

CHAPTER 2

Demythologizing Lear: A Deconstructive Reading of Shakespeare in Edward Bond's Lear

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Chapter II

Demythologizing King Lear

What is important is not only a writer's honesty and faithfulness in capturing and reflecting the struggles around him but also his attitudes to those big social or political issues...that are struggling for a new order, a new society, a more human future...And of course it depends on which side he is in these class struggles of his times.

(Thiongo 74-5)

Edward Bond is considered one of Britain's most important, innovative and controversial playwrights writing today. He himself declares in one of his letters: "I may be a good or bad writer, but I am an innovative one"(L 84). Bond's career as a theatre writer covers a span of about fifty years. An essential feature of that career has been Bond's constant theatrical experimentation. His theatre encompasses a wide range of styles, genres and locale. With each new style or genre which he makes use of, he does so with a sense of analysing it. While one facet of Bond's work implies incessant change, another entails continuity and permanence.

Born on July 18, 1934, to working class parents in Holloway, North London, Edward Bond, like many children, during the Second World War was evacuated to the country side. "I knew that I was being sent away so that I would not be killed by bombs. Not unreasonably, I thought that the fact that my

parents were staying behind meant that they would be killed” (qtd. in Coult 9). He was exposed to the violence of the war, the bombings and the continual sense of danger. These helped to shape Bond’s image of the world as a violent place. During his time in the army he discovered the naked violence hidden behind normal social behaviour. This early exposure to the violence and terror of war probably shaped themes in his work, while his experience of the evacuation gave him an awareness of social alienation which characterized his writing. After serving for two years in the army, Bond began writing in earnest. Incidentally, it was a time when opportunities for unknown writers were to become available in an unprecedented way.

Bond left school for good, at fifteen, with no qualifications and one good memory of a visit to *Macbeth* that so stirred him that he could not understand how anyone could live the same way after seeing it. He has described the impact that evening had upon him:

For the very first time in my life...I remember this quite distinctly...I met somebody who was actually talking about my problems, about the life I’d be living, the political society around me. Nobody else had said anything about my life to me at all, ever... I knew all these people, they were there in the street or in the newspapers- This in fact was my world(10)

The newly formed English Stage Company under the Artistic Directorship of George Devine, with Associate Director Tony Richardson,

formulated a policy which centred upon the writer. Devine observed that “Ours is not to be a producer’s theatre or an actor’s theatre; it is a writer’s theatre”(Hay and Roberts 16).The aim was “to find a contemporary style in dramatic work, acting, décor and production. We hope to present exciting, provocative and stimulating plays... And we want to attract young people”(qtd. in Hay and Roberts, Introduction 16).

The English Stage Company which bought the lease of the Royal Court Theatre showed the possibilities of modern theatre, and presented plays which had not been produced in England with the belief that that would produce a kind of renaissance of writing inside England.

Bond is a playwright who could never see the theatre as isolated from any other activity. His theatre is an expression of the means of living rationally, the means of making a sane world. His views have remained more or less the same from the earliest days:

I think it was because I was brought up in a war, but the moment I start sitting at my typewriter then immediately get involved in those fundamental questions simply because I was born into a society in which you didn’t know if you were going to last the day. You could have been killed. When I was very young I saw people running for their lives. So those questions come very naturally to me...I am concerned with important issues. That’s part of my basic response. The subjects I deal with are not

minute. They are full scale. They are about the future of our society. Whether I deal with them well others must judge.(22)

The theatre is regarded as a moral institution. In order to convert to a new way of thinking or at least to challenge old modes of thought, the theatre became very overtly political in the twentieth century. Informed by Marx's analysis of capitalism, a number of playwrights particularly Bertolt Brecht and Erwin Piscator decided to use the stage to propose socialist alternatives to the injustices of the world about them. In doing so they helped to coin a new term - "political theatre" which is actually the title of Piscator's book. All theatre, they believe, is political. It is, indeed, the most political of all art forms. In the theatre, live actors speak out directly to an audience and so ideas and feelings are expressed instantly to a community of on-lookers. The process of artistic creation in the theatre is a shared one. Moreover, theatre depends on transcendence. Just as the actors must transcend their own individuality in order to assume the role of a stranger, the audience must also escape from their own self to become involved with the events on stage. For the origin of political thought is in the willingness to identify with others and to share their problems.

The term "political theatre" may be defined as a kind of theatre that depicts social interaction and political events and also implies the possibilities of radical change on socialist lines. It also suggests the removal of injustice and autocracy and their replacement by a fairer distribution of wealth. Edward Bond along with other political playwrights like John Arden, