
IMPERIALISM, THATCHERISM, AND RESISTANCE IN EDWARD BOND'S THE WOMAN: ACTING BACK TO THE CENTER

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ABSTRACT

Edward Bond is one of the greatest dramatists of post-war period. During the 1970s, one dramatist who tried to inaugurate a form of historical drama, which used history as a means of representing political circumstances of contemporary Britain, was Edward Bond. In 1978, with *The Woman*, he seemed to have achieved his goal. He uses the history of the past to reveal the political, social and economic situation of his own time in order to make a change. Bond's *The Woman* is a critique and an attack on imperialism, neo-liberalism, and Thatcherism, but a revived version in the modern sense of the word. For this reason, I decided to work on *The Woman* to analyze how he criticizes his society and the imperialistic ideas dominant in western societies. As mentioned before, the main focus of this study is to read and interpret Bond's *The Woman* in the light of imperialism and see how colonized people, especially women, reject the imperial legacy by resistance and acting back to the center. *The Woman* contains numerous suggestions that Trojan War was an imperialist one which happened over economic interests and political competitions were at stake. Bond aims to have a deconstructive writing of the misogynist prejudices and reveal that human civilizations and institutions collapsed due to imperialist and hegemonic political practices.

Keywords: Imperialism, Postcolonialism, Power, Resistance, Woman.

1. INTRODUCTION

Imperialism and Resistance in Bond's "The Woman"

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, "imperialism refers to the policy, practice or protection of expanding political and economic authority and dominance either directly or indirectly over other nations often in the form of military force" (8). Edward Said has referred to imperialism as orientalism through which the West came to know the East - orient - as irrational, primitive and disordered, while Europe spanned rationality, order and symmetry. In the same way, postcolonialism deals with cultural identity in colonized societies: the dilemmas of developing a national identity; the ways in which writers articulate and celebrate that identity; the ways in which the knowledge of the colonized people has been used to serve the colonizer's interests; the ways in which the colonizers have tried to justify colonialism via images of the colonized as inferior people, society and culture. According to Said, imperialism and culture are interlocked. Culture is both a function and a source of identity. Imperialist culture can be the most powerful agent of imperialist's dominance in the colonized world. "The cultural factor behind imperialism is the notion of civilizing mission" (15). The developed nations of the Europe believed that they had a duty to rule Asians and Africans in order to lead them to a higher level of civilization and culture. Foucault calls orientalism a discourse, "a coherent and

strongly bounded area of social knowledge, a system of statements by which the world could be known" (9).

As mentioned before, the main focus of this study is to read and interpret Bond's *The Woman* in the light of imperialism and see how colonized people, especially women, reject the imperial legacy by resistance and acting back to the center. Postcolonial theory considers matters of identity, gender, race, racism, and ethnicity with the aim of developing a postcolonial national identity, of how colonized people's knowledge is used against them in the service of the colonizer's interests, of how the basis of the world is based on the relation between the powerful and the powerless.

First of all, let's have a look at the summary of the play. Bond's *The Woman* is set in a quasi-homeric world in which Helen is replaced and substituted by the statue of The Goddess of Good Fortune. King Priam has stolen this statue and the Greeks have besieged the city to take

it back. The title *The Woman* refers both to Priam's wife, Hecuba, and the invented character, Isemen, wife of the Greek commander-in-chief, Heros. Hecuba and Isemen, the two hostile women, try to make peace and prevent war, but they fail in doing so. "Like modern politicians, Greeks and Trojans break their promises, and the Greek army loots Troy before burning the nation out of existence" (6). Isemen is immured within the wall as a traitor. After twelve years, Isemen and Hecuba live on a nameless island as mother and daughter. Then, we have the arrival of the Heros and the Greeks in search of the statue lost in storm. After searching the sea vainly, Heros agrees to have a race with a runaway. At the end, he is stabbed to death by the slave and Hecuba's rational plan. We can read this play as a reflection and representation of Bond's antiwar view and stance. We see, ultimately, the warmonger is sentenced and destined to death.

