Chapter 7

Conclusion

Great drama has its politics and rhetoric just as great politics has its high drama and intense rhetoric. The mammoth demonstration of negroes and whites which Martin Luther King Jr., the Gandhian leader of American Civil Rights Movement, led down Lincoln Memorial in Washington on 28 August 1963 implicitly admits as much as that. As King’s ‘public address’, as Leith and Myerson would have called it, was intended to “dramatize a shameful condition” (King 47), it is politics and drama all the way with the attributes of positive rhetoric. He was, in effect, enacting the plight of two Bondian characters—Paul, the negro, and Fred, his friendly whiteman. As different from the actual drama and rhetoric of real life, the rhetoric of dramatic fiction is often called upon to answer questions of literary theory.

The extreme formal objectivity of Saussurean structuralism, Barthean semiotics and Derridean deconstruction have placed a major hurdle before the semantic tracing of literary (dramatic) texts as they depose the author (playwright) from the context of textual interpretation. Since Barthes pronounced the death of the author-god, the reader is celebrated as the sole enunciator of meaning. Authorial intentions are treated as entirely irrelevant and extra-textual from the readerly / viewerly point of view. Another aspect of this problem is the endless, almost anarchical, plurality of meanings read into a text. As meanings continuously
‘differ’ and are ‘deferred’, interpretation is made possible *ad infinitum*. Though, following Barthes and Derrida, interpreter after interpreter claims freedom for “unlimited semiosis” and asserts “the instability of all meaning in writing”, there are textual elements which do not allow the reader “interminable” freedom of interpretation. As unbounded semantic freedom leads to “overinterpretation” (Collini 8), it privileges the reader over the author. True interpretation is to be sought in a semiotic dialogue between the ‘authored text’ and the reader as Bakhtin maintains. Bakhtin’s concepts of dialogism and sociality of utterance are fortified by the views of Umberto Eco who recognizes the author’s capacity for semiotic organization as a controlling factor. The authorial voice prevails upon the plurality of semantic suggestions to save the texts from interpretational anarchy.

Within the text of a play a character’s speech is an illocutionary act because, as William Downes says, he “performs an utterance”. “Such illocutionary acts”, he explains, “are of the class of intentional human actions, performed as a means of attaining a goal and therefore having reasons which explain or rationalize them” (226). Extending this observation to the context of drama, it may be noted that a play, as an organization of disparate visual and verbal signs, is an illocutionary act, a formulation of the author’s motivated vocabulary. The detection of these intentions is not an extra-textual concern for the reader or viewer, but rather a textual prerogative to be recognized and enjoyed in the theatrical context. Thus, the plays of Bond do not evoke “instability”, but plurality and multiplicity, of meaning. Interpretation ceases to be interminable; instead, it becomes controlled and context-bound in Bond’s theatre.

