Chapter IV

Textualizing Histories

An analysis of Bond’s plays in the context of the theories of postmodern historiography gives new insights into the dramatization of history. Bond’s engagement with history problematizes the textual representation of his dramas especially in relation to the objectivity of historical narratives. Bond’s dramaturgy involves a synthesis of distinctive politics and aesthetics both in the writing and staging of his plays. His subjective review of the events of history through his dramatic imagination and innovative presentation leads to various ideological questions. He has a distinct perspective of the role of imagination in the construction of drama as an ideological superstructure. In Bond’s view, the creation of ideological superstructures is the result of “destructive imagination.” But “creative imagination” brings forward a rational culture of human values and its potential for growth. Bond’s theatre records the vicious impact of an irrational culture emerging as a result of the destructive imagination. He proposes a politics of humanness as a solution. But his theatre events and their manifestations exhort his audience the need for a rational culture based on creative imagination.

In the dramatization of history, art functions as a means to interpret the world, rather than as a medium that mirrors existing realities. For Bond, drama is a medium and an interpretant. In such a process, Bond’s plays engage with the problematic of textual politics in dramatic canons. He unravels the issues
of writing the dramatic texts as verbal constructs. His politics of re-visionist history and the aesthetic of its imaginative reconstruction are creatively synthesized in his plays. For this purpose, Bond adapts the devices of memory theatre as an alternative way to link the past to the present, constructing meaning for both the past and the present. Memory suffuses theatre as an artifact and as a manifestation of culture. With the presentation of events in the memory theatre, Bond redefines the conventional notions of culture by staging the problems in the existing cultures. The existence of an irrational culture causes problems to human imagination, especially in the creation of ideologies/identities.

Bond has explored the reconstructive strategies of postmodern literary historiography in the thematic execution of his plays. Bond’s theatre can be located precisely within the historicity of the present. As an exponent of rational theatre, he uses the relationship between the present and the past to construct abiding values in human life. Bond insists on the need of political consciousness for his audience to reconstruct the theatrical experience. His dramas are characterized by a sense of historicity which is manifest both as a recurrent theme and image. Besides the historical consciousness and imaginative creativity that punctuate his plays, there is a deliberate engagement with the fundamental question of human existence in an inhospitable world that has internalized violence, both personal and institutional.

Bond’s dramas are often classified as historical allegories; they are theatrical paradigms of major political events of Britain. In this way,
British history forms an important part to his dramas. A greater verisimilitude is given to the historical events through a series of techniques such as commentaries, songs that comment on the events and their relative significance in the lives of the characters represented in his plays. Reconstruction or rewriting of history has its deliberate objective, either implicit or explicit, of criticizing the contemporary concerns of the violent and unjust society. Bond has always explored the principle of postmodern historiography: constructing meanings of the past by connecting it to the present. For him past events are just temporal contexts to reflect on the present.

Bond exploits the similarity between fiction and history to reconstruct the past. Different forms of history are synthesized in his dramas as an attempt to revisualize the past: history as myth, as memory, as genealogy and as fiction. His plays are an amalgam of “histories.” Simon Trussler’s Edward Bond makes clear the employment of the historical roots of different societies in Bond’s dramas:

If Bond’s work can be said to have moved from its early concern with present–day forms of aggression to an exploration of the historical roots of a violent society in Early Morning and Narrow Road to the Deep North, with Lear the time-scale becomes universal, even mythic. (1976: 22)

Trussler means that Bond uses a different timescale in his treatment of history. This is especially significant when he exposes the violence endemic in society. The history of social evolution has a parallel in the history of social violence.
In this regard, history is variously manifested as memory, myth or story. However, Bond’s concern is to create scenes of historical relevance which have great pertinence for the constitution of the present society. Violence, real and imagined, punctuates history in the form of figures, events, myths and memories. Recorded or otherwise, it is part of social history.

Critics have classified his dramas into different genres. These genres include social plays, rewritten classics, political parables, historical allegories and utopian futuristic plays. Bond’s plays imaginatively and intellectually meddle with the reconstruction of historical and contemporary events. The events or objects selected for dramatization are transparent and concrete facts which serve as evidences for any historian in the process of documentation. Historian’s subjectivity is manifest in his imagination, selection of events and their ordering. Dramatist’s deviations from the actual references from any “histories” are attempts at deliberate ideological construction of experiences. This tendency creates new problems in Bond’s theatrical experience: the relation between representation and reality on the one hand, and human existence and violence on the other. Bond claims to have generated a class of plays which have a basis in “Rational Theatre.” According to Bond, human imagination fortified with rationality is the basis of all ideologies. The culture as it exists now is the result of the rational imagination of human beings. Bond has tried to portray a culture which is made of human imagination integrated with rationality; this makes possible humanitarian and peaceful living in the world. But, the failure of human imagination to integrate
reason leads to violence and injustice. Since violence is inherent in society as it is in nature, Bond’s theatre has internalized violence which is often objectified as a visual spectacle.

Critics since 1970’s have found Bond’s tendency for the employment of re-visionist history in his plays. Ruby Cohn’s “The Fabulous Theatre of Edward Bond” classifies Bond’s historical dramas into “invented or embellished history” (Bock and Wertheim, 1981: 190). In his plays, Bond uses various strategies of adaptation by appropriating elements from social history. These include modification, distortion, revision and invention. D. Keith Peacock, in Radical Stages: Alternative History in Modern British Drama, establishes the relevance of historical consciousness in his various plays:

… in Bingo, the beginnings of the enclosure movement which may be viewed as the commencement of the evolution of British society from feudalism to capitalism; in The Fool, the start, after 1815, of the Industrial Revolution; and in The Woman, the establishment in the aftermath of a war of an exploitive, materialistic and affluent state which is devoid of spiritual values. (1991: 141)

These similarities in the different phases of history are deliberately appropriated to confuse the theatre-goers on the verification of historical facts presented in the plays. Besides, such a process of historicization of events has had its political overtones. It is an oblique attempt for the establishment of a society based on order, justice and morality.
Bond’s play *Saved* has played a significant role in establishing his position as a prominent dramatist of the contemporary times. This is the last play which Lord Chamberlain successfully prosecuted with his powers of censorship. The protests made out of the crises for the release of the play made him famous among the contemporary British dramatists. Later, the powers of Lord Chamberlain were cancelled by Parliament which resulted in the propagation of Bond’s avant-garde revolutionary theatre. Christopher Innes, in his “The Political Spectrum of Edward Bond: From Rationalism to Rhapsody,” underlines the role of Edward Bond in producing the tangible political effect of “the abolition of censorship in the English theatre” (Brown, 1984: 148). Bond decided to show his protest through his plays for the wrongs done to him by the political administration of his nation.

Bond’s dramaturgy involves the distinctive politics and aesthetics in the writing and staging of his plays. His politics of revisionist history and the aesthetic of its imaginative reconstruction are synthesized in his plays. Through his dramas, Bond confronts the audience with several issues: the importance of historical consciousness, its constitutive role in identity formation, and the ethics of memory concerning what ought to be remembered for the present and the future. The problematic of writing the dramatic texts as verbal constructs has its impact on staging of the historical events. He reconstructs the historical events from a subjective perspective to convey his political ideas. So the process of reconstruction is at once subjective and political.
War as a perennial theme of literature has always fascinated Bond. It is interesting to note how Bond has reconstructed wars as historical events. Janelle Reinelt, in “Theorizing Utopia: Edward Bond's War Plays,” notices that Bond’s plays employ the technique of reflecting contemporary reality through subjective points of view of “histories” rather than through objective history:

The problematic use of the word "histories" and the insistence on conflating present and past suggest both the mimesis of contemporary reality and an apocalyptic retrospectivity, from the perspective of which “history” is already closed. (Case and Reinelt, 1991: 227)

Memory-plays imitate retrospective elements from the past in such a way that there is a conflation of the past and the present. Here memory is the stream of consciousness, real or imagined, continuous or interrupted, of a character.

Writing alternative histories is not a new trend in the practice of literary historiography. Both historians and men of letters rewrite histories to suit their ideological purposes. Peacock, in *Radical Stages: Alternative History in Modern British Drama*, points out that “one dramatist who, during the 1970s, set out consciously to develop a form of historical drama peculiarly suited to the political circumstances of contemporary Britain was Edward Bond” (1991: 139). In his plays, Bond employs many narrative strategies for the reconstruction of the past as a medium of radical politics. His representations of historical myths constitute a site for social change; they are deliberate attempts to temper civilization of people with effective political implications. Bond’s plays
sustain historical significance and they can be interpreted in the light of postmodern reflections on literary historiography.

As literature is an integral part of the cultural terrain, the contemporary practice of revisiting historical events brings forward new layers of meaning into our culture. Bond is a dramatist who has worked in this direction. Bond’s “Freedom and Drama” shows the relation between drama and reality:

Creativity enacts human reality because although drama uses fiction it activates the core self which is the foundation of our reality. Drama is not fiction – it works on the border between fiction and reality. In any serious understanding, drama is reality – not because it takes its subject from street reality but because it enacts the core self, which is the means by which we entered into reality. (2006: 209)

Bond’s dramas creatively activate the self of the artist/audience to enter into the realm of reality. He admits that drama uses fiction, but it is the stepping stone to human reality. In this perspective, Bond’s treatment of history is different from that of contemporary fiction writers. Drama exists in the interstices of fiction and reality. When fiction is substituted with story or history as per postmodern perspective, drama creates a site for itself from history and reality. The added dimension of reality problematizes the theatrical experience. As verbal constructs of historical events, drama may not differ considerably from fiction. But as a visual paradigm of historical events, drama tries to captivate the audience by impressing them with its apparent reality.
Bond’s visual presentation of the reconstructed past imaginatively brings forward elements in the form of events or characters. His plays illustrate how the meanings of the texts as well as the messages of the performances alter with the reconstructed alterity of the historical narratives. Bond creates a visual world of alternative reality by the reconstruction of the past through verbal and visual narratives of genealogical significance.

