. Both of these characters have achieved a great deal of knowledge about the world, but both refuse to act upon what they know. Evens realizes his predicament, when Willy asks him what he should do with his life, Evens reveals his dissatisfaction with his own life, "I'm a wreck rotting on the beach. . . . That's why I live here out of people's way. It wouldn't help them if they lived here. (168). Yet Even's wisdom has not led him to change his world, behaviour essential for the complete Bond hero. Mrs Rafi is equally complex and incomplete. She knows she is trapped in her position as standard-bearer of the community and is painfully aware that life in the village is a kind of death. She advises Rose, "Don't stay in the town and marry the solicitor or doctor or parson. You can't breathe here (161). In spite of the advice she gives Rose, Mrs Rafi can find no way out for herself. Instead, she accepts her responsibility to remain in the town because her absence, she believes, would lead to chaos. Both Willy and Rose suffer before they realize that they must leave the town if they are ever to be free of the "ditch" (161) in which both Evens and Mrs Rafi find themselves. The discovery of a body, a funeral, and Rose's talk with Mrs Rafi provide the dramatic recognitions that set both Willy and Rose free so that they choose to leave. Before they can depart, however, Willy must recognize that Evens and Mrs Rafi have the same weakness, and he must point out this weakness to Rose. When Willy discovers Rose hesitating, he says, "Then you're like your aunt. You talk and have no courage" (163). Willy understands that both Mrs Rafi and Evens have a

certain degree of wisdom, but that neither has the courage to act. At the end of the play Willy represents Bond's perspective through his decision to leave. The young couple are caught in the middle of the madness around them. On the one hand, Mrs Rafi and her amateur dramatics, and on the other, Mr Hatch, plotting to free themselves from the aliens who are taking over. In this bleak situation, the couple's only hope is escape. The last words of the Willy "I came to say goodbye, and I'm glad you" (171). The play is not completed "because the play can have no satisfactory solution at that stage. Rose and Willy have to go away and help to create a sane society and it is for the audience to go away and complete the sentence in their own lives" (Bond, 1977: 74). *The Sea* shows progress in Willy from the shell shocked state he falls after the drowning of his friend Colin, to a full understanding of the problems of his life and his society. Both Willy and Rose eventually "let go" of Colin, and more importantly, of the conventional life he comes to represent. Bond can't reconcile with the life that will ultimately end in violence and chaos. He believes in the triumph of human spirit. If *The Sea* starts violently and noisily, it ends with the profound sense of tranquillity.

Early Morning (1968) is written in the form of a dream sequence. It seems at first glance to be an intensely depressing play about our incapacity to escape the logic of post-Victorian society; even death reveals a heaven where the characters do explicitly what they did implicitly on earth, they eat each other. Society's manifestation in the play is, as a painless cannibal orgy in heaven where, as Queen Victoria says, "There's no dirt. There's only peace and happiness, law and order, consent and co-operation" (223). More

frightening and more comic is Arthur's heavenly trial, where, with complete blindness to human issues, the accuser set criminal acts alongside. On the one hand, they accuse Arthur of serious crimes, "He rapes little girls", and "He kills". But these grave criminal acts are juxtaposed with such apparently trivial accusations as "He wastes electricity", "He's a nose-picker", and "He eats dirt" (198). Capitalist society in crisis can only lead for Bond to either fascism or madness, and *Early Morning* shows Queen Victoria's rule as offering a large dose of both. Her iron hand over her government and people has made life near unbearable, a situation of which she is well aware.

Bond's dream society carries to its logical conclusion the relative unconcern of human beings with physical violence. As in *Saved*, the characters in *Early Morning* are almost completely dehumanized by their environment, and their possibilities for independent action are strictly limited by their implicit acceptance of what seem to them the unavoidable conditions of their existence. The act of killing and eating a fellow human being parallels the more extensive rationalized murder practiced in the play's political arena. The bizarre circumstances in *Early Morning* portend "All these people in heaven eat each other. Obviously we don't literally do that, but what it says is that our society is based on destroying people in some sense, destroying their humanity. In that sense, we're destructive of one another" (Lonely, 1976: 42). Bond makes us see that in following their instincts, Len and Joyce are acting in a manner perfectly consonant with their upbringing and that their act is no more indefensible than the equally macabre, though socially rationalized, murders committed by the ruling powers. Perhaps the most

