



ISSN NO. 2320-5407

Journal homepage: <http://www.journalijar.com>

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF ADVANCED RESEARCH

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Re-creation of the Past in Edward Bond's *The Woman*

Amany El-Sawy

Manuscript Info

Manuscript History:

Received: 14 January 2016

Final Accepted: 22 February 2016

Published Online: March 2016

Key words:

Edward Bond,
revolutionary theatre,
New historicism, sexual
politics

*Corresponding Author

Amany El-Sawy.

Abstract

The author intended in this paper to examine the reasons why Edward Bond in *The Woman* has focused upon historical, mythical themes and characters. Moreover, the author highlighted how Bond demythologized particular notions of gender by examining social and political issues from a historical perspective. The paper began with some critics' theoretical viewpoints concerning history and drama. Then the author discovered by means of close examination of the character relationships and settings how Bond chose to situate the historical characters and events within a network of power, politics, or social choices. Finally, the author clarified how Bond demonstrated in *The Woman* his interest in a theatre of social change, and how he compels his audience to ask questions about their own time through the issues he raised.

Copy Right, IJAR, 2016., All rights reserved.

Introduction:-

Several of Edward Bond's plays investigate particular periods of history that have crucially influenced the way contemporary culture operates. For example, in *The Woman: Scenes of War and Freedom* (1978), Bond delves into the roots of Western civilization, drawing on Classical Greek literature to examine contemporary social and political problems of aggression, oppression, and injustice. These problems, he believes are due to the explosion of particular myths which encourage and justify a competitive, aggressive, and self-destructive society. Such myths which promote competition and aggression become codified values for a repressive and oppressive capitalistic society; moreover, they are, according to Bond, irrational and consequently give license to irrational actions and behavior.¹

Bond believes that theatre is obligated to investigate the causes of suffering and sources of strength in humanity and society, and emphasizes that theatre must rewrite history to make sense of the future. Thus this paper tries to show how Bond, in *The Woman*, juxtaposes contemporary issues with issues from the past, not to expose specific historical facts, but to reveal how past heritage lives on and misinforms the present. Bond's method of exploring past legacies characterizes his search for and revelation of historical truths; he describes his history plays as "inevitably about my own time. They were an attempt to discover process rather than product" (Bond, Letter). Bond's search for the roots of injustice and oppression in social relations makes him a key figure among recent British playwrights who are seeking to create a transformational and revolutionary theatre, encouraging the investigation of models for change and, in some cases, promoting new images of cultural practices.

Historical Drama and Bond's Myth:-

Recent historians such as Hayden White have brought attention to the problem of understanding historical works as verbal structures in the form of narrative prose discourses. His studies have concentrated upon the poetic elements in historiography and the philosophy of history. In considering history as a mixture of science and art, he suggests that it has slighted the artistic component of historical writing (*Metahistory* 11-13). In debating the proper role of history as a discipline, White sees historical writing as being:

[I]n bad shape today because it has lost sight of its origins in the literary imagination. In the interest of appearing scientific and objective, it has repressed and denied to itself its own greatest source of strength and renewal. ("The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" 62)

This is a relevant issue for dramatists creating plays with historical themes; they must decide how they are to reinterpret historical fact with dramatic representations of characters and events from the past. Moreover, in a study of historical drama from "Shakespeare to Brecht," Matthew Wikander sees the creation of great historical drama as "a tightrope act; the strain of balancing the warring demands of dramatic form and historical data soon begins to tell" (238). Wikander observes this balancing act as similar to the tension in the "discipline of history itself" which:

[E]xpressed in the classic distinction between mere chronicle, the record of facts, and true history, which organizes the facts according to principles that may be called either scientific or literary. Thus the historical dramatist, working from a usually published source, works from a predigested version of the past. But the immediacy of drama--the fact that it traffics in bodies on stage, or, in Buchner's words, gives us 'characters instead of characteristics' --forces the dramatist to re-experience the gulf between the historian's 'dry narrative' and the living bodies that once peopled the dead past. (238)

Hence, the historian must chart out the "stories" that are concealed in the chronicles and through this process explain the past. White uses this idea to make a further distinction between "history" and "fiction." Their difference, he affirms, "resides in the fact that the historian 'finds' his stories, whereas the fiction writer 'invents' his" (*Metahistory* 6). This distinction does not exclude the role of "invention" in the historian's process. His "invention" takes the form of arranging chronicled events "into a hierarchy of significance by assigning events ... to disclose the formal coherence of a whole set of events considered as a comprehensible process with a discernible beginning, middle, and end" (7).

Playwrights dealing with historical subject matter therefore find their place in these two processes. They both "find" and "invent" when creating art from historical subject matter. In writing about "Twentieth-century English History" Plays, Niloufer Harben notes that:

History is governed by the very necessary discipline of having to limit its focus to what is actually there in evidence. It would therefore, sometimes have to be dry and insufficient. Drama cannot afford to be so strictly limited by the facts. The dramatist has to read into history in order to convey the totality of an experience and he gains something by this greater imaginative appropriation of the past. The history play, therefore, has to be, in a sense, more historical than history. ... A playwright's interest in history would be more from the perspective of what it can possibly bring to our awareness of what life is and can be. (14-15)

Harben refers to Aristotle to elaborate on the twentieth-century English history play; he notes that Aristotle differentiates between the poet and the historian as being that "one relates what has happened, the other what may happen." Poetry therefore "is a more philosophical and higher thing than history; for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular." (15)