The label historical allegory is a very simplistic classification of his plays. His dramas have great political significance. They suggest alternative ways to subvert the power structures of the capitalistic society. This alternative reality has great potential for both logo-centric and grapho-centric mediation. This power of multiple mediation has added to the complexity of his plays. Peacock, in *Radical Stages: Alternative History in Modern British Drama*, highlights how Bond uses history to analyze a capitalistic society:

> By this point in his career, history had become both a major target and an important tool in Bond's analysis of the nature of capitalist society and in his attempt to outline an alternative way of living. His concern with history was primarily intellectual and was centred upon historical issues rather than events. (1991: 140)

His treatment of history, though imaginative, is essentially intellectual. Quite different from historians, Bond is earnestly preoccupied with a paradigm shift in his plays: from historical events to the politics of historical issues. His directions involve alternative ways of living with the eradication of oppression
and anarchy associated with capitalism and authoritarian power structures. In this context, Peacock explains:

His first history play, *Early Morning*, … represented an assault upon history, and in its emotionally charged tone, its surrealistic structure, its attack upon the icons of an authoritarian, Capitalist society and its yearning for freedom and change as represented in the character of Arthur, it could be seen to reflect the anarchistic impulses of its period. (1991: 140)

Bond has depicted the monumental human landmarks of Victorian England in *Early Morning*. Even though the characters portrayed in the play are both comical and farcical, the outward references to each of the characters are intelligible to the audience. With allegorical references to these characters in actual history, Bond progresses to depict a self-consuming society. In this context, Cordelia Oliver reports in *The Guardian*: “What you are seeing, he (Bond) is surely saying, is our own aggressive, abrasive, callous, cannibalistic society with its roots in repression and emotional starvation” (Roberts, 1986: 17). Bond portrays a society which culminates in absolute anarchy and cannibalism. His theatre challenges the audience to take responsibility for contemporary social situation and to find remedial alternatives.

Bond’s plays are of historical significance in which the past is often a paradigm of the present or future. Bond’s *Early Morning* (1968) is a reconstruction of historical figures such as Queen Victoria, Lloyd George, Florence Nightingale, Gladstone, William and Disraeli. The Queen is a serious
character who commands people and rules the nation. She is a political figure obsessed with madness and fanaticism. Albert is the representation of the virtue of goodness. Queen Victoria has been engaged in seducing Florence Nightingale. The play exposes Victorian morality and social injustice. Through an alternative version of history, Bond creates an alternative Heaven, where everyone turns into cannibal. David Ian Rabey, in *English Drama Since 1940*, connects *Early Morning*’s allusion of historical details to “Margaret Thatcher’s bid to remanifest ‘victorian values’ in 80s Britian” (2003: 80). Through *Early Morning*, Bond tries to imaginatively reconstruct the period history of Britain in order to review the injustices done to the people by the earlier administrators of the country. Bond’s aim is to show the mistakes the society is obsessed with and learn lessons from previously established facts for a radical change in the society.

Historical events, when revisited, provide a site for the radical and rational transformation of society. Bond makes a contrast between two characters: Arthur and George. They are shown to be Siamese twins in the play, but they have only one heart which is under the possession of Arthur, who is virtuous and omni-conscientious. It is through George, Bond depicts throughout the play “a world where ‘aggression has become moralized and morality has become a form of violence’…” (Roberts, 1985: 17). This is a version of Bond’s depiction of a heartless society with its aggressiveness and violence that can be justified with the morality of the age. However, when it is connected to the present, the approval and justification become irrelevant.
The Heaven-like-atmosphere in the play is an occasion for the game of ghosts in the play. In an interview with Karl-Heinz Stoll, Bond comments on the purpose of the incorporation of ghosts in his plays. Ghosts are representations of the past phenomenon, of past actions and lives:

And if you try and live in the past, then that becomes a very destructive thing. And the ghost does live in the past, and he does belong to a stage of society that I think one can't go back to. I don't believe in returning to the past. (1976: 420)

Bond earnestly decided to reject the propagation of a Victorian society which ideologically demoralized its own values. Dramatists often engage themselves in renewing the deteriorating human values of a living culture. The creation of counter-myths helps a lot to project the problems of a culture rooted in society. Attilio Favorini, in Memory in Play: From Aeschylus to Sam Shepard, comments on the creation of counter-myths in Bond’s Early Morning:

Rejection of the Victorian worldview was taken to radical extremes in Edward Bond’s Early Morning (1968) in which Queen Victoria has two sons who are Siamese twins, Florence Nightingale is Victoria’s lover, and Gladstone and Disraeli conspire against each other like a couple of thugs. This is once again dis(re)membering — a factual dismantling in the service of what Bond considers a higher “truth” about nineteenth-century capitalism. Bond’s tactic is to confront the
mythologizing of the past on its own ground by constructing countermyths….(2008: 72)

Bond’s portrayal of the nineteenth century capitalism involves high ideals about British culture. This is quite different from the common people’s beliefs on the workings of a capitalist society. In Marxist terms, the capitalistic working forces work in a culture absolutely based on an ideological superstructure. But the counter-myths Bond constructed help to perceive the working of a capitalist culture in terms other than the conventional dialectic between an economic base and an ideological superstructure.

Arthurs’s apotheosis, elevating him to the status of a saint, to that of a Christ, is an instance of the imaginative reconstruction of supernatural characters. The scene is set in heaven where every injustice is practised. The audience notices a mix of terrible plots, intrigues, wars and conflicts about sex, religion and morality. The assumed status of the supernatural existence is a device used by Bond to view the cruelties of the society and to comment on it from an objective perspective. Its objective vision is noteworthy and in tune with Bond’s remark in the text of the play before introducing the characters in it: “The events of this play are true.” In many interviews, Bond reveals the real incidents which prompted him to write plays based on them. But the nature and extent of distorted events depend on the imagination of the writer which, according to Bond, is required to relate them to reality. In this regard, Ronald Bryden noted in The Observer:

*Early Morning* extends the same image of Britain into a gargantuan Swiftian metaphor of universal consumption: a society
Victorian morality developed on a notion of absolute consumption of the lives of the fellow beings. Everyone turned to be the sole proprietor of his own exalted and dignified position in the world with selfish motives. The Other in the society was always marginalized and set apart to create a world of self-centredness. Bond has meticulously brought out a meditation similar to the cruelties of Hitler on the field of battle. Bond states in an interview:

I think *Early Morning* is essentially about working-class life. I mean, the plays that I am told are based on social realism very often seem to me the wildest fairy stories, and setting them against an immediately recognizable background doesn’t make them any truer. So what I wanted to do in *Early Morning* was to take away all the known landmarks that might have led to false assumptions. (Roberts, 1985: 19)

Bond thinks that recognizable background and known landmarks may create preconceived notions on the play. The practice of defamiliarizing the background or making the landmarks anonymous is part of a distancing technique by which the audience is provoked to reflect on and associate with the known facts of history. As Bond is a product of the working class culture, he knows only too well the immoral and unjust means of livelihood and existence in the society. But, Bond tries to distance himself from the Marxist
perspective since he thinks that the communist nations are also aggressive, totalitarian and fanatic.

There is an unmistakable Marxist influence on Bond’s plays, especially his early dramas. David Edgar, in “Unsteady States: Theories of Contemporary New Writing,” clearly locates the preoccupation of a working class background in the works of the first wave dramatists:

The great subject of the first wave, from Osborne, Arden and Wesker to the early Bond, was the consequences for the culture of the economic and political empowerment of the working class in the years after the foundation of the welfare state. (2005: 297)

The foundation of a welfare state had its influence instilled on the working class people. Bond is one among those dramatists who stood for the causes of their empowerment. C. W. E. Bigsby, in “The Politics of Anxiety: Contemporary Socialist Theatre in England,” highlights the changes in the governance with the emergence of the working class people in England:

[A]fter a period in the early 1970s, when working class solidarity seemed to have the power to exercise real authority over national policies and even to precipitate the collapse of a government, there followed first a socialist government forced to compromise on its central principles, and then the most reactionary government in recent British history. (Brown, 1984: 167 – 68).

Bond clearly notices a society which stands on its ideological apparatuses. The world he knows is quite different from its economic base; so he
deliberately wants to depict socialist realism in his plays. But, he is different from other dramatists of his age in that he lets the audience determine what is actual, rational and socially acceptable to human beings, both in performance and in actual life. This means that Bond has never accepted Marxism uncritically in his plays. His plays are in fact a critique of the working class culture. Though Bond endorses the empowerment of the working class, he disapproves of the fanaticism, authoritarianism and irrationality of working class culture. This is the inevitable tension in his early plays.

This tension is evident especially in the portrayal of female characters in Bond’s plays. According to Peacock, there is a central shift in the characterization of women characters in Bond’s plays. They are depicted as more authoritative and more powerful than the men represented in the plays. Still, there lies the difference between rational rulers and irrational administrators. In this regard, Peacock explains:

*Early Morning* and *The Woman*, centred his attention upon aristocratic women. Although in *Early Morning* Queen Victoria is lampooned both as a ruler and as a woman, over a decade later in the allegorical world of *The Woman*, Hecuba and Ismene are portrayed as being superior to the play's male characters in that they possess the ability to think and to act rationally. It is they who prepare the ground for a new, more equitable society. (1991: 153)

However, through the portrayal of women characters, Bond underlines the necessity for a rational and just approach from the administrators of a nation.
Bond thinks that women are better rulers as they are endowed with greater rationality and an equitable view of society.

The play, *The Woman* (1978), is a manifestation of Bond’s symbolic version of history through Trojan War. He has adapted the play from the Greek classic of Euripides’s *The Trojan Woman* or *Hecuba*. Each of the significant characters in the Greek play has been reimaged and reenacted by Bond to suit his political purposes. The reconstructed locations include the city of Troy and the Greek camp outside Troy. The original, Euripides’s Greek play, depicted Helen as the prize for the Athenians. But Bond has made a deliberate appropriation here. Instead of capturing Helen, the whole attention is reconstructed on taking back a stone image of the goddess Fortune, which was once a property owned by the Athenians. Bond has shifted the dramatic focus from Helen to the retrieval of the stone image of Fortune.