amusing aspect of this macabre scene is that although the frustrated couple murders and consumes a fellow being, they maintain to the end a perverse sense of propriety which reflects once again the absurd concern of civilized beings with etiquette. While the nature of aggression and its amplification by the restrictions of an industrialized society are clear, the reader still echoes Arthur's question, "Why did you kill him?"(153). The apparent lack of motive is confusing, as is the sudden focussing of generalized aggressivity on this specific object. Yet while the choice of a specific object may be puzzling, for Bond the general impulse is clear. Len and Joyce's cannibalism, Fred's murder of the baby, Lear's execution, and even the Ghost's goring by his pigs respond to a common instinct; the roots of such unreasoning violence can be located in the social system that provokes it. In Bond's plays, murder is frequently, pointedly, an act of violence done to a mere body, a soulless post-industrial entity. The recognition that the mob will be temporarily appeased by a scapegoat does not escape *Early Morning's* Arthur. While the doctor expresses concern during the attack on Windsor castle, Arthur realizes that "they'll be all right once they've lynched someone" (165). The public hangings advocated by the Chamberlain and carried out by Victoria and Florence demonstrates a similar principle. The anger of the people is directed away from the government and focussed on relatively minor offenders. Hanging is, after all, no more than the socially approved mode of lynching, and the doctor's response to Arthur's insight is typical of the conventions he represents, "If they're lynching they'll need death certificates" (165). Thus, the availability of victims does nothing to alleviate the

aggression itself. Like the heavenly cannibals who must periodically appease their hunger by eating each other, so the execution of a scapegoat only temporarily appeases the hunger for freedom from society's cage. Bond maintains, "As long as man does not realize that his real enemy is the 'social institution' that fuels his aggressivity, the cycle of violence will continue" (Bond, 1971: 9). Thus, *Saved* ends with a chilling reminder of the cycle of violence; at the end of *Lear*, Cordelia takes the old king's place as a wall builder; and at the end of *Early Morning* Victoria works out her eternal roster of the order in which the inhabitants of Heaven will eat and be eaten by each other. This eternal recurrence is most strikingly envisioned in Arthur's nightmare of the mill which epitomizes the blindness and futility of society's pursuit of its illusory goals. "D' you dream?" Arthur asks his Siamese twin George, now reduced to a skeleton:

D' you dream about the mill? There are men and women and children and cattle and birds and horses pushing a mill. They're grinding other cattle and people and children: they push each other in. Some fall in. It grinds their bones, you see. . . . Their feet get caught up in the rags and dressings that slip down from their wounds (185)

The mill grinds and grinds, remorselessly grinding the people and animals, destroying their hopes, poisoning their dreams, negating the value of their very existences, blinding them to the approaching storm, forcing them to ignore everything but the tantalizing and inexplicably distant horizon.

Arthur makes a number of decisions in the play, some of which are erroneous. He decides to join his father's rebellion against the queen Victoria, to annihilate the

human race, to eat his father's flesh. All of these decisions move him a step further towards a tentative understanding of his own situation of the potential goodness of human beings, and the actual evil of political structure as shown in the play. He can only talk of his own unhappiness and his resentment at his condition, but gradually he is brought face to face with the notion that his condition is not unique. The audience is invited to follow Arthur's evolution and to understand how Arthur wins his freedom. In order to test the thesis of the real possibility of individual freedom, Bond constructs a framework within which extreme representation of corruption are presented as hideous nightmare. Arthur endures horrors, survives and escapes. What he escapes to is not shown. What he will do with his freedom is left unsaid. He is a victim, but he now comes to act as interpreter of the logic of the world, "I am a limited person. I can't face another hungry child, a man with one leg, a running woman, an empty house ...I'm limited" (185). From the dulled quasi-dialogue with his brother's skeleton and joking remarks to the corpse of Len, Arthur moves from outlining his limitations to a vision of how he can be of service to the world. Arthur's vision propels him into action and he plans to destroy as many as possible, to become a benefactor. He outlines his plan to kill his own men. Arthur's plan becomes clear as his side fall over the cliff while they are chased by Victoria's side. Victoria's soldiers rushes to the edge to cheer and the cliff gives away. They are all killed. As everyone plunges over the cliff, Arthur thinks that he has freed himself and everyone else. As the ghosts of the men he has killed rise up, Arthur greets them, "I set you free. You'll always be free" (195). But its ultimate consequence is that they find