New Historicism and the Past:-

Moreover, recent interests concerning the methodological assumptions underlying history writing make distinctions between history and fiction even more complex. In the past few years, what has been loosely termed "new historicism" has caused a shift away from earlier forms of historical scholarship as well as from formalist criticism. Stephen Greenblatt, in *Power of Forms*, points out that this earlier historicism tended to be "monological," and it is concerned with:

[D]iscovering a single political vision, usually identical to that said to be held by the entire literate class or indeed the entire population. ... This vision, most often presumed to be internally coherent and consistent, though occasionally analyzed as the fusion of two or more elements, has the status of an historical fact. (5)

This sense of questioning the ways and means whereby "historical facts" have been presented to us also raises pertinent questions when considering dramatists who write about historical characters, settings, and events. New historicism is indirectly relevant to contemporary historical drama because these playwrights' reconstructions of historical themes question not only the "monological" perspective of traditional history, but also particular perceptions of present culture by delving into the acceptance of past attitudes and beliefs. Thus, within the context of

new historicism, there is a great emphasis then on examining not only the ideological situations surrounding past characters and/or events, but also how each playwright constructs that past through his or her contemporary interpretation of these situations. Bond may not be involved in this debate as historians in the traditional sense. He deals with text and fact in a way that blends his understanding of past events with creative insight in the form of dramatic art.

The Demythologizing of Myth:-

A significant connecting theme in Bond's concern with history is how past mythologies can live on and affect the culture of the present. As Richard Chase explains in *Quest for Myth*, the concept of myth has a variety of meanings depending upon the discipline involved. Myth can be considered as a sort of philosophy or science which seeks to explain the universe by constructing a world view. To the psychoanalysts, myth is more of a collection of sexual symbols related to the dream world. To the semanticists, myth is a puzzle involving the sorting out of signs and symbols (vi). Bond, however, uses "myth" to describe dominant, historically-rooted, cultural beliefs and values which should be called into question. He distinctively lists such myths in his short essay on "Scenes of War and Freedom":

[T]he world is a jungle, men are animals, some men are more animal than others, all men are born to sin or with the need to be violent, only the hard prosper, most men wish to be led, happily others are born to be their leaders, and all this is either chosen by god or ordained by evolution. (133)

Examining these mythologies of the past promotes a theatre of social and political reform which has the potential to draw attention to, reveal, and possibly even correct injustices by raising questions about how societies might improve. Bond rewrites history to make sense of how particular myths have manipulated us to respond and act as we do.

Bond echoes Roland Barthes' perspective concerning myths. At the beginning of "Myth Today" Barthes defines myth as a speech in that it is part of a system of communication in which it bears meaning. For Barthes every cultural product had meaning which is conditioned by ideology, i.e. myth, and therefore any cultural product can be the subject of mythological analysis and review. Barthes states that:

The oppressed is nothing, he has only one language, that of his emancipation; the oppressor is everything, his language is rich, multiform, supple, with all the possible degrees of dignity at its disposal: he has an exclusive right to meta-language. The oppressed makes the world, he has only an active, transitive (political) language; the oppressor conserves it, his language is plenary, intransitive, gestural, theatrical: it is Myth. The language of the former aims at transforming, of the latter at eternalizing." (19)

For Barthes, meanings and myth are historically produced and conditioned, and they are not eternal but rather constantly mutating and reforming. This means, under Barthes' Marxist perception, that myths are always political in being the result of specific power structures in a certain society at a certain time. What myth does, according to Barthes, is to "de-historicize" and "de-politicize" meanings that are always historical and always political. Myth for Barthes is a type of collective illusion, a story that society tells itself in order to justify its own world the way that it is. Bond repeats what Barthes once said by demythologizing myth itself.

Brechtian Historicization:-

Moreover, interest in settings, plots, and figures from the past also links Bond with Bertolt Brecht's theories on history. In Brecht's discussions on the differences between the "bourgeois theatre" and the "historicizing theatre" he explains that actors in a drama must face certain questions if they want to show incidents as unique and historical. "The bourgeois theatre emphasized the timelessness of its objects;" Brecht, in *Brecht on Theatre*, states:

Its representation of people is bound by the alleged 'eternally human.' Its story is arranged in such a way as to create 'universal' situations that allow Man with a capital M to express himself: man of every period and every colour. All its incidents are just one enormous cue, and this cue is followed by the 'eternal' response: the inevitable, usual, natural, purely human response. (96-97)

Nevertheless in the "historicizing theatre," he explains, "everything is different. The theatre concentrates entirely on whatever in this everyday event is remarkable, particular and demanding inquiry" (97). This compels those involved in the drama to ask about the unique processes at work at a particular historical moment. Focusing on reasons and

results assists the actors in showing “the incident as a unique, historical one: [and in demonstrating] a custom which leads to conclusions about the entire structure of a society at a particular (transient) time” (98).

Brecht further believes this can only be achieved if the “Verfremdungseffekt” is brought out. The Verfremdungseffekt-the cornerstone of his theory-operates as the defamiliarizing of words, gestures, or ideas with the purpose of encouraging the spectator to see or hear in a fresh or new way. A representation that alienates is therefore “one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar” (192). This alienation effect or “A-effect,” he states, “consists of turning an object from something ordinary and immediately accessible into something peculiar, striking, and unexpected” (143). Through alienation, Brecht says, the actor “quotes” or demonstrates rather than identifies with the character’s actions. This keeps the actor outside the character’s feelings and allows the audience to be more objective and free in assessing the play’s meanings. Brecht’s “A-effect” is a helpful beginning point for looking at how Bond examines and questions dominant cultural beliefs and values. The benefit comes from portraying myths so ingrained in our culture from fresh and new angles in order that the audience might be challenged.