By writing an old tale Bond implies that Trojan War happened not over Helen, but for economic improvement. The Greeks aimed to attack and capture Troy not only to colonize it, but also to make it a road to commerce. Bond invites the reader to have a 'dissent reading' of the established mythological account. Instead of Paris's abduction of Helen, the two camps fight in *The Woman* for the possession of the Statue of the Goddess of Good Fortune which has been claimed to guarantee welfare and protection to those who possess it and which the Trojans once snapped from their long-lasting enemy.

The Woman contains numerous suggestions that the Trojan War was an imperialist one which happened over economic interests and political competitions were at stake. Bond sternly rules that in this conflict 'neither is right, neither is wrong. It's just a struggle for power, possession, within two imperialists power' (13). Bond believes that the Trojan War, like most of today's, had mainly economic and political implications closely pertinent to the heartless capitalist race. Bond aims to have a deconstructive writing of the misogynist prejudgments and reveal that human civilizations and institutions collapsed due to imperialist and hegemonic political practices. This war happened to gain economic profits. The colonizers aimed, since the beginning, to constitute the land and make it a commercial city, of course, to use it as their colony. They believed that building the new city "will pay well".

As mentioned before, the counterpoint of imperialism is resistance. Resistance against empire was pervasive within the domain of imperialism, since the coming of the white man caused some sort of resistance every where in the non-European world. Foucault believes that 'where

there is power, there is resistance'. So, resistance becomes a process "In the rediscovery and repatriation of what had been suppressed in the native's past by the process of imperialism" (14). Isemen's action is a kind of resistance against imperialist culture. Hecuba, also, resists and does not hand in the statue of The Goddess of Good Fortune. Imperialists are stable characters. They do not change during their state of affairs. Heros insists on the fact that what he believes in is true and he should attack and capture Troy and later on the Island just for a piece of stone. At the end, he is doomed through a conspiracy decided by a woman, Hecuba. Therefore, she is a clever and far-sighted woman whose cleverness was rejected by males. So, she is the pioneer of destroying imperialist and misogynist culture.

Another cultural issue in imperialism is geography which means struggle over constitution of the land. When an imperial country attacks a target one, the target country resists, for they do not like to have their land constituted by the colonizer or imperialist. According to Said the notion of mapping and charting of a territory is pertinent to the affirmation of cultural dominance. So, Hecuba and her people resist, but they are not powerful enough. They like their country remain as it is. So, they believe: "when you built your new city, our hell grew with it. It's not true the guilty go to hell: only the weak" (2). This is the imperialist discourse that the weak and the frail are sentenced to destruction. Thus, imperialism owns historical root, but Bond means something which is more severe, tougher and crueler. I mean the demeanor of man to man, nation to nation, and man to nature is more hostile than the past. In the past, it was much calmer than now. But in the modern time, nature is distorted by man and worsened. So, this neo-liberalism is not the revival of the previous one, but a more severe version of that. Water, soil, earth, and even fire all are parts of nature, but are utilized as resources of exploitation. As a result, our environment is being destroyed and our world is being divided into two poles; one pole is a good one and an ideal place for living, in other words a utopia, but the other one a dystopia, and all these happenings are the consequences of the new version of imperialism; in other words, neo-liberalism.

Thatcherism in Bond's "The Woman"

During Bond's life, Margaret Thatcher, a neo-liberalist or an imperialist in the modern sense of the word, was the prime minister of England whose government paved the way for the modern terrorism which is an offspring of neo-liberalism. Thatcherism is the same as neo-liberalism. It is a political system of thought attributed to the government of Margaret Thatcher, the British Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990. "Thatcherism is characterized by a decreased state intervention via the free market economy, monetarist economic policy, privatization of state-owned industries, lower direct taxation and higher direct taxation, opposition to trade unions, and a reduction of the size of the welfare state. She was deeply in favor of individualism over collectivism" (8). So, the policy of privatization has become synonymous with Thatcherism.