themselves entering in the new world where they are ruled by Victoria and her gang. Arthur is pronounced guilty and admitted to heaven where people eat each other. The effect of induction into heaven is seen as his brother suffers from his refusal to eat. His refusal is an attempt to negate his earlier logic which led to the attempted destruction of the species. When his attempt to relieve the suffering of mankind failed, he sees himself as the stumbling block to the happiness of others, "Why can't I let them alone in peace!"(197). He forces himself to eat, so that everyone may exist peacefully in heaven. Arthur has begun the logic and accepted the condition of existence, "There is something I can't kill - and they can't kill it for me. Pity- it must be nice to be dead. Still, if I can't die I must live. I am resigned to my curse! I accept it" (210). Though he is tricked by Victoria into a coffin at the end of a play, his mistakes lead him to an apprehension of both himself and of his relationship with his surroundings. Bond's idea of Arthur is that of the most developed of the protagonists who has the "point of view which is the most morally and emotionally . . . developed" (qtd. in Hay 43). Finally Arthur is shot for attempting to make everyone comprehend. He is destroyed, as he begins to understand. The ending is one without hope which inevitably leads to Arthur's destruction, but what modifies the despair of the ending is Arthur's attempt to describe what he knows to Florence.

Beneath the manifest criticism of society lies the latent social message which makes the play's improbable action convincing, that is the possibility of acting against the oppression in a world defined by violence, ruthless competition and injustice. Arthur's message is simple and resonant "don't eat". So is his reaction to devouring one another

like cannibals, laughter, a response that throws the enemy into total confusion. Bakhtin finds in the affirmative power of grotesque an ability “to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted” (Bakhtin. 1984:94). Although determined and confined by his world, Arthur finally emerges different. Arthur’s only power is the power of negation, but using it enables him to “rise above it all”. His resurrected body reminds the audience that only those who resist can escape. The analysis prompted by Arthur’s example is the socialist option Bond offers to his audience, the analysis that turns phantasmagoria into fable, an existential nightmare into political parable.

Conclusion

The present dissertation has made an attempt to study the plays of Edward Bond with the aim of showing his contribution to the contemporary British drama. It has focussed on Bond as an important voice on the British theatrical scene and as a bridge between the realistic tradition and the experimental drama of the 1970s. If on the one hand, he sticks to the realistic tradition by using its strategies, at the same time he transcends realistic norms to suit his purpose of a new theatre. Bond as a revolutionary dramatist considers realistic canon to be inept to soothe the minds of his audience. Therefore he adopts a new mode of realism tinged with disruption, fragmentation, and a sense of unease and unpredictability. His theatre is deeply involved in present day themes, of which he speaks not so much with the intention of denouncing it, but by posing a

problem and finding a real method of examining it. Bond's realism can be designated as a social political realism, with its truthful representation of affairs, displaying how to create a society where human response of pity is more important than the inhuman and violent response. In other words, he desires to achieve a society free of violence. Therefore he is preoccupied with the theme of showing action as the necessary footstep to build a society of equality and justice.

It is this emergency of 'action' in Bond's plays which becomes the chief cause of his conflict with the 'absurdist theatre'. He does not speak well of the theatre of absurd because it is deeply cynical and therefore powerless to demonstrate the importance of action in redeeming the society from the clutches of irrationality. Its ultimate effect is to stub out in people an enthusiasm to revolutionise the society towards prosperity. For this reason his attitude to Beckett is one of vehement critique for considering that there is no significance to human activity, that there is no power to redeem the society from the corrupting influences of irrationality. On the contrary, Bond wants to create awareness in the people about the conditions of society and their ability to alter them. He is determined to write plays in which it is necessary to embolden people about their innate capability to handle not only their private problems but also their political and social troubles. Thus, his plays are didactic with their

emphasis on human power to reshape history and encouraging people to replace injustice with a more just system.

Although Bond has been every now and then alleged of being an absurdist himself because of the steady manifestation of violence in his plays, the fact remains that he is simply catching the everyday phenomenon of the modern world in which violence has become an integral part of society. Bond, being a true artist, is adamant on depicting sites of violence the way they are in our society. There are over and over again violent things, which he exposes and mocks candidly and honestly. He believes that the root cause of violence is irrational social morality and when this violence occurs he insist on rational attitudes and models by condemning the irrationality. This straightforward treatment of violence in his plays makes him one of the recognisable and appealing playwrights of the modern world.