In an article on “Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory,” Elin Diamond comments on these aspects of “historicization” and change within the context of the spectator and the actor. She points out that “the crux of historicization is change: through A-effects spectators observe the potential movement in class relations, discover the limitations and strengths of their own perceptions, and begin to change their lives” (86-87). The important element in this, Diamond sees, is the “double movement in Brechtian historicization of preserving the ‘distinguishing marks’ of the past and acknowledging, even foregrounding, the audience’s present perspective” (87). She believes that when Brecht refers to the spectators as becoming historians, he refers both to the spectator’s detachment, his/her ‘critical’ position, and to the fact that he/she is writing his/her own history even as he/she absorbs messages from the stage. Thus,

Historicization is, then, a way of seeing and the enemy of recuperation and appropriation. ... In historicized performance, gaps are not to be filled in, seams and contradictions show in all their roughness, and therein lies one aspect of spectatorial pleasure--when our differences from the past and within the present are palpable, graspable, applicable. (87)

Diamond further explains that “historicization” is an important aspect in understanding the relationship between “spectatorship and the performer’s body” (87). She states that, according to Brecht, one way that the actor alienates or distances the audience from the character is “to suggest the historicity of the character in contrast to the actor’s own present time self-awareness on stage” (87).

Playwrights using historical themes and characters certainly confront the problem of the historicity of the character in contrast to the present-time stage experience. This raises, according to Diamond, the question of whether or not the actor should lose himself or herself in the character or be more aware of present time in order to “look back on” the historical character and make choices (87). Bond acknowledges the importance of Brecht’s contributions in this respect, while, at the same time, he defends the uniqueness of their characters’ “contemporary voices.” Diamond’s arguments, therefore, show that Brecht’s ideas on history provide a most useful framework for comparing and analyzing what is happening in contemporary productions using historical themes and characters. In looking at Bond’s work, I will consider to what extent he continues Brecht’s traditions or develop new ways and means to engage the audience with history and drama. Moreover, Diamond’s arguments call attention to one further observation relevant to this study. An intertextual reading of certain aspects of feminist theory with Brechtian theory is helpful in looking at many of the questions raised in Bond’s play in which questions of gender, myth, and history are explored through the use of a woman protagonist.

The Deconstruction of the Male Paradigms:-

In general, many of the concerns in the play are explored and discussed by Gale Greene and Coppelia Kahn as they investigate certain shortcomings of literary criticism and history. Regarding women’s accomplishments, they believe that feminist scholarship has a “dual task of deconstructing predominantly male cultural paradigms and reconstructing a female perspective and experience in an effort to change the tradition that has silenced and marginalized [women]” (*Makings Difference* 1). This makes feminist literary criticism “one branch of interdisciplinary enquiry which takes gender as a fundamental organizing category of experience” (1). Greene and Kahn explain that this enquiry involves two related premises concerning gender:

One is that the inequality of the sexes is neither a biological given nor a divine mandate, but a cultural construct, and therefore a proper subject of study for any humanistic discipline. The second is that a male perspective, assumed to be 'universal,' has dominated fields of knowledge, shaping their paradigms and methods. Feminist scholarship, then, has two concerns: it revises concepts previously thought universal but now seen as originating in particular cultures and serving particular purposes; and it restores a female perspective by extending knowledge about women's experience and contributions to culture. (1-2)

The feminist viewpoint is appropriate to the methodology and concerns in my study. Moreover, the proposition laid out by Annette Kolodny in her article, "Dancing Through the Minefield" is relevant. In this article she addresses the dilemmas of artists (especially women) who discover their "most cherished private experience 'hedged by taboos mined with false naming'" (148). This is also related to the dilemma faced by the male reader who, when confronting a woman's text, "finds himself entering a strange and un-familiar world of symbolic significance" (148). Kolodny seeks to transform existing misunderstandings and "hostilities" into a "true dialogue" that will clarify and "breathe new life into now moribund areas of [this] profession" (151). Moreover, she explains a significant point relevant to this study: "our sense of a 'literary history,' and by extension, our confidence in an 'historical' canon, is rooted not so much in any definitive understanding of the past as it is in our need to call up and utilize the past on behalf of a better understanding of the present" (151). Kolodny goes on to quote and paraphrase David Couzens Hoy to support her arguments as she notes:

"[T]he understanding of art and literature is such an essential aspect of the present's self-understanding that this self-understanding conditions what even gets taken" as constituting that artistic and literary past ... "This continual reinterpretation of the past goes hand in hand with the continual reinterpretation by the present of itself." (152)

Along similar lines, Toril Moi's concerns in *Sexual/Textual Politics* about the "patriarchal notions of aesthetics, history and tradition" also relate to the contributions Bond makes with his experimental themes. Masculine and feminine codes of behavior are central issues in Bond's *The Woman*. Women protagonists are placed in traditional masculine roles, raising questions about the female tradition in literature. Moi sees it as "an urgent political necessity" to note that

[I]f patriarchy oppresses women as women, defining us all as 'feminine' regardless of individual differences, the feminist struggle must both try to undo patriarchal strategy that makes 'femininity' intrinsic to biological femaleness, and at the same time insist on defending women precisely as women. In a patriarchal society that discriminates against women writers because they are women, it is easy enough to justify a discussion of them as a separate group. The problem, more urgently, is how to avoid bringing patriarchal notions of aesthetics, history and tradition to bear on the 'female tradition' we have decided to construct. (82)

Even though Bond may not be addressing Moi's concerns directly, he is certainly providing ammunition for those looking for contemporary material that explores unique and creative ways of examining and demythologizing gender roles from historical perspectives.