By writing *The Woman* Bond criticizes Thatcher's government and her style of privatization and free market. We can have a deconstructive look at the play as the critique of Thatcherism. Thatcher emphasized on privatization and free market economy. Government had no interference in the social and economic affairs. Working class or labor had no right in the monetary and social matters. So, we can say Thatcher is an emasculated female ruler. She orders the things which are not favored by the vast majority of the people, those who are frail, vulnerable and susceptible to the social and economic ups and downs.

The same world has been depicted by Bond in *The Woman*. Heros is Thatcher, a male Thatcher. He attacks Troy, captures the city, reconstitutes it, and alters it to another land. He makes it a road to commerce. They were misused for the constitution of the land and victimized so that the wealth could rest in the hands of the rich. Thus, Thatcher was pioneer of modern neo-liberalism and privatization. In the same way, Heros was so obsessed with the idea of the Statue of the Goddess of Good Fortune that even the lives of the islanders were trivial to him. We can read and interpret Helen and Isemene as the opponents of Thatcher's government and her critics who coined the term Thatcherism as an opposition to her hegemony.

In general, Bond believes Thatcherism and neo-liberalism are the same as imperialism but revived in a new form with a new name. The root and the essence are the same just the terminology is different. Thatcher is the imperialist Heros and Iraq or Britain (her agreement to America's attack on Saddam Hussein's government) is the modernized Troy, the colonized Islands and the road to Good Fortune only for the powerful and the rich.

The Woman is Bond's most ambitious play. The subtitle is "Scenes of War and Freedom". Bond's political views are clearly revealed in this work. Bond believes that we must learn to live fairly. This is the aim for which we are evolved. But imperialism and technology prevent this. The imperialist prefers to have the power and wealth in his own hands and the working class serves as his servants. So, these imperialists determine how the working-class people should live and work. Therefore, he makes us read his works as political works, for he aims to attack the false political opinions held in his time.

The reason I am interested in politics is that I grew up in a political situation where everything was seen in terms of politics rather than art. If you were born into the working class where I was, then the purpose of it all was political, that's what the activity of life was about because you were always involved in questions of necessity (10).

In *The Woman*, the main character is Hecuba who "progresses from political blindness to actual physical blindness and from physical blindness to political enlightenment" (12). As a result, she undergoes an individual revolutionary act. On the other hand, Isemene, the second female character, decides to offer herself as a hostage to the Trojans to guarantee their safety if they return the stolen statue. But her offer to break the deadlock fails. At the end of the play, Heros who represents the old irrational order is slayed by a proletarian miner who has been inspired and encouraged by a blind "newly politicized Hecuba" (ibid). Bond wrote: "I have represented history as a woman with a sword under her skirt" (11). In an essay in *Plays Three* Bond wrote, "I also wish to make it clear that the woman and the miner are not superhuman archetypes. They are shown as individuals struggling to take decisions, who are no wiser, stronger or persistent than others may be. Society can be changed only because there are many people like them – and that is the only way in which they can represent the large forces working through centuries: they are ordinary people who change the world" (3).

We can interpret the play's allegory as follows: in the first part of the play, Bond represents the Homeric myth of the Trojan War to depict a society in which this myth is used to perpetuate its political and economic structure. Heros, the Greek commander, holds to his superstitious sophistry that since the Trojans are holding the Goddess against her will, the Goddess of Good Fortune will punish them by giving us victory. So, Bond reveals "a society that refuses to recognize truth and whose irrationality has within it the seeds of its own destruction" (12).