As a playwright, Bond is not a dead author. He allows his intentions to permeate the whole organization of his texts. They are not univalent projections
of his personality, but motivated articulations of socio-psychic processes. Their polyphonic voices rustle semantic multiplicities which issue from the context of their social being. As the self-conscious voice of rational political involvement, Wang in *The Bundle* represents Bond’s idea of revolutionary social activism. Similarly, the Dark Man in *The Woman*, defines Bond’s broodings over a political alternative to capitalism. In the selection of the themes, genres, modes, characters, scenes, incidents, episodes, visuals and verballs, Bond’s implicit presence is quite palpable. His word / sign — the dramatic discourse — muses over the semantic chaos of polyphonous and polyvalent utterances, exerting a sort of authorial control. Intimating the complex ideological processes in society, he targets human empowerment for social transformation. He does not let the anarchy of meanings resulting from “overinterpretation” orphan the signs.9 Instead, his ‘authority’ directs the spectators to engage themselves in a dialogue with the dramatized reality. His great plays are, indeed, great social dialogues. Prodding and provoking the spectators, he targets their self-critical involvement in social revolution. To reconstruct the world anew, he rewrites the classics (*Lear* and *The Woman*), subverts history (*Early Morning*), demythologizes biography (*Bingo* and *The Fool*), demystifies adored icons (*Black Mass*) and devalues consistently the hallowed ideas of social morality and religion. His signs have designs in them.10 They are informed of authorial intentions as deliberate rhetorization ideologically deneutralizes them. Combative and liberative, they actively school his spectators into a new culture as Lear and Hecuba are schooled into new social awareness. A critique of society, Bond’s signs constitute the new rhetoric for conveying the messages of a counter ideology, culture and social structure.
When rhetoric assumes centre stage, the motive of the author/playwright is a criterion for validating its social usefulness. Drawing a line of distinction, Bond considers the negative use of rhetoric a crime. Just as rhetoric is inherent in Martin Luther King's political practice, it is inherent in Bond's dramatic practice too. Exploring diverse rhetorical possibilities, he dramatizes social analysis and creates an awareness of changing social reality. Meanings always change because they are always social and democratic. Bond dramatizes social change and, therefore, the meanings they transact are bound to change with changing contexts. As Birch says, "The process of changing meanings continues from writing to writing; reading to reading; analysis to analysis; rehearsal to rehearsal; production to production; reception to reception" (13).

As every form of discourse is an interpersonal mediation, Bond's plays inevitably raise questions of ideology and rhetoric. Thanks to the neo-Marxist thinkers like Gramsci, Althusser, Williams, Eagleton and a host of others, the whole gamut of ideology—the interrelationship of ideology, politics, language, literature and other discursive practices—is being thoroughly explored. As established by Bakhtin, the semiotic fusion of ideology and rhetoric is inseparable as they manifest only through signs. The influences of Gramsci and Althusser are evident in Bond. Like Gramsci, he considers that through self-criticism, an individual may escape from oppressive capitalist ideology into the freedom of socialist ideology. Althusser's ideas of the interpellative address of ideology on the subject-individual and its collusion with the oppressive state machinery finds dramatic illustration in Bond's plays.

He intervenes in the ideological processes of capitalism with his counter ideology founded on dialectical and historical materialism. A cultural materialist,
Bond views life as relentlessly evolving through defaults towards greater and greater moral consciousness, the ultimate form of which is conceived as socialist moral self-consciousness. Besides clarifying his own position in prefaces, notes and interviews, Bond dramatizes his views to help conceptualize the ideological processes at the individual and social levels. Plays like *Lear*, *The Woman*, *The Bundle* and *The Stone* illustrate with special emphasis the processes of ideological subjugation and liberation. He takes on the problems of democracy, capitalism, religion, morality, culture, art, literature, drama, science, technology, war, violence, evolution, rational optimism, socialism, social revolution and socialist moral consciousness with an unprecedented earnestness.

Bond considers it his moral duty to join cause with the intellectually and emotionally enslaved sections—the voiceless and the futureless—of society. Through the upward valorization of proletarian ideology Bond strives for dominance over the reigning ideology of capitalism. As the toiling masses are the real heirs of all human wealth and culture, Bond is always concerned with their reality. He grapples with it in all dramatic genres and modes. Whether in terms of tragedy, comedy, fantasy, farce, parody or allegory, reality stalks the centre stage of his plays. He does not allow himself the luxury of vagueness and abstraction. He exhumes the rotting carcasses hidden behind the facades of modern industrial progress and prosperity. *The War Plays* are his prophetic warnings about the possible nuclear annihilation of human civilization, the inevitable consequence of pursuing the path of selfish and competitive capitalism. Bond suggests that, if the present course of reality, dominated by capitalism, is not altered, nuclear disaster may erase history. In fact he writes the dramatic history of our future with the fervour of a great pacifist and shares the greatest anxiety of modern times—the
anxiety of nuclear holocaust—with the spectators. Only with a socialist self-consciousness—the readiness to share equitably the products of collective human labour—the dawn of true freedom is possible.