The Past and Present in Bond's *The Woman*:-

Bond's re-creation of the past in *The Woman* focuses upon the central historical event of the Trojan War; the characters became not merely modern renditions of Homeric or Euripidean Greek and Trojan figures, but something larger than life or fiction. They became representatives of Greek civilization itself, and the similarity between that civilization and our own is a fact that Bond's drama will not permit his audience to overlook. James Bulman highlights that in Bond's view "the myth of the Trojan War embodies all the immoral premises of capitalist culture ... the wanton destruction of one such culture, Troy, by another, Greece, whose very reason for being is conquest" ("*The Woman* and Greek Myth" 506). It is significant to note that Bond is not interested in showing the Greek world as ordinary and closely tied to our present world. This approach to the Greeks seems much in line with Brecht's criticism of how what he called "bourgeois theatre" tries to make past periods look as if they are our own. It seems appropriate that Bond might even borrow Brecht's words in saying that "we ought to leave the Greeks' distinguishing marks and keep their impermanence always before our eyes, so that our own period can be seen to be impermanent too" (*Brecht on Theatre* 190). Bond's purpose is not to bring the Greek world closer to our own; rather, he prefers to focus on Greek aggression, imperialism, and exploitation in order to promote a sense of need for social change within our contemporary world.

The Horrors of Irrationality:-

The Woman is divided into two parts: the first concerns the ravages of the Trojan War; the second depicts the new life of Hecuba, the Trojan queen, and of Ismene, the wife of the conquering Greek general, Heros, who have found refuge after the war on a remote Aegean island. The wall around Troy dominates Part One, reflecting the divisiveness of war, the alienation of one nationality from another, and the separation of human beings in the name of a meaningless abstract idea. Part Two presents an island landscape, a land free from man-made walls and bounded only by the open sea. It celebrates the beauty and achievement of non-aggressive relationships that can be forged among individuals and the need to protect such relationships from those who would sacrifice human life and love to some supposedly higher goal. In *The Woman*, that goal is the possession of the Goddess of Fortune, a primitive stone sculpture that will bring good fortune to the society that owns it.

Heros has gone to war against Priam to own the Goddess of Good Fortune, which Bulman describes as, “a skillful compression of Helen and the Olympian gods into a primitive stone statue, an idol of doubtful value that brings Homeric myth down to a human scale” (“*The Woman and Greek Myth*” 507). Heros’ obsession with the statue underlines the imperialist ideology embodied in the contemporary world. He says:

Let’s review the situation. Twenty-five years ago Troy was already a falling city and Athens in the ascent. My father’d won his war for the Eastern mines. He’d captured the statue of the Goddess of Good Fortune and was bringing it to Athens. Hecuba told Priam that if he owned the statue Troy would be saved. He took it—and since then Troy’s had nothing but disasters. Why? The statue brings good fortune only to those destined to own her. But how can we win the war and capture the statue of Good Fortune when we haven’t got the statue to give us the good fortune to win the war? (*The Woman* I.ii.15)

Bond presents Heros’ society as superstitious and irrational; they are convinced that the statue will bring victory to Athens through its magical powers. Heros lives a logic that dictates that he cannot lose; he masks over all contradictions with the belief that Greece will triumph because it is destined to triumph. The Trojans will be defeated because they are holding the supreme goddess “against her will,” and such actions demand the “greatest misfortune” (175). Therefore, the Greeks must win the war. Heros wants the statue back, and he is willing to offer the Trojans peace should they return the statue. Bulman criticizes the irrationality of this society and comments on the way Bond sets this up:

The Priests who serve the Goddess are cyphers of state; those who believe in her are irrational. This irrationality leads them to believe that prosperity can result only from war and conquest. Common men--soldiers, slaves--are exploited for such ends, while their leaders deceive them into thinking that rape and plunder will bring them honor. (“*The Woman and Greek Myth*” 507)

The myth of the Trojan War, therefore, includes the immoral practices of imperialistic cultures, and the many of the dominant cultural attitudes and values which Bond wants to call into question are illustrated in *The Woman*.

Gender Inequality: Women’s Political Consciousness:-

Bond’s use of historical events in *The Woman* subverts the classical, heroic world of Homer. He employs techniques that call into question stereotypical attitudes associated with masculine and feminine prerogatives in society; for example, he presents masculine force and aggression against feminine concerns for compassion and reconciliation. Through the characters of Heros, Hecuba, and Ismene, Bond questions attitudes towards human reality. Heros embodies the mind of authoritarian fascistic thinking, while Hecuba and Ismene make hopeful transitions into a tragic state of consciousness. He challenges conventional representations of these women as essentially passive bystanders in the drama of the Trojan War. To some extent, Bond seems to work with the traditional assumptions about aggression as essentially masculine and compassion as predominantly feminine. At various points in the drama he subtly reverses the values assigned to these qualities, demonstrating the value of feminine traits which traditionally have been undervalued. The most obvious example of this strategy is how Bond plays upon the issue of gender to reveal Heros’ hubris by paradoxically employing a female protagonist and elevating her as a model of honor, justice, and freedom in a society that is notoriously considered patriarchal and even misogynistic. Thus through techniques of irony, contrast and reversal of expected notions of gender responses, Bond works with historical events and materials to challenge contemporary notions of honor, justice, and freedom.