Bond believes that Heros is a man who stands for classical values of beauty and order, and he is opposed by a minor who stands for a new order, for a new proletarian direction of history. There is a conflict between them and the minor wins. It is Heros' obsession which is used by Hecuba to defeat him. Although he wins the race, he is told by Hecuba that during the race he stopped to sleep, and the minor is the winner. So, he is confused and unable to use the nonexistent rationality. At the end, Hecuba is killed by a waterspout, a natural force, which by saving her from shipwreck has altered history. The storm image occurs several times in the play and foreshadows a change. At the end of the first scene, Hecuba refers to an impending storm whose raindrops represent "a human face" (2). Then, this is followed by the sudden arrival of the Dark Man which is associated with the "natural inevitability of a proletarian revolution" (12). The alliance between Isemene and the minor is optimistic. Besides, Hecuba's alliance of truth and revolutionary action wins freedom and offers an opportunity to create a new rational society.

Bond is a strict and severe critic of the society in which he lived, and his works represent his criticism of that society. In *The Woman*, Bond represents a civilized world which is violent inside. Actually, he uses violence as a means to help us understand what is going around us. He believes that colonialist and imperialist ideas of the past are present in our life. Therefore, there should be a change. He does not accept the imperialist ideas of the past. By using a subverted myth, Bond aims to represent the irrationality of Western capitalist society. So, he implies that this myth should be replaced by history which refers to the "truthful retelling of the past" (ibid. 151) Because of Bond's dialectic intentions, he has been claimed to be a member of Eric Bentley's "theatre of ideas". But Bond has called his theatre a "rational theatre" just to make distinction between his own literary practice and that of his contemporaries. The idea that life is meaningless and human action is absurd has no appeal to him. "For him, playwriting is an unquestionably moral activity" (4). Consequently, he states that his duty is simply "to tell the truth", and looks at himself as a realistic writer. In a letter to Tony Coult he wrote, "theatre is a way of judging society and helping to change it; art must interpret the world and not merely mirror it" (ibid.). Thus, his realism is like Brecht's realism. The reality they represent is not only recognizable but also tenable and in need of change. Furthermore, the audience must be active not only in the narration of events but also in their interpretation and association with the world in which we live. When a playwright aims to make a change in the society, he should be concerned with the problem of time. Therefore, he should have historical consciousness. In *The Woman* Bond attempts to make a change by "showing a movement away from a symbolic and mythical world to an historical one" (ibid. 133). The relation between Acts I and II depicts this movement more clearly. In Act I, we have Bond's own version of the last three days of the Trojan War. In Act II, on the other hand, he tells a story of his own with little relation to his Greek source. Bond rewrites the consequences of an action based on myth and represents the islanders moving "from an isolated and ideal community into a Greek-dominated historical world" (ibid.).

Therefore, for Edward Bond history serves both as a target and a tool for analyzing the nature of capitalist society and finding an alternative way of living. He was mainly concerned with historical issues rather than historical events. Bond's plays of 1970s all displayed his political awareness. Bond believes that imperialism and colonialism date back to Middle-ages and Feudalism, the time that feudal aristocrats owned all the land while a class of landless peasants did all the labor. The Catholic Church trained peasants to be obedient to the authority from an

early age. They learned to believe that their reward for a life of obedient labor would come in an afterlife. A few hundred years later, a new group – the capitalist class – assumed economic power and social dominance. So, by writing *The Woman*, he is revealing the presence of the past in our life. At the end of the play, we see how a woman and a crippled plan to act against the center and to eradicate the imperialist. He believes that history can be altered by these ordinary people.

In Bond's view of war, the prize of the Trojan War was not Helen, but a stone, the Goddess of Good Stone, stolen by Priam that brought plague and then utter destruction to his people. It has the same result for Heros. At the end when Heros reappears, "Athen is rebuilt, wealthy, a monument of male design, power and rationality" (5). But Heros admits in chagrin that his victory is Pyrrhic. He respects power and now power resides with Hecuba; as he confesses "You're strong. You have nothing and want nothing. So, you have nothing to lose. Yet you have what I want. No power on earth can move you. I'm in your power. I have never been in this situation before" (2).