Therefore, Bond does insist upon razing down all walls of individual ego and social ignorance that limit freedom, the chief glory of mankind. His loathing of "the US McCarthyism" and "the Soviet Zhdanovschina" (Elsom 8-10) as well as of the Berlin Wall is evident from Lear. He triumphantly struggles against the rampant pessimism of the Cold War which saw the progressive attenuation of social utterance in the works of Absurdists like Beckett. Brecht, who considered Waiting for Godot "to be the last word in social pessimism, an illustration of the state of despair to which capitalism reduces mankind" (Elsom 49), did not write a reply to it. But along Brechtian lines Bond has rebutted Beckettian pessimism by dramatizing social optimism through the rational negation of social stasis. From this point of view, Basho, the poet-philosopher of Narrow Road to Deep North and The Bundle, with his claim of social distinction and craftsmanship is a fascist criminal. Not only does he refuse to adopt abandoned children, but also selfishly seeks personal enlightenment. He aligns himself with Buddha as of socialist moral self-awareness. A condition where one is for all and all is for one is the ultimate goal of socialism. From the conflict-ridden realistic world of Len and Scopey through Wang's and the Dark Man's efforts at revolutionary social transformation, Bond moves on to the prophetic world of Great Peace where, invoking the spirit of the Phoenix, the survivors of nuclear ravages reconstruct their society and reinforce it with mutual love and responsibility. As Richard Scharine says, Bond believes in "the Family of Man, and that makes the crimes men commit against one another fratricide—no matter
what "ism" is offered as justification." Bond proves himself equal to the dramatic transcreation of his ideological convictions. As he runs the risk of getting caught on the wrong foot, he seeks strategic novelty, remoteness and indirection so that he does not appear inane and self-imitative.

An aspect of Bond's introspective criticism is found in his discussion of the artist's (his own) role in society. He problematizes the social commitment of the artist bringing out its political and moral implications. With the clear conceptual support of dialectical materialism, he probes the inherent element of commitment in writing. A writer, whether he is aware of it or not, is naturally very much political and, his imagination, which endows him with distinction, is also political.

Though all writing is socially determined, Bond recognizes that the artistic manifestation of ideas is not metaphysically uniform or simple, but dialectically pluriform and complex. The choice of social commitment is a measure of the artist's moral standard. From this point of view, Basho, the poet-philosopher of Narrow Road to Deep North and The Bundle, with his claims of social distinction and craftsmanship is a fascist criminal. Not only does he refuse to adopt abandoned children, but also selfishly seeks personal enlightenment. He aligns himself with colonial and feudal powers of exploitation. Basho does not realize that writing is not a politically neutral activity and, eventually, he ignores the socio-economic fundamentals and daubs his reaction in pseudo-philosophic self-mystifications. Quite suggestively, he is shown as still crying, "Where is the way...the way...the way...?" (The Bundle 78).

Commitment at the artistic and social levels is an existential imperative in Bond's plays. He considers it the moral obligation of every writer and reader.
(spectator) to choose consciously the course of his life. His great poets and politicians are in this respect existential rebels who choose the course of their struggle for freedom. Shakespeare’s suicide, seen from this angle, is not a meaningless expression of a dramatist’s depraved fancy, but a sign of revolt against the constrictions of Elizabethan capitalism. In the absence of clear political self-awareness, John Clare (The Fool), suffers as he does not realistically discern the dynamic forces behind social transformation and the role of his own class in that process. However, his madness is another form of revolt against the impingements that nineteenth-century makes upon his sensibilities. The absence of critical and self-critical analysis of social situations makes ‘craftsmen’ like Basho sinful approvers of the status quo.

Bond does not confine the idea of commitment to literature alone. The ethical choice of socially committed activism is a task that he assigns to his major characters. At some crucial stage of their social schooling, his political characters are compelled to take decisive turns to carry on the struggle that they have been pursuing. The doddering Lear’s struggle up the Wall to demolish it is an existential decision to erase the past in order to make a new beginning. Wang’s decision to throw the baby into the river is a sign of his choice of revolutionary activism, breaking himself free from the ideological compulsions of sentimental charity. In The Woman the Dark Man has waited on the fringes for years to avail himself of the opportunity to eliminate his class enemy. The murder of the Monster by the Son in Red Black Ignorant and the fratricidal infanticide in Great Peace are supreme exemplifications of the moral choice that Bond expects from humanity.