Ismene is the “cleverest woman” in Greece; and as such, she goes as an envoy to negotiate with Hecuba. Heros has instructed her to promise that the Greeks will leave Troy in peace if Hecuba will relinquish the statue; but Ismene, who knows that her husband is lying, joins in league with Hecuba “against the laws of war,” according to Thersites, (*The Woman* I.iv. 34), vowing to remain in Troy as security. Ismene says that she will not leave Troy until Heros has honored his word. To the Greek way of thinking, this is treachery: they cannot allow anyone to betray their false strategies. Ismene exacerbates the situation when she stands before the Trojan wall and tries to persuade the soldiers with pacifism:

Greek soldiers! Go home! Is there any loot worth the risk of your life? Women? There are women in Greece! The goddess? If the Trojans listened to me they'd throw it out to you over their wall. That's how they'd punish you most! What luck could it give you? You'll go home when you've got it? You can go home now! You're wasting your life making your tombstone! (I. viii. 43)

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, and she speaks her humanist message more rebelliously:

In Troy I saw the people suffer. Young men crippled or killed, their parents in despair and dying of disease. I told them as they were dying—they couldn't hear but I told them because I'm Greek!—I shall do all I can to stop this. No more suffering caused by men! I said that—if the sight of them hadn't made my mouth dry I would have sung it! Yes! And now tomorrow: tomorrow you'll go into the city - the frightened people are spending their last night in their homes - and you schoolboys will prowl through the streets looking for something left to steal or kill. Is that Greek? (I. xiii. 51-52)

Ismene is Bond's re-visioning of a Greek tragic protagonist.ⁱⁱ As Bulman points out, despite some superficial similarities between *The Woman* and Euripides' plays, Bond's play is far more reminiscent of Sophocles' *Antigone*, and Ismene resembles Antigone in her unrepentant declaration of the senselessness of war. As a result of her political consciousness, she has to be immured in the Trojan wall. This strikingly alludes to the punishment of Antigone, who is immured for defying Creon; but it also symbolizes the way in which any speaker of truth must be buried within a wall that stands for the edifices all totalitarian governments erect to protect themselves from truth and to preserve their injustices.

Bond uses Sophoclean myth to subvert the ethos of Homeric one. He recognized in Antigone's disobedience an attitude necessary for the cultural revolution against oppression and injustice. George Steiner examines ways in which writers over the centuries adapted the myth of Antigone to serve their own social and political purposes. Steiner points out that in our own century, Anouilh found the myth relevant to the French resistance, and Fugard to the horrors of apartheid.ⁱⁱⁱ However, Bond's revision was more radical than theirs. He was not satisfied with the ideological choice implicit in Sophocles' version, for he found Sophocles' Antigone too bound by her culture to be a social activist. In a poem he wrote while composing *The Woman*, Bond laments that Antigone is impotent to change Creon's culture:

If Creon has power he can't be just
And Antigone's weakness can't make her wise
Or her pain teach her the law (109-110)

Antigone cannot tell the meaning of justice because she is not wise enough. Rebelling against that, Bond makes Ismene wise. In her, he revises the myth of Antigone and leaves her free to choose between capitalism and socialism, between her husband's irrationality and her own reason, between myth and truth. Ismene would shake the foundations of western culture by refusing to subscribe to its myths. When Heros offers her poison so that she will not linger long inside the wall, she responds, “No, I shan't kill myself. I'll be alive when you go into Troy. I shall sit in the dark and listen till the last wail. Not to tell tales when I go to heaven, but so that the truth is recorded on earth” (55). She vows to record the truth, the horror, the history/ (her)story, that will make mincemeat of any myth that may spring from Greek victory.

While Ismene seems open to a tragic consciousness from the start, it is Hecuba's growing historical, tragic consciousness that occupies the largest portion of the dramatic action and that bridges the two parts of the play. Bulman pronounces that if Ismene is Bond's Antigone, Hecuba is his Oedipus. From the outset, she is a seeker after truth. Although she is doomed to preside over a culture in decay, she would reform it in the light of reason. She

would forfeit the statue to the Greeks in order, like Oedipus, to save her city: What luck has it brought Troy but the plague? she asks. The tragic action of the siege of Troy comes to a climax when Heros orders that Hecuba's grandson, Astyanax, be thrown from the city wall. A group of Trojan women plead for the boy's life, becoming choral in their lamentations: "The rest are dead. Leave us this child. We're all his mother. Don't kill our son, you'd kill hundreds of children at one blow. Make a hundred women childless!" (219). In order to block Heros out of her sight, Hecuba blinds herself in one eye offstage. In doing so, she joins a select company of blind visionaries - Oedipus, Teiresias, and Bond's own Lear - who see a more profound truth within.

Hecuba, and Ismene are rays of truth and light even though their delicate alliance is threatened from both sides. Ultimately, Hecuba is placed under arrest behind the palace walls and Ismene is thrown in a cell with "shorn hair and in rags". Both women, determined to share and communicate the truth of Greek and Trojan fraudulence, are physically confined due to their common commitment. Hecuba accepts defeat with her Son in control and his determination to keep the statue; she knows Troy is doomed. Ismene, in contrast, seems stronger as she tells Hecuba, "I can't pretend now: that's why I'm in prison. In prison you're free to tell the truth" (39). Ismene defies Heros, her husband, in the name of peace and freedom for a whole society. Lou Lappin declares that Ismene "furnishes the spirit of dissent that enables Hecuba to formulate the plan for the death of the Greek General" (*Art and Politics* 157). In the widest sense, both women symbolize all political prisoners in history who have been held unjustly in oppressive societies yet are free even in their confinement because they have experienced true freedom in the knowledge of what is just and unjust.