In the play *The Woman* Bond reconstructs the Homeric myth by shifting the dramatic interest from the beautiful Helen to the uninspiring statue of Fortune. Peacock, in *Radical Stages: Alternative History in Modern British Drama*, emphasizes how Bond reworks a Homeric myth to construct and appropriate a play like *The Woman*:

In the first part of the play Bond reworks the Homeric myth of the Trojan Wars to portray a society that is locked into myth, not out of religious belief but as a means of perpetuating its political and economic structure. The myth is centred upon the aesthetically uninspiring statue of the Goddess of Good Fortune
which Bond portrays, instead of Helen, as the prize stolen from the Greeks by the Trojans which has provoked the long-drawn-out Trojan war. (1991: 149)

Bond achieves his political objective by a shift in the aesthetic of rationality of the characters and in the sensibility of the audience. The myth of the Trojan war helps to background the play in the minds of Bond’s audience in order to locate its contemporary significance. Heros, the Athenian commander, and his wife, Ismene, engage in a discussion with Hecuba on the issue of recovering the stone image. But their discussions only lead to a war in the battlefield. This can be seen as the struggle for the possession of power within two imperialist countries, Athens and Troy. Bond, in an interview with Salvatore Maiorana, comments on the relation between the story and the history in *The Woman*:

I’m telling a story about history. Now, the first act is a moment in history and the second half is a story about history – ‘step further away and look at all history, see if you can discern patterns in history’ – and that makes a demand on an audience, but I think that’s a good demand …. What happens in the second half is that figures represent various forces in history and what they have to do in the second half is defeat the Greek general. (Roberts, 1985: 41)

What Bond does in *The Woman* is a metaphorical representation of the different stages in the evolution of a society through the dialectic of class struggles. In Bond’s view history, story and myth are all synonymous and they are all merged in the dramatic text.
In a Marxist perspective, history is a grand narrative with a teleology leading to communism, where there is a classless society. Each society advances one after another with robust determination for change. Bond’s portrayal of a Greek society has been modelled for the changes required in the contemporary political context of the state. Michel Patterson’s “Edward Bond: Maker of Myths” establishes that *The Woman* is specifically preoccupied with the “problem of culture, with the problem of the past which makes change so difficult” (Luckhurst, 2006: 416). But the actions of Hecuba lead to her own failure at the end of the play. Bond tries to manifest the culture of a peaceful and reasonable conduct of war for the possession of power. In Bond’s scheme, imagination and reason find a place even in violence committed for power.

Bond tries to assign different cultural/political roles to his characters who function as the different forces of history. The escaped miner is a representative of the advanced form of proletariat. Hecuba, who handles power, has been shown as the representative of a rational culture. Heros remains to be the representative of the irrational culture. Bond, in an interview, makes clear the different opposing forces he has enacted on the stage:

So I showed the two forms of proletariat on the stage – the primitive farming, fishing form, and the advanced industrialized form, and there’s Hecuba, who I take to represent history and she is able to understand what’s going on. Heros doesn’t understand what’s going on. He’s totally irrational, but Hecuba understands…. And if I say that history is the battle between the
rational and the irrational, well, then, Hecuba stands for the rational and the combination of the rational and the proletariat triumphs. In the play necessarily they’re divided into two characters, but when we talk about movements in history we’re not talking about characters, we’re talking about masses. (Roberts, 1985: 41)

Bond succeeds in showing the destruction of a rational culture with the failure of Hecuba. Here the struggle is between those who stand for the rational culture and the representatives of an irrational culture. The irrational culture very often succeeds over the rational culture. This is because the irrational culture is always supported by the authoritarian administrative power.

In recent theatre studies, memory suffuses theatre as an artifact and a manifestation of culture. Dramatists take issue with the representation and dramatization of memory and history as binary opposites. A few playwrights view history and memory as alternative ways of describing the relationship of past to the present. But a few others arrive at a position in which memory and history are regarded as interplay rather than opposition, and both positions also find expression in dramatic form. In Bond’s theatre, memory and history are alternative ways of linking the past to the present, constructing meaning of the present. There is always an interplay or interfusion of the two in his dramas.

Bond’s *The Fool* (1976) is a manifestation of the beginning of Industrial Revolution after 1815 where John Clare appears as a poet. This is an examination of the life of the peasant poet, John Clare. Bond depicts a stormy indictment of the society. It narrates the rural world of the poet, John Clare who
was a farm labourer. The depiction of the peasant-poet, John Clare demands peculiar needs suitable to comment on the impact of the capitalistic forces in the society. Alan D. Vardy, in *John Clare, Politics and Poetry*, emphasizes the relevance of understanding Clare’s social context for the interpretation of his poetry and politics:

Clare lived and worked inside the social upheavals of the 1820s and 1830s, and only through a thorough understanding of this specific context can a record of his agency (his acts of resistance, capitulations, compromises and contradictions) emerge. Historicist approaches to Clare’s life and poetry have done much to establish the social context in which Clare lived and wrote. (2003: 2)

It is clear here that the social context of the writer has made a great impact on the thought processes of his works.

John Clare (13 July 1793 – 20 May 1864) was an English poet, born as the son of a farm labourer. He is very often considered the greatest labour-class poet that England has ever produced. Clare was born in Helpstone which, at the time of his birth, was in the Soke of Peterborough, Northamptonshire. He became an agricultural labourer. In his early adult years, Clare became a pot-boy in the Blue Bell public house and fell in love with Mary Joyce; but her father, a prosperous farmer, forbade her to meet him. Later, John Clare married Patty Turner in 1820. On account of his dissatisfaction with the atrocities and injustices in the society, Clare's mental health began to worsen. As his alcohol consumption steadily increased along with his identity crisis, Clare's behaviour
became more erratic. He became a burden to Patty and his family, and in July 1837, on the recommendation of his publishing friend, John Taylor, Clare went of his own volition to Dr Matthew Allen's High Beach Private Asylum near Loughton, in Epping Forest. Taylor had assured Clare that he would receive the best medical care.

Peacock, in Radical Stages: Alternative History in Modern British Drama, enumerates the problems of a consumerist society for abandoning the poet when he ceased to please his society:

All Clare's personal problems are therefore attributed by Bond not to any inherent personality defect but to the social and economic iniquities of capitalism. The major problem faced by the poet is that, in a class-driven society where there is no accepted place for him amongst his own people, the upper class treats him as just another commodity which they are quick to abandon as soon as it no longer pleases them. (1991: 146)

As a result, Clare had to make a secluded life in an asylum. In 1841, Clare left the asylum in Essex, to walk home, believing that he was to meet his first love Mary Joyce. He did not believe her family when they told him she had died accidentally three years earlier in a house fire. He remained free, mostly at home in Northborough, for the five months following, but eventually Patty called the doctors in. Between Christmas and New Year in 1841, Clare was again committed to the Northamptonshire County General Lunatic Asylum. He died on 20 May, 1864, in his 71\textsuperscript{st} year.
Clare grew up during a period of massive changes in both urban areas and countryside as the Industrial Revolution swept Europe. Many former agricultural workers, including children, moved away from the countryside to over-crowded cities, seeking factory work. The Agricultural Revolution saw pastures ploughed up, trees and hedges uprooted, the fens drained and the common land enclosed. This destruction of a centuries-old way of life distressed Clare deeply. Paul Chirico, in *John Clare and the Imagination of the Reader*, stresses how the economic realities shaped Clare’s body of works:

> The growing body of evidence of Clare’s textual debts and literary imitations, of his relations both intertextual and social, qualifies any assessment of the limits imposed by his geographic, economic and cultural marginality. (2007: 5)

Literary imitations which Clare depended and works which imitated Clare’s works have a fair basis on the geographic, economic and cultural status of the period.

Having narrativized the life of John Clare, Bond shows how the poet reaches a stage of madness after his careers as a farm labourer and as a literary celebrity. It is noteworthy that Bond has not changed the names of even Clare’s former lover and his wife in the play. They are given real names so that it is easier for the audience to associate the events with the life of the poet. Peacock, in *Radical Stages: Alternative History in Modern British Drama*, emphasizes the nature of an ideal culture Bond proposes to cultivate in the society:

> In 1975, in the preface to *The Fool*, he defined culture as ‘the rational creation of human nature, the implementation of
rationality in all human activity, economic, political, social, public and private’. The task of culture, he suggested, was to ‘show how we can live and how we ought to live so that there is a future for us.’ (1991: 141)

The mad poet’s life is a lesson for the humanity to preserve the values of a rational culture for a better future. The portrayal of an industrial England also presumes many things that Bond includes in his tacit agreement with his audience. From the very beginning Clare is characterized as more interested in his material needs of food, sex, and poetry. The audience gets a crystal clear picture of the social/cultural background of the society from one of the characters in the play, Parson. He explains the changes in unambiguous terms:

PARSON: In this year of our lord eighteen hundred and fifteen England is beset by troubles. The tyrant Bonaparte has been put down. But we are entering a new age. An iron age. New engines, new factories, cities, ways, laws. The old ways must go…. (1976: 6)

This exhortation by the Parson resembles a sermon to his fellow companions. There are clear references to the age when the battle of Austerlitz took place in 1805, in which Napoléon Bonaparte defeated the Russian and Austrian armies.

According to Bond, art is a means to manifest our creative imagination. Through art, one can make public images so that the people in the society can
identify one another. In the introduction to his play *The Fool: Scenes of Bread and Love*, Bond writes:

> Creative imagination need not always be expressed in art – there are other expressions of it – but it must be expressed in art sometimes. The artist’s job is to make the process public, to create public images, literal or figurative, in sight, sound and movement, of the human condition – public images in which our species recognizes itself and confirms its identity. (1976: xv)

The art of imaging enables human beings recognize themselves in others and find their identity. As already stated, Bond stages in *The Fool* the insane world of the nineteenth century Europe. The performance of the atrocities in the English slums has been highlighted with theatrical effects. The play is a reconstruction of Industrial revolution, the battle of Austerlitz, the enclosure movement, the urban slums and a reimagining of the peasant poet, John Clare.