Although Bond's stance on the theatre of the absurd seems very convincing theoretically, he is not always successful in producing a potent dramatic expression on the basis of his conviction. Sometimes, for example, he makes authorial comments in his writings outside of the play about Len's ethical nature in *Saved*, yet an ethical nature is exactly what Len, as well as other characters in the play, lack. It seems that a more critical and hence fruitful engagement with the absurdist tradition would have created the possibility of a greater variety in his plays. For him good art is one that 'praises life' (this is an

argument against theatre of the absurd) he is, however, forgetting that many of his own plays are not in praise of life. For instance, *Saved*, which shows indifference to the death of a child, cannot best be described as a vehicle in praise of life. Bond's rejection of Becket is not tempered by enough detachment, when we see that what he dislikes in Becket is present in some of his own plays, either in theatre-tool usage or audience response. It can be argued that what is best in plays like *Coffee* (1995) and *Saved* are the absurdist elements effectively mixed with Bond's social concerns.

The thesis has also revealed Bond's ability to develop his own theory of drama which he calls as 'rational theatre' that is more akin to Brecht's 'epic theatre' with its emphasis in the relation of a play to their audience, and the relation of history with the individual. His strength lies in adopting the various dramatic techniques of Brecht but at the same time differentiating his thematic concerns in a different historical situation. His dramatic style is highly personal. Visual poetic images, a logical cause-effect structure, as well as dialectical relationships involving characters, plot construction and dramatic movement, constitute the distinctive characteristics of an outstanding dramatic creation which tries to understand the present day crisis and to show potential for achieving a sane society. Bond's drama is suggestive of Balzac's diversity of characters and situations, which are aimed to penetrate deeper into the visible and complex web of human relationships that constitute the society. His

‘political art work’ is best cast in the way of social realism. But for him this social realism is spattered with unavoidable violence. Bond exhibits his aversion to Pinter’s dramatic attitude because he is akin to Becket in creating the situation as being secretive, hidden and ambiguous. If in Pinter’s plays everything from scenic object, dialogue and action of the characters generates the unpredictability and suspense, Bond is more Brechtian, with the lesser disintegration of scenes, character and objects on stage.

The study has also revealed Bond’s stance in adapting the postmodern trend in his drama, thereby highlighting his critical attitude towards capitalism. Bond as a postmodern playwright signals the evils of capitalism, which according to him is the cause of fundamental disruption of the relationship between people. He asserts that the role of writing assumes greater significance in postmodern times as it is the only way to interrogate the postmodern conditions of horror and disorder. For him the only way to deal with the dire consequences of capitalism in postmodern times is to redeem it by intellectual and moral awakening. He believes that works of art, such as plays, can offer a way out of the existing social situation by ‘cleansing the doors of our perception’. To a considerable extent his drama manages to fulfil its promise and keep the human imagination free and active.

He believes that a modern writer, aware of the role drama can play, has only one subject to write about - justice. Certainly he has spent his entire life

writing about unjust societies and the violence they generate. Bond is an optimist and a visionary who sees the way out of this disaster and chaos of postmodernity through the power of writing dramas. Bond is a severe critic of postmodernity for its ability to undermine notions of truth and justice, the seminal concepts for a reconstruction of a rational society. This is the reason he allows his characters to enter into postmodernity to explain the technological errors, to question its irrational order and the circumstances of dread released upon humanity. As a writer he interrogates the postmodern spectacle and questions the hell it has unleashed on humans. Bond wants to drive us from the state of social paralysis into a mode of activism. The conclusion to be drawn from the presence of revolting characters is that Bond seeks to reveal that there is always a possibility to change the society.

It has to be said that Bond's versatility as a dramatist becomes evident in his appropriation of postmodern techniques to make his writing rich. He used many of the postmodern strategies to achieve the purpose of his 'rational theatre' and to convey the horrors of the modern society. If on the one hand he acknowledges his debt to postmodern phenomenon, he does not play a blind to penetrate into the infirmities of its very nature. Bond objects to the postmodern claims on the inefficacy of both the language and the human thoughts ability to grasp the impartial truth. He revitalises the profundity of language and the validity of human thought on account of its dialectical nature which enables it to

trespass the ideological nature of things. Thus, for him it is the dialectical process through which postmodernity should be interrogated, critically engaged with, and finally, transcended to create conditions for a social structure which ensures existence of conscientious human subjects.

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