The Deconstruction of Justice:-

The final scenes in Part One exchange intense action between the Greek and Trojan camps. Bond presents contrasting moods through interrupting, overlapping, or jumping to an unexpected progression or order in the scenes. His purpose seems to build a climax of catastrophe as he switches from Greeks to Trojans in their inevitable destruction process. The unjust actions override justice and bring on the destruction of Troy. On an individual level, this injustice is represented in Ismene's immurement, Astyanax's death, and Hecuba's self-blinding. Bond uses many night scenes at this point, symbolizing the clandestine dealings in the dark. When the Trojan priests bring word to Heros of Ismene's decision to stay in Troy of her own "free will", Heros shows shock and disbelief. Nestor convinces him it was Hecuba's fault but reminds him that "punishment for treason in time of war is fixed: common women burned and ladies immured" (*The Woman* 42). Bond uses this to demonstrate how Athenian justice works. "I imagine the Athenian parliament will vote to stone them to death," Heros states (42-43). Bond shows that truth and justice work strangely in the Greek camp. Traditional views of Greece as the cornerstone of honor and justice for Western civilization, with law courts and democracy, are ironically reversed and undermined through the devolution of the Athenian parliament and Heros' leadership.

Towards the end of Part One, treachery mounts as priests deceive one another and the Son takes full control. Bond makes the Son - the Trojan counterpart to the Greek Heros - becoming more corrupt, murdering his own people and rejecting the advice and pleas of Hecuba as she says to him, "I saw this war corrupt almost everyone it touched. It's taken you to the limit of corruption" (47). Hecuba's failure to persuade the Son and the citizens of Troy to seek peace and Ismene's failure to communicate the truth of Heros' deceitfulness, link the women's defeat with the defeat of truth. Thus, the irony of women from a misogynistic culture being models of truth and justice helps alert the audience to other aspects of irony in the play. Finally, the concluding struggle between the Greeks and Trojans are not in grand battle scenes with mythic heroes but rather in civil and internal conflicts where the Trojans rather than the Greeks destroy their own city. Bond demonstrates that by replacing truth and justice with obsession and greed results in anarchy, death, and destruction.

The Reconstruction of Justice:-

The play could have ended with Part One, but Bond adds Part Two with nine scenes to restore justice in his recreation of history. Where Hecuba stood for and directed truth in Part One, in the second half she stands for and initiates a reconstruction of justice. Bond shows Hecuba reestablishing connections with family and community as she assumes a place of leadership once again. The disintegration and breakdown of civilization brought about by Heros and the Greeks in the first half of the play is counterbalanced by the process of restoration and preservation of justice directed by Hecuba in Part Two. Bulman emphasizes that:

If we recall Bond's own precepts for a rational theatre, that it must "create a new image of men and women," we might expect to find in Act II a more positive vision of society's future. Act I has analyzed the causes of civilization's decline; Act II ought to offer a plan for reform. ("*The Woman and Greek Myth*" 510)

Hecuba and Ismene, who was freed from her tomb by grave robbers, are refugees in an island community as Part Two opens. Twelve years have passed and Hecuba, living with the now insane Ismene in a hut near the sea, waits to celebrate a village spring festival. They are permitted to live with the islanders now, but the imminent Greek invasion disturbs their delicate and tenuous existence.

The second part of *The Woman* emerges, however, as a repetition-with-a-difference; whereas the first dramatic action took place within a situation of war, the second occurs within the seeming realm of freedom. Nevertheless, Heros' unbending, destructive quest for the statue of the Goddess of Good Fortune is repeated in both of parts of the play, which indicates that these are interrelated. The two women are threatened once again by deceitful enemies out of the past. Nestor informs Hecuba and Ismene that Heros will use violence if that is his only recourse in retrieving the statue. Even though Nestor offers peace, promises of sanctuary in the new Greece, and reminders that time heals all wounds, Hecuba is skeptical and her words express sorrow. "Ah! Ah! I can hear my grandchild's voice," she adds

I thought I'd forgotten. Let me die here in dignity ... I love to play on the beach, I listen to the sea and it washes away all my anger and so I'm at peace. Now there's a storm blowing up. Millions of drops of rain, each one with a human face ... (72)

Even though there are a number of references to healing and the passage of time in the opening of Part Two (70-72), Hecuba's comments reflect a woman with deep scars and one quite vulnerable to a new challenge from Heros whose obsession with the statue is unquenchable. Heros has to destroy the islanders to prove to Athens that he made every effort to find the statue. His vision of freedom is oppressive and fascistic, and the new Athenian enlightenment is thus a fiction. Authoritarian tyranny and barbarism still are the most effective weapons of those in power; superstition still rules over reason. Athens, paradoxically, has become like Troy, her economy built on the exploitation of slaves who suffer inhuman deprivation mining gold and silver for the rich. One of those slaves becomes a crucial figure in the play. He is the Dark Man, a refugee who has escaped from the Athenian silver mines, and at the end of the play, emerges as Heros' chief antagonist: master versus slave, the oppressor versus the oppressed.