Bond considers cultural degradation a byproduct of Industrial and capitalist cultures. *The Fool*, for instance, illustrates how this degradation takes place: it primarily arises from the evaluation of progress exclusively in material terms. Philip Roberts, in “Making the Two Worlds One: The Plays of Edward Bond,” stresses the devaluation of immoral cultures in the play:

> The play is concerned to explore the uses to which an advancing technology are put, how the exploitation of progress in a material sense is employed not to better the conditions of
society, but to repress and destroy the culture and traditions of particular groups. (1979: 80 – 81)

The impact of a new Industrial culture can destroy the traditional values of a society in its adaptation and exposure to emerging trends and circumstances. Bond is concerned with the role of art in monitoring the development of a rational culture. In the introduction of the play, Bond states: “Art helps to monitor the creation of culture and reflects the past and future in the present” (1976: xii).

The feature that frames Bond’s definition of culture is human imagination. Human beings should understand the world and their place in it. In Bond’s opinion, culture and society are the determinants of human behaviour. Human beings are different from animals since they are endowed with a fertile imagination which is free to be creative or destructive. It is responsible for creating the fiction that makes the world and our self. Thus, imagination is the most important human characteristic. In the “Notes on Imagination” published in his seventh volume of plays, Bond remarks:

Imagination and reason are closely symbiotic. The story which is imagination’s structure is acquired through reason, through description, explanation and evaluation … It is an article of faith to ideology that we are creatures of instinct. But really when we behave like animals we do so specifically because we are not animals. (2003: 107)

In Bond’s opinion, imagination informs the nature of reality and fiction for human beings, and gives them an understanding of themselves and the world in
which they live. Thus, Bond’s definition of culture embodies imagination as a potent force that moulds it.

In the introduction to his seventh volume of plays entitled “The Cap: Notes on Drama, the Self and Society,” Bond states that culture constitutes a structure of meanings of the world, which understands that it is itself part of that meaning. It must be a tool for understanding and interpreting the world and its own self. Otherwise, it reifies something abstract and meaningless, resulting in chaos and sterility. Ideology, for Bond, is the ownership of “Nothingness” which is a phantasmagoric entity that makes the world and our self understandable to us (2003: ix-xi). It is created by the human imagination to integrate human practical knowledge and its power with its limitations like mortality, vulnerability, and chance. Humanness is the successful integration of these two realities through imagination. Ideology is the corruption of this process and is the source of the irrational. Since it is the site of irrationality, it needs to be redefined in order to create a self-awareness of humane culture. He says that transcendentalism is the fictional meaning given to the self in relation to the world; it is a form of madness that renders the mad incapable of social living, or enables the personally sane to live in an unjust society. Bond thinks that the transcendental is a fictional construct.

The failure of imagination to give a rational answer leads to the formulation of ideologies, which is a corruption of imagination. Bond calls ideology a belief in “Nothingness.” An ideology is a fictional reality created by human imagination to combat the fear, which is an outcome of human
mortality, all that is unknown, the uncanny, natural disasters, fear of the Other and so forth. However, he states that he uses the word “Nothingness” instead of “ignorance” or “the unknown;” for, paradoxically it can be true, though it is fictional. This is so because it gives us a possibility of creativeness and a choice of freedom. In a metaphorical enactment of the game of Chess, Napoleon makes clear to Mary Lamb the failure he had to encounter in his life due to the fraudulent game of Wellington. This scene, being the last in the play, has been set in an asylum:

Napoleon: That’s the move I made at Austerlitz.

Wellington won because he’d learned to cheat on the playing fields of Eton. (1976: 67)

Bond's depiction of the incidents in the war captures its aggressiveness and inhumanity. Clare's protests go unheeded, and he is forcibly taken away to the asylum. The society and its representatives succeed in their attempt to take the life-blood and sanity out of Clare's art. Having depicted the artist in society, Bond evaluates the socio-political circumstances which generate the artist's dilemma in Clare’s life.

The play, *Restoration: A Pastoral* is a manifestation of eighteenth century class system and the Falkland War. It is set in England in a world of cruelty and injustice. In the play, Lord Are is forced by poverty into an unwanted marriage with the daughter of a wealthy mine owner. Bond’s plays demonstrate how human imagination creates ideologies, which form violent and unjust cultures. The title of the play *Restoration* is not merely an indicator
of the time and setting, but also of the tradition of restoration comedy from which Bond draws the structure and meaning of the play. At the beginning he writes: “England, eighteenth century - or another place at another time” (1992: 177). He gives the play a context and then immediately broadens it as an indication that the happenings of the play are not limited to any specific time or place. Thus, the specificity of time is relevant; but, violence and injustice are not time specific because they have existed since time immemorial, since the beginning of memory.

The sense of historicity of Bond’s play differs from its ordinary sense. He often uses mythical time dimensions in his plays. In her essay titled “Alienation is the ‘Theatre of Auschwitz’: An Exploration of Form in Edward Bond’s Theatre,” Kate Katafiasz remarks: “For Bond then it is imperative not to interrupt the story: that is why his plays might sometimes look, superficially, as though they were realist in style. Time and space may be stretched in a Bond play…” (Davis, 2005: 36). She means that in Bond’s plays temporal elements are elastic in nature and can be stretched to supernatural levels. This necessitates consequent changes in spatial elements. He calls the play “A Pastoral” to draw a contrast between city life and country life and debunk the ideologies surrounding country life. Country life offers a more simple, serene and innocent life in comparison to city life which is corrupt. The play begins with a revolutionary song, which depicts an ideal situation where violence and injustice are rejected:

From now on we’ll live in the way that we say
And we won’t be told, not this time
This is our world and it’s staying that way
This time we’re gonna say no
Today we’ll live till tomorrow
And tell the bastards where to go. (1992: 178)

Bond intersperses the scenes with songs sung by characters who represent the working class to highlight their lack of self-awareness and political insight. However, in the songs the working class characters display political insight. But, they are also victims of injustice and violence at the hands of the elite. Unfortunately, they are unable to understand this hegemony because of the social conditioning they have been subjected to. The working class and the elite believe in false ideologies regarding their status quo and their relationships with each other.

In the opening scene of the play Lord Are is shown engaged in some frivolous activity with his servants while he contemplates the prospect of getting married to a rich merchant’s daughter for the sake of dowry. While the scene reflects his shallowness and greed, it also highlights the subservience and helplessness of his servants, especially Bob. Lord Are tells Bob to graze in the field and he complies. This is because he is taught to obey his master and he knows that his survival depends on his obedience. He says to himself: “I must learn their ways if I’m to survive…I’ll chew three stalks t’ show willin’. That’ll hev to doo” (1992: 184). Lord Are’s marriage has a utilitarian basis as he wants the dowry his wife will bring; his wife Ann looks forward to the life of luxury her husband offers, and her father, Lord Hardache, is greedy for the coal buried underneath Lord Are’s land.
Lord Are’s marriage culminates in violence and tyranny at many levels. The elite turn against the working class, the elite against the elite, and the working class against itself. Lord Are murders his wife and manipulates his servant Bob into incriminating himself and becoming a scapegoat for his master. Lord Hardache decides not to implicate Lord Are in the murder of his daughter and blackmails him for his coal. Bob and his mother incriminate Frank, another servant, for petty theft. The only character who is shown to have self-awareness and courage is Bob’s wife, Rose, who tries desperately to obtain an official pardon for her husband, and also tries to help Frank. She is the symbol of hope in the play since she has the self-awareness to combat injustice.

Bond’s *Human Cannon* (1985) reconstructs the Spanish Civil War. The first scene of the play is located in Spain at the end of the 1920’s. Both Augustina and Nando live in a poor world where children die of starvation. Historically, Augustina of Aragon was a revolutionary woman who fought in the Spanish War of Independence (1808) against the French invaders. Bond’s Augustina in the play fires a cannon against the enemies in an exemplary act of honour. Here, Augustina is a suffering mother who understands that children die and the poor must fight to survive and change the conditions of injustice in an inhuman world. Bond, in an interview with Karl-Heinz Stoll, points to art which scrutinizes real events in life:

> Art is the close scrutiny of reality and therefore I put on the stage only those things that I know happen in our society. I'm not interested in an imaginary world. I'm interested in the real
world. And in fact, of course, all things that I put on the stage are
understatements. (1976: 415)

The play *Human Cannon* is significant in its stage-show of brutality and horror
in the Spanish Civil War. The second scene portrays the trial of the village
against the priest who is accused of Manuel Barrio’s death. This man was a
neighbour who hanged himself after seeing the destruction of his harvest by the
governor Don Roberto.

False myths and false worldviews petrify political institutions and
manipulate the course of history. Political institutions irrationally divide society
on the basis of sectarian interests. Bond, in the interview with Karl-Heinz Stoll,
reveals the sectional interests of political institutions represented in his plays:

> Our present political institutions aren't representative of the members
> of society. They are representative of sectional interests. And in
> order to protect those institutions, society has two powers. One is
> force, and the other is the manufacture of myths; myths or false
> worldviews. An obvious example is that "Jews are evil" or that "all
> men are sinful." On that false worldview you can build all sorts of
> political institutions. So both things, the force and those myths, are
> necessary to maintain an irrational society. Now, if you had a rational
> society in which people were responsible for their own lives, you
> wouldn't have any need for force or any need to tell lies. (1976: 417)

False myths lead people to irrational behaviour. The trial in *Human Cannon* is
carried out by the momentarily victorious Spanish revolutionary system.
Bond's depiction of the trial in the era of the historically defeated Spanish Popular Front points to his idea of a scrupulous trial and the faults of those revolutionaries who enact it. The historical victory and defeat of the people's militia of the Republic in the Civil War signify the trial's beginning and end.

Bond’s *Narrow Road to the Deep North: A Comedy* (1968) is on nineteenth century imperialism. This is a war parable set in Japan. Bond reconstructs the Japanese poet, Matsuo Basho in this play in order to show Basho’s means of enlightenment to the society. Basho is actually a historical figure and a poet who lived in the seventeenth century Japan (1644 – 1694). Bond also reconstructs him in his *The Bundle*. He was born near Ueno, Japan, southeast of Kyoto. He had several names periodically changed from his childhood to adulthood. He was also known by the names of Matsuo Kinsakin and Matsuo Munefusa. He got his fame under the name Basho, the poet. He established himself as the independent master of the poetic form, haiku.