Bond strives to rhetorize his views and ideas by building up dramatic tension. He does it by challenging, modifying and violating the logic of familiar
forms of utterance. Tension, as John O’Toole defines it, is “the gap between people and the fulfillment of their internal purposes, a gap created by deliberately imposing constraints in order to create an emotional disturbance (the tension itself) in the participants”[13]. The “emotional disturbance” issuing forth from tension gives it an aesthetic dimension and intellectual elevation. The unsettling of the spectators’ emotionalized convictions triggers their deschooling and initiation into a new set of values and outlooks — a new ideological awareness. The spectators are empowered with a new knowledge of the processes of revolutionary transformation of social relations, the ultimate goal of Bondian rhetoric.

In drama, tension, springing from various sources, reveals itself in diverse ways depending on the “drama praxis” (Birch 6) of playwrights. The creation of tension at various levels is a Bondian strategy to rhetorize ideas. Importantly, he is not interested in the dramatic narration of story, but in the analysis of social processes. Analysis involves, naturally, comparison. The shocking brilliance of dramatic tension helps Bond compare the agents of social dynamism clearly. The conflict between the facts of real life and the fictions of stage action is at the base of all dramatic tensions. A politically self-conscious playwright, Bond gives representative class character to his fictional re-creations of the real. In Pope’s Wedding the rural characters and in Saved the urban lower middle-class youth struggle with an enemy whom they do not fully comprehend or identify. In later plays like Bingo, The Bundle, The Sea, The World and The Woman class divisions are brought into sharper contrast.

The nature of tension that drama generates in the audience is a measure of its rhetorical impact. In this respect Bond has not many superiors and only a few peers. He achieves it in diverse ways. One of Bond’s devices for evoking
emotional tension and intellectual response in his spectators is through visual and verbal metaphors which are, generally, informed of the violence built into our social systems and structures. The various scenes of child murder as in Saved, Narrow Road to Deep North, The Bundle, Great Peace and Jackets, the cannibalism of Early Morning, the autopsy of Fontanelle in Lear, the physical combat of Scopey with his friends in Pope's Wedding, the prize-fight between the Negro and the Irish man in The Fool and the physical deformity of the Dark Man in The Woman are a few of the numerous scenes in Bond's plays where visual demonstration of violence is called upon to perform metaphorical functions.

Of these the spectacle of the Siamese twins in Early Morning deserves special mention as it powerfully evokes the physical and moral tension in our divided society.

Bond creates tension in the spectators by violently contradicting their expectations at every turn. The stoning of the baby in Saved, Shakespeare's inaction at the scaffolding of the girl, the blinding of Lear by his daughters, Wang's throwing of the child into the river, the robbing and pinching of the Parson in The Fool, Christ's poisoning the communion wine in Black Mass, the shooting of Fred, the whiteman, in The Swing and the reverse strip tease of seven deadly veils by the Girl in Stone are a few examples where the unexpected rhetoricizes new social and moral meanings. These dramatic actions, fictional as they are, emphasize the cruel tragedy of social life when compared with real life situations. The two specific instances in The War Plays where Bond, quite characteristically, draws our attention to the moral tragedy of war deserve special mention. In Red Black Ignorant the soldier Son kills his father when he was ordered to shoot a
stranger. Similarly, asked to kill a young child in his street, the Son in *Great Peace* strangles his own young brother instead of a neighbour’s kid. In both instances the strange, but new and morally sound, logic of the characters for their action brings to the fore the moral conflicts in our social life.