The Protest of the Dark Man:-

The damaging effect of a class-structured society is obvious in *The Woman*. Bond's analysis of appropriately "human" responses is focused, clarified, and developed. Jenny Spencer highlights that anger allows the Dark Man to become, however temporarily, "energetic force of protest and change" (*Dramatic Strategies* 7). Ineffective as isolated figure and rarely the focus of the narrative, the Dark Man's "gut-level class-consciousness positively affects other characters and directs the audience's attention to stark social contradictions in the play" (7-8). While the actions of Bond's "dark forces" constantly serve a crucial narrative function within his plays, they also provide a "radical measure of the limits and consequences of other characters' actions" (8). Through these characters, Bond encourages a political reading of events without resorting to traditional methods of empathetic identification.

A confrontation is imminent as the Greeks, led by Heros, face Hecuba, surrounded by a few villagers, while the rest of the community stand upstage left. Bond's stage directions indicate, "All the GREEKS wear ceremonial military or professional dress. Heros looks like Michelangelo's Lorenzo de' Medici at the Basilica of San Lorenzo" (79).^{iv} The audience's first impression is naturally to see Heros' power and the Greek forces played off against the weaker looking and disorganized group of villagers. The Greek soldiers eventually push back the villagers like common slaves, and Hecuba attempts no fight. She remains protective of only the Dark Man and Ismene who revolted against her entrapment. She is strong and willing enough to recall old memories of her dead children in Troy through recovering her sight, but the agonizing and tense sequence of removing the bandage reveals that her one good eye has gone blind. Nevertheless, the choice to blind herself and now the choice to try and see again reinforce Hecuba's strength. Bond has given the audience a strong Hecuba once again, but one who is handicapped to fight Heros. However, like the blind visionaries, Oedipus or Teiresias, Hecuba's inner truth will be her strength and guide as she oversees "blind justice."

Hecuba is determined to make one grand gesture of defiance against social repression before she dies; and she alone can do it, because she alone remembers the past as it was - as history, not myth. Although she has tried hard to forget, she acknowledges that change can issue only from remembrance. "Hope," according to Bond, is not faith in the future but knowledge of the past," (20) and Hecuba understands that Heros must die if there is to be any hope for humanity. In taking the initiative, she becomes, in Bond's view, "an image of human thought and human purpose acting within the developments which are created historically" (qtd in Hay & Roberts 260). She understands the pain and injustice of the past to make things right for the future. Hecuba urges the Dark Man to kill Heros to eliminate his threat to society. The Dark Man boldly defines his opposition to Heros and even, in a fundamental irony, asserts his natural superiority to him:

When you built your new city our hell grew with it ... Why d'you cover your new city in silver? Your mud bricks, the sales of your shoes, are worth more than silver. I know what value is. I made your statues in Athens. You think I'm the broken bits that were chipped away! No - I made their smile" (II. vi. 97).

Killing Heros is the Dark Man's "only chance" (106). Thus the war that resulted when truth and justice were denied in Part One is now replaced by a restoration of justice which provides freedom for the future (hence, Bond's subtitle, *Scenes of War and Freedom*). Heros, who sees narrowly and leads his society with a policy based on greed, ignorance, and personal pride, follows a course of destruction. The blind Hecuba sees the truth, has a sense of history employs reason, logic, and consequently restores and preserves human life as the island is saved.

The Woman is not an easy play as Bond compels the audience to think. It has, Martin Esslin highlights, "to be pondered and thought about afterwards" (*Plays and Players* 27). Bond is not interested in searching for ways to make the Greek world look like our contemporary world. He sees the great strength of Greek plays resting in their ability to ask important questions. Through his re-created past stories, Bond also wants his audiences to ask questions about human behavior in our contemporary societies. He seeks not to uncover particular historical facts, but rather to reveal through historical events that change is both possible and necessary for a better world. Bond bases the play upon literary and historical references from the Greek period. This raises the audience curiosity as to what he is going to do with known characters and events from the past and it also provides references and clues for solving the problems. Moreover, he challenges his audience, distancing them in a sense, with theatrical devices such as disconnected scenes and contradictions arising through repeating opposing actions. Furthermore, he clarifies the historical theme and invites the audience to experience a sense of closure by connecting injustice of Part One with the fulfillment of justice in Part Two. Thus, the play moves from deconstruction to reconstruction, and Bond reveals that through collective, as well as co-operative individual decisions, actions, and determination, the process of freedom and justice can be achieved.

Sexual Politics in *The Woman*:-

Since Bond is obviously re-creating the past through his eyes of the present, controversial contemporary issues such as the role of sexual politics in society become a matter of interest in *The Woman*. Bond employs female characters--Hecuba and Ismene--to ironically challenge the male-dominant culture responsible for the values of their world. *The Woman* criticizes the male power structure of Bond's re-created Trojan war, which was precipitated by Priam's theft of the Goddess of Good Fortune. Indeed, the treatment of Ismene at the council when she is forbidden to speak and the cynical decision to send her with Thersites as a delegation to Hecuba are cases in point. These examples shed light on the relationship between lies, greed, personal ambition, corrupted forms of heroic warfare and the chauvinistic male Greek council. Hecuba and Ismene are not like the characters in both Euripides's plays where women, as Lappin points out:

[F]unction to support and maintain male institutions. Procreation, the ability to bear male heirs, remains their only claim on history and events. Even Cassandra's gift of prophecy in *The Trojan Women* is ironically mocked--she is condemned to be misunderstood. Bond, however, frees Ismene and Hecuba from the causality of gender biased roles. (*Art and Politics* 160)

Whereas, in *The Woman*, the men in power appear irrational, militaristic, and self-seeking in their respective male-dominated Greek and Trojan societies, Hecuba responds to the particular results of the values coming from such male-dominated societies. She attempts to solve problems of peace, justice, and freedom in her culture through rational processes. Bond explains that he has observed in his lifetime how "more and more groups of people are asking for and getting their freedoms." One of these groups asking for freedom, he believes, is women.