Basho travelled a lot, especially during the last ten years of his life. He visited many pilgrims, poets and his disciples. His poetry is highly influenced by the ideas of Zen Buddhism. He developed the haiku form of poetry from “a form that relied on puns, slang, parody and vulgar subjects to one that explored authentic human experience and perception through subtle but familiar images from nature” (Boucquey, 2005: 18). Bond’s adaptation of Basho’s life and poetic style is quite peculiar to the need of the times. He wants to depict the authentic human experience of the people he has found in the world.
Basho’s own original master piece, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, is based on the experiences of his two year journey around Japan from Edo to Ogaki. This work of art consists of both haiku and haiku-like prose with many of his personal visions of life in this world. It is quite remarkable a fact that Bond has developed or appropriated a drama of his own adapted from the same title of Basho’s travel diary. Bond acknowledges that the introduction of the play has been “based on an incident in Matsuo Basho’s *The Records of a Weather-Exposed Skeleton*” (1978: 172). The setting is in Japan about the seventeenth, eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. By depicting the voyage of the poet Basho, Bond reconstructs the literary figure to his modern audience. Of course, a redemptive politics is involved behind such a manifestation.

Basho’s journey is not merely a source of authentic human experience. It also signifies how the society has degraded into cruelty and irrationality. Errol Durbach, in “Herod in the Welfare State: *Kindermord* in the Plays of Edward Bond,” elaborates the speculations of the play:

*Narrow Road to the Deep North* is a remarkably appropriate play to the occasion for which it was commissioned: the People and Cities Conference in June 1968: It is an essentially “civic” play, speculating upon the nature of the “good city” and the “humane society” which are the concerns of the city planner and social philosopher alike. (1975: 484)

The ideals of a humane society and the construction of a good city are the major concerns of its planners. Bond’s version of Basho’s journey witnesses
innumerable injustices and cruelties of the society. During Basho’s journey, it was reported that he had found a baby abandoned by its parents near a river. It was an authentic experience shared by Basho three centuries ago. Bond reimagines the same incident poetically as Basho himself experienced it. Basho’s aim was to achieve enlightenment rather attending the sufferings of the humanity. As an artist, Basho had his own aims and motives in his life. But in Bond’s play, on a return journey after thirty years, Basho finds that the society he had left has changed a lot into a cruel one. The audience realizes that the abandoned baby has grown into a cruel and violent despot named Shogo.

Many of Bond’s characters are not inherently inhuman; they are rather dehumanized victims of cruelty. They are often the inheritors of a legacy of cruelty and violence. In this regard, Bond uses select images to deconstruct conventional worldviews. Debra A. Castillo, in “Dehumanized or Inhuman: Doubles in Edward Bond,” finds that Bond’s chosen images deconstruct the dominant myths of the nation: “To use a currently fashionable term, Bond’s poetic dramas “deconstruct” dominant myths of perceptions, of conventions, and of ideologies in the controlled application of a few carefully chosen images” (1986: 78). The administration of the coalition governments of both Christianity and British imperialism, as Bond depicts them, becomes ever indifferent to the issues of humanitarian values in the society. The suicide of the priest Kiro is a clear manifestation of a hopeless society gripped in the degradation of human values. Bond’s reconstruction of Basho’s version of *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* is quite selective in its portrayal of events
and its fragmentary nature serves the poetic conventions of haiku. Kevin Kelly comments on this fragmentary nature of the drama in *Boston Globe*:

[The play] is the experience of life reduced, almost haiku-like to a series of fragments, some of them almost arbitrarily side by side. Yet the fragments are beautifully, mysteriously fitted together in a general pattern …. (Roberts, 1985: 21)

As historians intelligently make a selection of facts in their writing practice, Bond deliberately clubs together various fragments to give form to the poetic synthesis of his play with the employment of fragmentary haiku expressions. Bond introduces Basho formally as the propagator of haiku form of poetry:

BASHO: My name is Basho. I am, as you know, the great seventeenth-century Japanese poet, who brought the haiku verse form to perfection and gave it greater range and depth. For example:

Silent old pool
Frog jumps
Kdang!

I’ve just left my home in the village here (*points offstage*) and I’m going on a journey along the narrow road to the deep north and when I reach there I shall become a hermit and get enlightenment. (1978: 173)

Bond imaginatively reconstructs the haiku form of Japanese poetry in his drama in a style which resembles the original works of Basho.
Bond thinks that an artist is a revolutionary who has the imagination and rationality to challenge the authoritarianism and violence of the society. As a poet is also a prophet, Basho is not afraid of the changes which took place in the society. As a revolutionary poet, he challenges the new authoritarian government of the city even when the soldiers come in search of him. As an artist, he continues to write his own life as it happens to him:

BASHO: Let me finish this row. (*He hoes.*) Write this. (*He hoes, and the NUN writes.*)

Two soldiers came

The head of the city wants me

They waited

While I wrote this poem (1978: 180)

Bond reminds the audience that a poet’s life forms the content of his poetry. Bond, in an interview, reveals how he got to reconstruct Basho’s masterpiece in his drama: “…I more or less forgot about it but from time to time it came up in my mind and when I had this play to produce I just went back to the book and I read it, and wrote a play” (Roberts, 1985: 22). It is evident from his words that the play is a deliberate reconstruction of Basho’s travel diary.

Basho’s journey also reveals the political transformation the society has undergone. Between his visits the society undergoes a transition from
feudalism to capitalism. During his travel, the pathetic lives of the poverty-stricken people have been truthfully recorded:

PEASANT: We’re poor and there’s no food. We have five other children and if we let this one go perhaps the others will live. Better lose one than all of them. People do it every day. (1978: 173)

On Basho’s return journey, he finds a new society, built on capitalist investments. The sight of the city with bridges, parks, courts, merchants and so on makes a clear picture of a developed society:

When I left there was only a village here. Now there’s a great city with ten bridges, and parks, a palace, law courts, and crowds of merchants and beggars and priests and soldiers and children…. (1978: 175)

The absence of the poet Basho in his homeland paved the path for invaders to attack the village and build it as a city. Shogo exploited the means for his livelihood:

SHOGO… I am the city because I made it, but I made it in the image of other men. People wanted to follow me – so I had to lead them. I can’t help shaping history – it’s my gift, like your piety. (1978: 196)

The subversion of a moral society into accepting its immorality as morality has become the society’s ideology. Bond wants to question the accepted morality of the people, and thereby demands a change in the values of a moral society in
the contemporary times. The degradation of the values of a moral society can be noticed in the conversation between the priest Kiro and the immoral Shogo:

KIRO. You’re married?

SHOGO. Five times. I’ll show them to you. Have you ever had a woman?

KIRO. No.

SHOGO. That’s evil. (Pause). (1978: 196)

The coalition government undertakes the city under the guise of reforming the society. The propagation of Christianity is undertaken by the characters, Georgina and Commodore. They undertake to enlighten the people of the city with proper education. Georgina enlists her duties one after another:

GEORGINA: Secondly, you will leave the education of all children to me. In this suburb of hell they are all orphans of Jesus, and I claim them on His behalf. Hallelujah! (1978: 198)

Bond constructs a city designed by Shogo to provide for his various needs and thereby find an identity in the society. In order to resist the cruel world of Shogo, there are many forces of revolution; Bond depicts them only to reveal how a society evolves out of its cruelty and resists counter-revolutions. Basho becomes a means of a coalition, a temporary alliance to form a government, with two British imperialists. British imperialism is known for its policy of extending its power and influence in the world through diplomacy, especially by acquiring colonies.
The Bundle (1978), set in a primitive Asian community, depicts a guerilla warfare to overthrow the landowner. An adopted infant grows up to be a rebel leader. Bond depicts the class struggle between the villagers and a tyrannical landowner in a Marxist vision of a classless society. He subtitles the play, “Scenes of Right and Evil, or New Narrow Road to the Deep North.” Although a new play, it is an imaginative reconstruction of the earlier play Narrow Road to the Deep North. As the earlier play, the work begins with the seventeenth century Japanese poet Basho. The title of the play The Bundle refers to an abandoned child left by Basho on his way to enlightenment, rather than the tyrant in the earlier play. The abandoned child, Wang becomes a liberation leader. But the landlord’s exploitation of the people has been reinforced by the floods in the river. Colin Chambers reviews the play in Morning Star:

Bond has progressed from exposing the condition of our times to showing the possibility of, and the need for, changing that condition. And it is a condition of cruel exploitation that Bond depicts, with his characters oppressed my men – the landlord – and by nature – the river that floods. (Roberts, 1985: 42)

There is a subsequent development in the play as Wang and the villagers join to resist or overcome the forces of nature. The armed struggle led by Wang causes to replace the landlord by the collective strength of the villagers. Daniel R. Jones, in “Edward Bond’s ‘Rational Theatre,’” remarks that the revolution in The Bundle is by no means complete: “A socialist utopia is not achieved.
The landowner still resides in a Provincial capital protected by the Emperor’s soldiers” (515). This retreat from the part of the landowner for the benefit of the villagers is a direct manifestation of the social forces working in a society.

Almost all plays of Bond are allegorical in nature, often reflecting the contemporary concerns of the society. Bingo is a play where Bond revisits both Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. The beginning of the enclosure movement is viewed as the commencement of the evolution of a British society from feudalism to capitalism. It is a visual manifestation of the last days in the life of Shakespeare. Jenny S. Spencer, in Dramatic Strategies in the Plays of Edward Bond, remarks: “…the 1970s revival of interest in revisionist history provides a context for the writing of Bingo…” (1992: 10). Spencer argues that Bond has constructed the narrative of the play from historical past. The play is explicitly connected to the social and economic ground with the growing presence of Puritanism which provides its meaning to the audience.