Hecuba's mind has been refined during her pains and suffering. Therefore, her mind is her source of power and this is what Heros is scared of. He rationalizes it as an enemy's clever and cunning revenge and supposes that she is aware of the whereabouts of the statue lost in the sea during the shipwreck. When she replies she has no little knowledge about it, he asked nakedly to see her eye, to recognize trust. Then he decides to make the islanders dredge the sea till the statue is found. Hecuba observes the growth of his mania, knowing that he will destroy the entire island unless the statue is found, for he can never accept failure. As a result, she traps him in the web of his own obsession and plans his death. She has her private revenge, but she does this to guarantee the freedom of the islanders from Greek exploitation. She believes he is a death-bringer and his only freedom resides in his death. Hecuba accepted that it is she alone who can complete the pattern of events. Therefore, at the end of the play when Heros – the imperialist power – is eradicated, natural order is restored all over the island. In other words, bond's view of Athens is a partial one: he focuses on imperialism, aggression and enslavement. When Heros attacks Troy, he uses Trojans as mine slaves to work in the silver mines for the betterment of the imperial power. In other words, "he builds a new Athens "from the "wealth culled out of silver mines and spoils of Troy" (2).

In part two of the play, the crippled introduced by Bond, functions as a 'counter poise to Heros' (12) who gains victory over the powerfully imperialist. This is the climax of the play. In the first glimpse, Heros seems to be the hero of the play, but at the end we see how a male force is killed and doomed to death by Hecuba. Thus, Hecuba is the real heroin of the play to whom misogynist attitudes were held by the male dominant society. Hecuba and Isemene aimed to stop war, for the only consequence of war, for women and children, is rape and raze.

In 1960s and early 1970s, Bond liked violence and aggression in his prefatory analysis of capitalism and its consequences. Bond believes that being born into a western society is a very uncomfortable thing. He asserts in an interview "the thing you see is that, our society is not geared towards protecting, preserving, and enjoying life. The moment anything is born it must be put into society; it must be codified, it must be taught, it must be trained, it must be disciplined" (10). All these rules are deconstructive. When a person is born, we put him in the chain of these rules to fit into our society. He maintains that human beings try to be the most successful of all species, but they are dying out. If we disappear, the other species can freely

flourish and nourish. As a result, our way of living is destructive to other creatures and other human beings. Violence and aggression in human societies are absolutely mad. These violence and aggression are direct fruit of imperialism. When a country expands its power and system of rules and values on another nation, we can easily realize that this imposition is unjust. Colonialism does not have any adventure to offer.

2. CONCLUSION

In Bond's play, it is crystal clear that women oppose war, whereas in other works by other writers women are either marginalized or represented as a woman concerned with her domestic duties or physically too weak or morally too pure to participate in war issues. By writing an old myth, Bond aims to depict the real society. We can read his work as a critique of the society of his time. We can easily read his anti-imperialist and anti-misogynist notions in his work. Chinua Achebe's story "Girls at War" has the same representation of women. Women are considered as a vulnerable but impregnable race. It has always been asked, "How long will men make war? As long as women have children" (ibid. 10).

Although in some literary works women have no voice in igniting the war (such as Iliad), in Trojan War a woman is to be blamed for causing the war. So, these historical fictions are the genre through which women have their place in history. But men have had a misogynist attitude towards women for knowing them responsible for causing war. Hence women have been called Fame Fatal like Helen being the one who ignited the Trojan War. But by rewriting myth, Bond reveals the fact that the desire to colonize and capture a country has been deeply rooted in men and women are not responsible for it. They are pacifists who believe that war has no good end.

Bond says: "like most people, I am a pessimist by experience, but an optimist by nature, and I have no doubt that I shall go on being true to my nature. Experience is depressing, and it will be a mistake to be willing to learn from it" (qtd. in Plays and Players). The Woman is a tragedy by nature or a comedy of our Life. But there is a glimpse of hope at the end. The oppressor is oppressed and doomed to death by a woman and a crippled. As a result, Bond is hopeful that the colonizer will no longer accept the brutal treatment of the imperialist and by resistance and acting back to the center; they will defend their right and struggle for equal rights. Correspondingly, Hecuba observed the growth of Heros's mania for power and planned his eradication.

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