I think women have always been in purdah even in Western society. Their attitudes to life, their thoughts have never been recorded, and therefore have never had a life of their own. Men's thoughts have always been recorded, they've always written them down, and other people have come along and thought about them and developed them. The woman's side of human culture has not found its proper place in our society. There are aspects of viewing the world that we have been deprived of simply because the culture of women has not been allowed to develop and grow, and now it becomes possible ... it becomes possible for women's situation to be much improved. If I have a criticism of the feminist movement, it is that they sometimes want to find their place in a man's world, which I think is wrong. I wish they'd start saying more 'What do women need?' How should the world be run to facilitate the needs of women, which are enormous. How should we reorganize the world so that it's not always the needs of men that are met. Obviously the freeing of any group of people is also the freeing of their oppressors, so that the demand for freedom by women is an immensely significant and wonderfully liberating thing. (qtd in Coult 102-03)

Freedom is certainly an essential aspect of Bond's use of history in the play. If Hecuba represents the oppression of women throughout history, Bond is also using the Dark Man to symbolize the new working-class consciousness. Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts point out that "it is [the Dark Man] who kills Heros, because the death must seem the result of historical, rather than tragic, inevitability" (*Edward Bond* 261).

Conclusion:-

The Woman, emerging in a period of profound social contradiction, served as a symptom of the possibilities that arise during such moments of strife. Historically, the possibilities were seized in 1979 by the conservative government of Margaret Thatcher who embodies the patriarchal ideology supported by Heros. Nonetheless, *The Woman* shows Bond's interest in a theatre of social change. Like Brecht, he compels his audience to ask questions about their own time through the issues he raises. However, Bond does not dwell on the hopeless or negative or suggest puzzles without answers. Hecuba and Ismene agree on particular truths and become interdependent. Their decisions and actions demonstrate their ability to rise to full potential as co-operative human beings and promote a cure for a diseased society. Bond's approach to history in *The Woman* affirms his belief in the ability of collective and interdependent human actions to make a difference when such values as freedom and justice are at stake.

Notes:-

1. Bond has also written a play dealing with the myth of *King Lear* (1971). His interest in Lear was its relationship to the evils of totalitarian societies. In his own production of *Lear* he makes various references to Shakespeare's *Lear*, but re-structures the ending by showing an enlightened King Lear at the conclusion who manages to tear down the wall around the kingdom, thus signifying his sensitivity to human need. *The Woman* was written shortly after *Lear*.
2. Bond's insane Ismene parallels references to women in the arts and letters who have tried to find their place in male dominated societies and managed the difficult task of achieving true female literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards.
3. Steiner's *Antigones* is a wide-ranging book which deals with art, music and philosophy as well as theatrical and literary adaptations of the Antigone myth.
4. Bond's choice of modeling Heros after the Italian Renaissance figure Lorenzo de' Medici provides an appropriate reference point for considering examples of economic and political power figures since the de' Medici family virtually controlled all aspects of fifteenth-century Florence for a time. Bond is encouraging the audience to think about the tradition of economic and political leaders throughout the course of history.

Works Cited:-

- Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies: Roland Barthes*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972.
 Bond, Edward. *The Woman: Scenes of War and Freedom*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1979.

-
- _____. "Letter to Robert Turley", October 1, 1989.
- Brecht, Bertolt. *Brecht on Theatre*. ed. John Willet. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964.
- Bulman, James C. "The Woman and Greek Myth: Bond's Theatre of History." *Modern Drama* 29.4 Dec. 1986: 505-515.
- Chase, Richard. *Quest for Myth*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1949.
- Coult, Tony. "Bringing Light Back to the Earth: Edward Bond's *The Woman*." *Canadian Theatre Review* Fall 1979: 96-104.
- Diamond, Elin. "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist criticism." *Drama Review* Spring 1988: 82-94.
- Esslin, Martin. "*The Woman*." *Plays and Players*. October 1978: 26-27.
- Green, Gayle and Copelia Kahn, eds. *Makings Difference: Feminist Literary criticism*. London and New York: Methuen, 1985.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *The Forms of Power and the Power of Forms in the Renaissance*. Oklahoma UP, 1982.
- Harben, Niloufer. *Twentieth-Century English History Plays: From Shaw to Bond*. New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1988.
- Hay, Malcolm. & Philip, Roberts. *Edward Bond: A Companion to the Plays*. London: TQ, 1978.
- Kolodny, Annette. "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics Feminist Literary criticism." *The New Feminist criticism: Essays on Women. Literature. And Theory*. Ed. Elaine Showalter. New York: Pantheon, 1985.
- Lappin, Lou. *The Art and Politics of Edward Bond*. New York: Peter Lang, 1987.
- Moi, Toril. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London and New York: Methuen, 1985.
- Spencer, Jenny S. *Dramatic Strategies in the Plays of Edward Bond*: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Steiner, George. *Antigones*. Oxford, 1984.
- Whites, Hayden. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1973.
- _____. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978.
- Wikander, Matthew. *The Play of Truth and State: Historical Drama from Shakespeare to Brecht*:-Baltimore: John Hopkins P, 1986.