Though an artist is endowed with imagination, he need not be a rational being. Artists often act or react impulsively rather than intelligently. As imagination without rationality is dangerous, such artists may prove to be a burden to the society. In social conflicts, they may take wrong sides and add to the violence in the society. Christopher Innes, in his Modern British Drama: 1890 – 1990, comments on the political impact of the play Bingo: “The birth of capitalism can be traced to the land enclosures of the Elizabethan period. So Bond is showing Shakespeare as ultimately responsible for the oppressive state of modern Britain” (1992: 160). The historical relevance of Bond’s play Bingo
consists in depicting the artist’s role in the society. The popular dramatist Shakespeare is depicted as a capitalist in a cultural context. Bond reveals to Karl-Heinz Stoll in an interview that the irrational society is the major projection of the play Bingo: “To show that our society is irrational and therefore dangerous - and that it maintains itself by denigrating and corrupting human beings - that is what Bingo is about” (1976: 418). Shakespeare, who is emotionally enthralled, is responsible for his irrational actions in the play.

In 1976, the drama won the Obie award for the best Off-Broadway play. Since literature is an integral part of the cultural context, the contemporary relevance of revisiting former literary figures brings forward new layers of meaning into our culture. In the seventeenth century setting of the world of Bingo, the poor wandered from place to place, living on the streets, begging for food and money, being harassed and punished, because they had no means to support themselves. The worlds of the poor and the rich are characterized by two kinds of violence. In this context, Peacock, in Radical Stages: Alternative History in Modern British Drama, observes:

Violence in the play is not, however, confined to the lower classes. Institutionalized violence, perpetrated by armed game-keepers, the militia and the hangman, is also employed by the upper classes to maintain their authority. The difference between
the two, as illustrated by Bond, is that the violence of the poor is defensive, whereas that of the rich is exploitive. (1991: 145)

The wealthy people banded together to keep the less fortunate from discovering any avenue to improve their miserable state. Bond recreates the early seventeenth century Warwickshire region with authentic rural dialects. Shakespeare is portrayed through the last couple of years of his life in the various seasons of Stratford. *Bingo* explores the place of the artist in society, showing the retired Shakespeare as an exploitative landlord. Peacock establishes the relevance of Shakespeare’s garden in the play: “Thus Shakespeare garden in *Bingo* has only symbolic meaning within the play itself, where it reflects Shakespeare's self-exile from the world and his emotional isolation from his family” (1991: 140). It is a reflection of Shakespeare’s life with the reminiscence of the fear that his entire career has been a lie and an evasion of the social and moral responsibility.

According to tradition, Shakespeare was born on the 23 April, 1564 at Stratford-on-Avon, Warwickshire. His father John Shakespeare was the son of Richard Shakespeare, a small farmer living in Smithfield, a village close to Stratford. Shakespeare was initiated by his father to some business. He married Anne Hathaway and their marriage contract is historically recorded on November 28, 1582. In 1583, Susanna, their first daughter was born in May. Twins Hamnet and Judith were born on the 2 February, 1595. Bidding goodbye to his wife and three children, he lived in London until 1600. Shakespeare, at the height of his dramatic career, was in a position to help
many of his younger struggling contemporaries. He had earned an income of over one thousand pounds a year. He purchased the largest house in Stratford, called New Place. After Queen Elizabeth’s death in 1603, Shakespeare’s success continued under the reign of James I. He became a shareholder in two of the leading theatres of his time, the Globe and the Blackfriars, and he purchased property in Stratford and London.

At the early age of fifty-two, Shakespeare’s health began to fail. As in historical records, Ben Jonson and Michael Drayton used to come to his new home in Stratford and cheer their friend. Ben Jonson, as a close friend of Shakespeare had received much financial help from him. R. Burt observes in *Licensed by Authority: Ben Jonson and the Discourses of Censorship*:

“Shakespeare continues to occupy a central place in New Historicist and Marxist accounts of the theatre as a social institution, while Jonson has often been relegated to the margins” (1993: 79). Historically, Ben Jonson was suspended from his salary when he was working as a chronologer. In his needy circumstances, he used to meet his friend, Shakespeare. This event is well manifested in *Bingo* to show Shakespeare’s humanitarian endeavours.

It is certain that Shakespeare contracted a fever, which hastened his death on Tuesday, April 23, 1616. At the time of Shakespeare’s death, his wife and two daughters were living. Judith, the younger, married Thomas Quiney, the son of a neighbour, only two months before her father’s death. John Hall, a physician had married Susanna in 1608, and her tombstone inscription gives the opinion that she had inherited some of her father’s
wisdom and wit. This daughter became the possessor of New Place and most of her father’s property. As given in S. Schoenbaum’s *Shakespeare’s Lives*, the readers get to know Shakespeare’s different treatment of two of his daughters:

Susanna Hall could sign her name to legal documents, and was lauded as witty beyond her sex; she was her father’s favourite – so we gather from his will. Her sister Judith presumably has less wit than her sister, for she never learned to sign her name. (1991: 13)

Bond’s portrayal of Judith as the daughter of Shakespeare is in tune with the historical records. She had been utterly neglected by her father as he did to his wife.

Lord Chamberlain’s office had been responsible for approving and censoring new plays since 1737. The parliament had abolished theatrical censorship in 1968 due to pressure from both the left and the right constituents; there was a concern that continuing persecution would result in the decline of the quality of drama. *Bingo* can be seen as an instance, which Bond has used to provoke the British establishment. History is narrated as a clue to the present conditions of the society in relation with the polished developments in England. Like Osborne, Wesker, Arden and other new British dramatists, Bond came from a working class background. The idioms and rhythms of a working class locality can be seen in *Bingo* along with an almost poetic quality of dialogue.
Very often Bond introduces some problems in his plays and tries to find solutions to them. But he prefers to call his last plays “scenes.” In an interview with Karl-Heinz Stoll, Bond explains the reasons for this. They are named scenes, because they were problem plays, unlike his answer plays:

I haven't called my last two plays "plays" at all, I called them "scenes" of something, in the sense that it would be wrong to say that our problem is such and such now because of something that happened in the past. Our problem is created all the time, constantly re-created. And it's because we don't interfere with the re-creations of our problems that we can't solve our problems. (1976: 420)

Bond suggests that timely interference with the problems in the society can easily have solutions. It is common-sensical for human beings who can learn lessons from their history. Problems are created and recreated; only prompt interference can solve them.

In Bingo, subtitled Scenes of Money and Death, Bond depicts Shakespeare as a rapacious capitalist who signed away the rights of his tenants. The objective of the play is not to slander the bard, but to ponder over the writer's responsibility to the society. According to Stephen Greenblatt, each literary text in a global context entails some negotiations by means of money or currency. Bond, in his introduction to the play, declares: “we live in a closed society where you need money to live” (1974: ix). It is “an important social tool. It is the means of exchange and of accumulating the surplus
necessary to create modern industry” (1974: x). The play deals with Shakespeare’s role in the Welcombe enclosure, through which the dominant groups in the society wanted to protect their lands by making walls. A large part of Shakespeare’s income came from rents paid on common fields at Welcombe near Stratford. Some landowners wanted to enclose these fields, which would affect Shakespeare’s rents. Shakespeare could side either with the landowners or with the poor who would lose their land and livelihood. He sided with the landowners, when they gave him a guarantee against loss. So, Bond depicts Shakespeare as ultimately responsible for the oppressive state of modern Britain.

The birth of capitalism can be traced to the land enclosures of the Elizabethan period. In the sixteenth century, landowners began to carve out open tracts of land to create small fields bounded by hedges. These fields could be farmed more profitably, but many poor farmers lost their livelihood, when common land, on which they used to graze their animals, was enclosed. Anti-enclosure riots ensued. Rebellion and disquiet was rife throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Shortly after the first performance of William Shakespeare’s King Lear, there were serious enclosure riots in the Midlands, including Warwickshire, where Shakespeare owned land. Awareness of the problem of land enclosures increased during the 1590s and early 1600s, when religious and ethical objections to unrestrained economic self-interest were continually reasserted by poets, politicians and the clergy. In course of time, arguments for purely
economic considerations became more respectable and widespread. A new order came into play; one divorced from morality, in which money dominated, authority lacked responsibility and self-interest governed. Tudor period in England was known for its enclosures. It culminated often in violence. In areas of rising population and dwindling common land, resistance to enclosure was a reflex reaction of local inhabitants. Many villages, including several in Warwickshire, had been completely depopulated as the result of enclosure.

Money is used to influence the lives of other people who are also trapped by money. In this respect, money becomes an important social tool for power. In the beginning of Bingo, Shakespeare had been addressed by a Young woman for want of money. The presence of Mr. Combe marks their attempts at the amalgamation of wealth. The Young woman is a representative of the marginalized group of people in the society. She is in search of some kind of work for her livelihood. But she, in the hope of getting enough money, is sexually disturbed by the Old man. When Shakespeare comes back with money in his purse, the Young woman hides under the protection of the Old man under the disguise that she had run away from there.

In the “Introduction” of the play, Bond speaks of two main sorts of political aggression. They are the aggression of the weak against the strong or the hungry against the overfed, and the aggression of the strong against the weak. This tendency of the aggressive violence in the society is due to the deformity of the society. Throughout the play, it is the aggression of the strong against the weak, which has its natural dominance in the society.
The powerless, the weak sections of the society, always make their attempts to transcend themselves from their existing moments of livelihood for better means of life.

In the play, Mr. Combe comes to Shakespeare to discuss the plans of the Welcombe enclosure. There are over four hundred acres of common field at Welcombe, owned by a group of farmers and a crowd of tenants. Shakespeare enjoys a good amount of rent from them. The town council has become a threat for their enclosure because the members of the town council also own some of the rents and they use their share to feed the poor people of the town. Despite all objections, Mr. Combe ensures Shakespeare a guarantee against any loss on the condition that he should not support the town council or the tenants and he must ignore when the council writes to him. Michael Taylor, in *Shakespeare Criticism in the Twentieth Century*, observes that “Shakespeare himself was politically conservative” (2001: 190). Shakespeare was afraid that his father, being old, had been bankrupt; so Shakespeare needed security for his land. Moreover, he possessed more than a hundred acres of his own land other than the common fields.