As, at bottom, Bond is a poet, metaphorical expression is quite natural to him. His dramatic language is highly poetic, a fact which may have prompted Jenny S. Spencer to consider his plays to be “experiments in poetic materialism”.14 Bond is dissatisfied with the inadequacy of ordinary language to carry out the functions of interpretation. He writes: “The way of telling a story, and the normative use of language, no longer contains an implicit interpretation” (*The Bundle* xv). Therefore, in his search for a new theatrical idiom he rends the norms of common logic and seeks the illogicality of unorthodox visual and verbal metaphors to facilitate analysis and interpretation. Through verbal and visual metaphors Bond rhetorizes violence — revealing their social sources and symptoms. As metaphors, congenitally, break the grammar of ordinary language of communication, the inherent semantic violation leads the reader / spectator to a new and different perception. In Bondian theatre, all visual and verbal metaphors, remarkable for their unusualness and violence, are semiotized to orient themselves towards new significations. Never seeking any vicarious pleasure, Bond uses the scenes of violence like infanticide, cannibalism, mutilation, madness, etc. for rhetorizing institutionalized social cruelty. With its high premium on profit and personal aggrandizement, greedy and competitive capitalism spreads spiritual pollution. Bond confronts the issue with great alacrity as he identifies the roots of violence in the social structure. Bond’s visual images have such a tabloid quality about them that they get imprinted on the spectators’ mind like picture-frames. That
Bond wanted them to be viewed like great masterpieces of art is evident from his
description of some of them. The verbal images are used with such poetic insight
that not only do they communicate graphically the violence in social life, but also
interact with the visual images and enrich the total dramatic effect.

Bond’s employment of violence as a self-demonstrative analytical and
rhetorical device was so unusual that his early critics could not appreciate its
uniqueness. This is explicitly admitted by Irving Wardle when he states that at
first he had found Saved culpable of ‘systematic degradation of the human
animal’.... “ But, since then, Wardle has revised his position: “I knew nothing
about its South London, working-class sources; but this kind of thing did not
happen down my street, so I surrendered to middle-class outrage as though it
entitled me to lay down the moral line.”(45) That Bond’s play prompted a hard-
line critic into self-critical correction is sufficient proof of Bond’s rhetorical success.

Emotionalization of themes and issues is one of the ways for a writer
(dramatist) to achieve rhetorical success, “a claim on our feelings” (Walter Nash
31). To achieve formal aestheticization he strives to produce pity or fear, sorrow
or wonder, and, eventually, to move or persuade the spectator to see through his
eyes. Marking a difference, through the gruesome novelty of visual and verbal
metaphors of violence, Bond shocks the spectators into a fearful abhorrence of
social injustice and creates in them a new intellectual awareness about the need
for revolutionary reconstruction. As Walter Nash further writes, “Great images
move us, it appears, but only in correlation with great themes, with matters of
empathetic concern” (31). And he notes that one such abiding theme is death
which is dealt with by most writers in order to assert the triumph of life over the
former. Bond, true to this great tradition, produces a great rhetoric of life in his
plays through "empathetic matter" (50). He always deals with themes of social conflict, war and violence which threaten revolutionary progress of life towards socialist moral responsibility. His preoccupation with violence on children reflects his great concern for the happy continuation of human life. In fact, Bond’s bundle image is one of the greatest visual metaphors of modern dramatic utterance. In The Bundle the child, the bundle, is a cumbersome hindrance to social revolution and, therefore, disposed of into the depths of the river. But in Great Peace the bundle image receives metaphoric extension, an assertion of the indestructibility of human life to the optimistic mind. The scenes where the Woman behaves with the bundle of rags as if it were her own dear child emphatically move us and persuade us to question the whole morality of war and violence.