In *Bingo*, Shakespeare confesses to his daughter Judith that he ignored his family while he was in London. It is his failure as a father. His creative powers are on the decline. Bond presents an irreconcilable conflict between the call for sanity and justice in Shakespeare’s art, and the active complicity in an unjust, irrational society in Shakespeare’s life. Bond’s Shakespeare becomes the type of artist who sells out morally, invalidates everything he
writes because he separates art from life. Shakespeare, the dramatist, and
Shakespeare, the man, are entirely different. It becomes true that he wrote
without any moral conviction.

Bond’s plays are suffused with class struggle and economic hardship.
Judith, her mother, the Old woman, the Young woman and the labourers are
instances of the marginalized subalterns, where Shakespeare enacts the
dominant culture. Mr. Combe’s warning to the Young woman is hegemonic.
She is threatened that she will be executed, if she does not act according to the
morals of the society, an ideological set of beliefs made for the convenience of
the capitalist forces. The dialectic between men and women, the rich and the
poor, the powerful and the powerless results in a classless society as
communists propagate.

Stephen Greenblatt’s subversion-containment dialectic works between
the dominant and the subordinate groups here. Containment is the act of
keeping power under control and within limits so that those who represent the
subculture do not dominate or emerge out of their subversive forces. Elements
of subversive forces function when the labourers need their rights established;
they have to destroy the authority of the political system working in the culture
either directly or secretly. Their dissent is very evident, because they also want
to live in the society, despite the influence of their ideologies. The officially
accepted rules and regulations of the society are in a way a distortion of the
actual reality. The tenants in the society express their opinions which are
different from those that are officially accepted and influenced by ideological material forces.

Bond's modern classic of political theatre, *Lear* (1971), is on Civil War, a deconstruction of Shakespeare's *King Lear* as a parabolic paradigm of the crisis facing revolutionary socialism, in Britain and across Europe in the 1970's. Here, an authoritarian monarch is overthrown by his daughters who, in turn, find the possession of power to be fatally evil. The play is the result of Bond’s dissatisfaction with Shakespeare’s classic tragedy *King Lear*. By revisiting and appropriating it, Bond develops a contemporary, politicized, radical humanist perspective for an authentic living in a modern age. Bond’s reinvention of characters central to the modern imagination provides a way to reveal the crises of the past that inform our current dilemmas. Through their fates, Bond’s characters reveal a sense of destiny in our lives and implement a change in the order which places the individual at odds with the structure of society.

Bond addresses the contemporary concerns of the society by connecting the past to the present. The reconstruction of history is a means to construct an identity and meaning of life. Rosette Clementine Lamont, in “Edward Bond’s DE-LEAR-IUM,” states that the *Lear* explicitly portrays both the first and the second World Wars:

Science One of Act One invites the public to recall two famous conflicts of heroic proportions: World War I (1914) and World War II (1941 – 45). For every educated European
these dates mark two phases of a familiar world struggle.

Lear draws our attention to these battles, to these famously heroic encounters. (2003: 311).

In this dramatization of the dialectic of history and society, the function of art remains to interpret the world, rather than to reproduce or imitate it. Bond intelligently records the historical processes to challenge the idea of reality as ahistorical and eternal. In this regard, Peter Billingham, in “Drama and the Human: Reflections at the Start of a Millennium,” comments that Bond’s Lear “engages with Shakespeare’s classic tragedy from a contemporary, politicized, radical humanist perspective, interrogating the very form and function of the genre of classical tragedy” (2007: 1). For Bond, human interventions in life and art have a major role to play and determine how human beings should progress in the world.

Bond’s Lear starts with an incident of building a wall to protect the kingdom from two deadly enemies. This is an allegorical reconstruction of a family tragedy which Shakespeare enacted in his King Lear. But Bond’s Lear gets the status of an extended civil war. Both Bodice and Fontanelle appear here as Lear’s daughters. But Cordelia has not been depicted as the third daughter of King Lear in Bond’s play. Rather, she is an outside peasant army leader who captures the wandering Lear and his reckless daughters. The incidents which lead Lear to be a captive of the new regime are politically suggestive of the social/cultural conditions of Britain. It was a country which, as Bond conceives it, had no powers of its own; as Lear stands in the play,
he remains open to any severe attack that can happen at any time in the country. In an interview with Karl-Heinz Stoll, Bond makes a truth claim to those things staged in his theatre:

The members of the theater can only say "What is the truth about the lives we are living, and how do we show this clearly?" And if you show that clearly, there are enough people around who want to come and see it. You don't have to attract an audience. If you can make peoples' lives clear to them on the stage, in spite of all the obfuscation and obscurantism and so on that is heaped on individuals in our society, if you can cut through all the myths that we are brought up to believe, educated to believe, paid to believe, if you can cut through all these things and put on the stage at least some of the truth about society, then people, I'm sure, want to come and see that. (1976: 421)

Here Bond expresses his dissatisfaction with Shakespeare’s *King Lear* and reveals his conviction that his play *Lear* stages the truth of life. Bond’s political consciousness is well evident in the helpless position of Lear who tries to destroy the wall before being shot down by the soldiers of the new regime.

Bond’s *Lear* is not only a reconstruction of history but also a reconstruction of the Shakespearean tragedy. It is a re-visionist play which reinterprets the political situation, re-images the characters and re-visualizes the human predicament in an anarchic state. Michael Patterson, in *Strategies of
Political Theatre: Post-War British Playwrights, points to the controversy regarding the contradictions in the adaptation of Shakespeare’s King Lear:

Bond, however, creates an almost entirely new situation out of elements of the original, the effect being to alert us by the freedoms he takes to his new treatment of the Lear theme. His Lear is, to use Gerd Stratmann’s term, an ‘anti-Lear’. (2003: 141)

Bond’s adaptation of the family tragedy in Lear resembles a myth which people cherish and experience for a long time through Shakespeare’s King Lear. But this family tragedy has its great impact in a political state. The people living in a nation are widely affected by the repercussions of a corrupted administration. Bond wants to depict these anxieties and fears which the people of a nation are bothered about. Terry Eagleton, in Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic, exhorts readers to confront the tragedy Lear has encountered:

It may well be that confronting the worst is a potent source of value. In Edward Bond’s Lear, it will turn Cordelia into a freedom fighter. What almost all the critics fail to point out, however, is that it would be better to learn the truth without having to face the worst in the first place. (2003: 34)

Bond’s dissatisfaction of Shakespeare’s meddling of this family tragedy has led him to reconstruct and criticize the play in a way which has wide political implications with the present status of the nation after the two second world wars.
Bond deliberately makes his Lear different from Shakespeare’s Lear to meet his political objective. In a letter to Christine Meyerson, Bond differentiated the roles played by Lear in Shakespeare’s version and in his own drama. Bond’s Lear as a king accepts the moral responsibility for his actions. But Shakespeare’s Lear could only remain passive to his own actions: “When it came to practical politics, Shakespeare could only end his plays by reinstating the old order which would (I think) certainly replicate the old errors” (Roberts, 1985: 25). But Bond replaces the old order with a new one in contemporary politics. As for Bond’s Lear, freedom and responsibility go hand in hand. But Shakespeare’s Lear does not seem to accept new changes in the society which no old order can bring forth. A king who needs to be in action, rather than remaining passive, is the need of the times, especially in times of political crises. Having staged the cruelties as a result of the injustices in the society, Bond depicts a world evolved from innumerable hurdles and struggles in the annals of history and cultural epochs. His concern is with the cultural dynamics of society.

There are a few rewritings of the play *King Lear*, some of which were staged during Shakespeare’s time. John Skelton, in “Death and Dying in Literature,” states that *King Lear* was Shakespeare’s reworking of a traditional legend to reflect the optimism of the age:

The play was reworked, in fact, in the 18th century with a happy ending grafted on to reflect the more optimistic ethos of the age.

And in our own time, Edward Bond wrote a version of the Lear
story (Bond, 1972) which was bleaker than Shakespeare’s original, precisely on the grounds that Shakespeare was too optimistic. (Oyebode, 2009: 78)

Bond criticized Shakespeare’s undue optimism on the development of a society. Lear destroys the misconceptions of an unjust society and instructs the audience to conform to the reality of circumstances. The division of the kingdom has become the reason for the building of a massive wall to keep out all enemies. It has developed only great misery and dissension among the people. At the end of the play, Lear is shot as he symbolically tries to tear down the wall.

Bond has several motives in writing a play about Shakespeare's King Lear. He wants to criticize Shakespeare’s myth of King Lear as an archetypal figure who was modelled by many as the standard of civilized perception. Though King Lear myth is a past one, people regards him in terms of solutions. Bond feels that Lear is a contemporary figure in terms of problems. His interference with the difficulties of human beings in their society fascinates Bond to reconstruct the play as Lear.

Bond’s The Crime of the Twenty-First Century (2003) is a futuristic play, which explores the grave consequences of a nihilistic culture stemming from a destructive imagination. David Davis, in his introduction to Edward Bond and the Dramatic Child, observes: “The quote at the start of his play The Crime of the Twenty-First Century is Thatcher’s ‘There is no such thing as society’ and the play explores the implications of the forces behind such a
statement and the struggle against them” (2005: xvi). The title of the play depicts the time period in which the play is set, and also the nature of the culture that exists in it, a criminal culture.

The setting of the play seems almost surrealistic because the desert-like description of the landscape and topography, in the opening scene, is too desolate. Bond describes the background of the play:

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The site is an open space that was once a yard or two or three ground-floor rooms. It is in the “clearance”, a vast desert of ruins that stretch for hundreds of miles and have been flattened to discourage resettlement … The site is littered with rubble and dust. Some of the rubble is gathered in heaps. (2003: 219)
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It seems as if the past has been deliberately erased and Bond gives no background or explanation regarding the setting or the characters who appear in the opening scene. Hence, the first impression is that of starkness, but as the plot gradually unfolds, grave complexities of the human situation are exposed by Bond.