The Unflinching from his basic concern which is the negotiation of the real, often Bond adopts various stances. On the process of destabilizing the present, he uses the power charges of fantasy, farce, parody and allegory. In his major plays like Early Morning, Lear, The Woman, The Swing, Grandma Faust, Stone, Black Mass, Passion, The War Plays and Two Post Modern Plays Bond rhetorically mixes them. He creates a formal internal tension which draws attention to itself by their stand off from the real. The variations to the conventions of these modes help Bond confront the real from oblique angles of approach and analysis. He generates plurality of meanings through the pluriformity of articulation. He adopts deviant stances and diverse vocabularies of distraction in order to persuade: "Persuasion includes distraction. To persuade distract" (Nash 99). The attitude of the playwright is a mask, a stratagem, a trap for the spectator which necessitates interpretation:
In the final analysis, Bond's contribution to modern drama will lie in his development of a didactic theatre along Brechtian lines, in the creation of a materialist poetics that addresses the most significant political issues of his time. Rhetoric only begins to come into its own when the "truths" it invokes are complex and conditional and require interpretation: in short, when there is a case to be made. (98)

Not interested in futile experimentation, Bond turns to the basic questions of social reality again and again. Each time he returns to it with answers and accuracy of enunciation. As rhetorical devices, his dramatic modes are tangential. With their help he orbits off to crashland vertically on reality. Bond uses the "parabolic trajectory" of rhetorical deviations to revolutionize the process of social structuration. The most important aspect of Bondian rhetoric is that it does not conform to any fixed pattern. Exploratively, he invents new channels of public address. Fully seized of the complexity of social relations, the intricate ways of social manipulation of individual psyche, he never lets oversimplification degenerate his art. As he says in the introduction to The Bundle, he dramatizes processes: "The dramatist can help create a new theatre by the way he writes. He should not dramatize the story but the analysis" (xviii). His interest is not in the creation of characters that A.C. Bradley would have welcomed. Instead, demonstratively, he presents man as a product and producer of his circumstances—socio-psychic and socio-political forces—and as moving through errors and failures to successful achievement. Critical as well as analytical, Bond, innovatively, incorporates Brechtian epic theatre techniques to dramatize analysis. Jenny S. Spencer writes:
In the final analysis, Bond’s contribution to modern drama will lie in his development of a dialectical theatre along Brechtian lines, in the creation of a materialist poetic that addresses the most significant political issues of his time. (4)

He displays great technical virtuosity and versatility in the dramatic mediation of reality.

Bond’s rhetorical strategies can not be underestimated as mere dramatic techniques in the usual sense of the term. They are part of a comprehensive social dialectics and are ideological intercessions in the processes of social reality. They are radically different, rationally awake and politically active. Like Plato’s, Bond’s own “objections to rhetoric” are “not stylistic, but moral” (Nash 99). Never agit-prop didactic paraphrases of political theses, his plays have great moral significance which buoys them up as great achievements of modern English political theatre. He creates dramatic situations which excavate the sub-surface forces active behind the formation of structures in individual and social psyche. Over and above all these, dramatizing social transition — human moral evolution and social revolution — Bond dialectically rhetorizes the indomitable human spirit that declares from the centre of encircling gloom: “We shall overcome”.


NOTES


2 Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream", *Profiles in Greatness* (Kottayam: Mahatma Gandhi Univ., 1994) 47. In his impassioned and inspiring "I Have a Dream" address, King spoke: "Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation...."

One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself exile in his own land. So we have come here today to dramatize a shameful condition." (emphasis added)

3 See the chapter "The Rhetorical Modes: Fantasy, Farce, Parody and Allegory" where the farcical aspects of Bond’s play *The Swing* are discussed.


I realize that, in this dialectics between the intention of the reader and the intention of the text, the intention of the empirical author has been totally disregarded”. Umberto Eco, “Overinterpreting Texts”, Interpretation and overinterpretation, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992) 65.


Umberto Eco’s novel The Name of a Rose (London: Picador, 1983) metaphorizes the detective process of readerly investigations.


Edward Bond, Theatre Poems and Songs, ed. Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978) 3: In scene one Lear suffers the Great Vice

Fear

And so commits The Three Great Crimes

Cruelty arrogance and rhetoric.


15 See the chapter “Rhetoric of Violence: Visual and Verbal images”.


18 See note number 11.