The events of the play revolve around Hoxton, a woman in her fifties, who lives alone in a cell among the ruins, and a small group of individuals who come to her in search of shelter. All the characters are victims of violence. Their dialogues and actions reveal their fear and the instinct for survival. The play opens on a filthy wasteland which is completely silent with the harsh realities of the impacts of nuclear wars. There are only four characters in the play who are victims of the effects of isolation, treachery,
loneliness and a desperate need for tenderness. Hoxton is a middle-aged woman who is confronted by an old man, Grig. Hoxton’s daughter is a disturbed teenage girl, Grace. The last among the four is Sweden, a young man who murders the surviving characters in the play. Grig, a man in his sixties is the first to visit Hoxton, followed by Sweden, a young renegade in his twenties, and lastly Hoxton’s adolescent daughter Grace.

There is a menacing totalitarianism in the background of the play. Devastated by the horrors and impacts of nuclear wars, people earnestly desire to survive amidst corruption and anarchy. The private lives of men and women are distorted by events beyond their endurance and driven to commit horrors. The woman manages a tap which becomes the only source of water there. Its destruction is relative to the nominal existence of the remaining characters. Everything is paced down to the elemental: water, shelter, scavengers for food and so on. This is a tiny oasis in a devastated post-nuclear world. The play enacts the deepest questions of human existence.

As the play progresses, the audience realizes the slow-revealing fragments of half lost personal stories. Hoxton tries to chase each of these vagabonds, even her own daughter away from what she considers her territory. She does so because her sense of fear and the instinct of self-preservation are so profound. All the characters tell one another their experiences in order to argue and defend their actions against each other or the society.

Sweden also tells Hoxton and Grig about the violence and cruelty he has been subjected to at the hands of the army. In order to escape, he had to
mutilate himself to extract a tracking device surgically implanted inside his body by the army. Hoxton, though says she does not remember much, talks about her being forced out of her house. Later she confesses to her daughter that she helped poor women abandon their children by giving them to childless couples in exchange for money. However, when she could not find couples who wanted to adopt children, she was forced to murder them because women kept leaving their children at her doorstep. Sweden also confesses that he was in prison for life because of car theft and arson. In an irrational culture, fiction can become reality because the circumstances force the human imagination to create that reality. But in a rational culture, fiction is different from reality.

Bond quotes an example of how fiction becomes reality in “The Cap.” He narrates a recorded incident of the Second World War in which it was mandatory for the prisoners to wear caps at a Nazi camp. A prisoner missing a cap would be shot. The creation of such an absurd rule is an example of fiction, and the actual shooting of prisoners is what makes it a reality (2003: xxxvii-xlii). The brutalization of civilians by the army under such fictitious, ideological pretexts, as depicted in the play, is a universal phenomenon. The characters are not only pitiful but also helpless in what they do.

Sweden, who is terrified and blinded, murders both the mother and her daughter with a broken knife. The death of Hoxton and Grace is a consequence of the helplessness Sweden feels. He tears out the precious tap, the remaining source of water. He was once betrayed by Grig to the Army. He takes
vengeance against those surviving members. He is horribly mutilated and he
reappears with filthy rags covering the bloody stumps of his legs, dragging his
body across the stage, vowing to forget he is human. Left alone, at the end of
the play, Grig stands immovable as the cast shifts the scenery around him to
create the clean cage of an asylum. Bond attempts to redefine the conventional
notions of culture by creating awareness about the problems in the existing
cultures, and ascribing their existence to the human imagination and the
ideologies it creates.

Bond’s *Coffee* (2003) reconstructs a real incident in the Second World
War. In a reply to Peter Billingham’s interview, Bond comments on the
evolution of the play *Coffee*:

> I wanted for a long time to write this play called *Coffee* and this
was to do with an incident that happened in the Second World
War. It’s a true story. Almost always, my starting of a play is
initiated by some true incident. *Coffee* was about the massacre at
Babyar and one of the people who survived, a woman. It was
very extraordinary because one of the reasons that she survived was
that she and some others had got left in the back of a lorry in a
situation where the Germans were killing thousands of people.
When these people were found, it was ordered that they must be
taken back to the ravine where the others had been killed. (2007: 1)

As Bond declared, *Coffee* is a true incident in the Second World War, set in the
past. The play captures the brutal forces of the history of twentieth century and
confronts us with the deepest questions about ourselves. The German army was notorious for its brutality. Bond succeeds in staging the unmitigated cruelty of the German soldiers.

Bond specifically mentions the incident which led to the making of *Coffee* in the following words:

The German soldiers who were doing the shooting were making coffee when this small number of prisoners was finally delivered for execution. They were so cross because they thought they’d done their job for the day and now it looked as if they couldn’t have their coffee. One of them threw away their coffee in disgust and I thought: that’s the twentieth century. (2007: 2)

The throwing away of coffee is only a means of protest. The play depicts the atrocities of the German soldiers on a number of prisoners brought for execution.

Bond reconstructs the history of Second World War to politically review the “fiction” and “reality” associated with it. The play revolves around a dream-like journey by the characters Gregory and Nold. Nold starts his journey from his bedroom to a hovel set in a forest, occupied by a woman and her young daughter. It is a nightmare landscape of twentieth century European war. Gregory reappears twenty years younger as a sergeant in charge of a laconically murderous group of soldiers at The Big Ditch, an execution site for civilians. The scene immediately changes to a ravine. Here, Bond reconstructs the site of mass killing, but his attempt is based on a historical fact. Graham
Saunders, in “‘A Theatre of Ruins’ - Edward Bond and Samuel Beckett: Theatrical Antagonists,” points to the historical event of mass killing at Babi Yar in the play:

…a ravine which is the site of a mass grave. Although these landscapes seem at first to be the stuff of expressionism, the site of the ravine is based on a historical event – namely the mass killings of over 100,000 Jews by a group of SS Einsatzgruppen at Babi Yar in the Ukraine during September 1941. (2005: 73 – 74)

Both Nold and Gregory move through different locations and periods of history, which serve to permit a collision between the imaginary and the material world. The material world provides them only institutions of social madness, but the imaginary world is compared to the radical innocence of a child. The play provides an expressionistic dream-world odyssey of dislocating experience and discovery.

Bond, in his essay “Two Cups,” at the beginning of the play Born (2006) differentiates between two models of the universe. In the medieval age, there was a hierarchy for the society known as the great chain of being. It consisted of people in their order of authority. God was at the top of all the beings. Then followed archangels, angels, saints, the blessed, the Pope, cardinals, priests, monks, emperors, kings, courtiers, councillors, lords, judges, knights, squires, scholars, bankers, merchants, traders, sailors, soldiers, farmers, labourers, servants, serfs, executioners, torturers and so on. The lowest of all these people was the Devil and his demons.
But Bond shifts the significance of the great chain of being to the great net of being. Instead of the pyramid structure of a society in its authority in the great chain of being, the great net of being is a democratic one, where there is a society controlled by its own people sharing their vote and power. But in both these societies, Bond observes the existence of both the rich and the poor. Nonetheless, there are injustices done by both these groups. He states:

In a democracy the voice of authority is the voice of the people. Then why do the people define humanness as ‘living in injustice’? Injustice destroys social meaning. This corrupts all action and society falls into misery. It is democratic gangsterdom. (Bond, 2006: vii – viii)

Rather than merely depicting a democratic society, Bond highlights the injustices practised in the society even by armed criminals. Amidst these cruelties, Bond’s exhortation is for the values of humaneness.

Bond’s *Born* is a tragic epic for the twenty-first century set in a de-humanized world of surveillance and terror. It is a family tragedy of the couple, Peter and Donna, who romanticize a settled happy married life. But their fancies are obstructed by the invasion of a few armed criminals invoking immediate change of the domicile due to the threats of war. People become mad as they cannot leave their blood relations and possessions unnoticed.

There is no essential difference between the narration of history and the narration of a literary text. But the significance of some events may appear to
be different for the writer. In an interview with Karl-Heinz Stoll, Bond reveals that a writer’s responsibility is to record the events of history as it is:

…the writer has to do is not invent something in here, he has to look out there. .. the writer does is look and see and record what he sees. There is no mystique about it. There is only simply a factual expertise of learning your job. (1976: 420 – 21)

The play Born manifests the traumatic and realistic representations of a family’s tragedy before the advent of a group of five invaders of a city, known as WAPOs. The peaceful setting of a family atmosphere is immediately destroyed by the WAPO’s automatics. The walls of the houses are blackened and pockmarked with bullet holes, streaked with black blood. Dead bodies are scattered over the floor. The invaders brutally destroy the baby of a helpless woman who is a victim of the oppressed society. Amidst the cruelties of the society, Bond questions the power of human beings to react to the atrocities of the age.

Literary works, with historical significance, reflect on the present and the future in terms of the past. Bond’s plays reveal the practice of reconstructing the past with new conceptual frameworks to address the contemporary concerns. Very often, his plays reveal the public disillusionment with a political establishment, its inherent hegemony and violence. By staging the problems of the contemporary society, Bond reminds the humanity of the need to be human in our relationships with individuals. In an interview with Peter Billingham, Bond remarks: “The only way that you can create humanness
is by dramatizing the self. We should be dramatizing the conflicts within the self and what art and drama should be doing is increasing human self-consciousness” (2007: 3). Bond is very conscious of the need to develop a politics of humanness to fit to the contingencies of the present day world. He has created a new aesthetic of humanism in his plays. Bond’s plays reveal the dangers of hegemony and violence inherent in the contemporary political institutions and illustrate how they can be undermined through a genealogical reconstruction of the past. His plays also deliberately try to achieve a revision of contemporary politics.

For Bond, art is a means to manifest our creative imagination. Bond believes that human beings are endowed with creative imagination. Imagination informs the human beings about the nature of reality and fiction. Any definition of a culture, for Bond, necessarily involves elements of imagination. Imagination helps to provide a rational answer to the realities of life. But the creation of ideologies is the result of the failure of imagination. In this way, imagination can be either creative or destructive in its endeavour.

Imagination’s power to create ideologies results in the formation of violent and unjust cultures. This can be noticed in political institutions which irrationally divide society on the basis of sectarian interests. They are petrified by false myths and false worldviews that manipulate the course of history. Bond believes that an artist’s role is to challenge the authoritarianism and violence of the society with the power of imagination and rationality. Bond in
his plays engages with the narration of historical past that elaborates their bearing on the present status of the social and economic conditions of life. His reconstructed histories remain as a means to find an identity and the meaning of life.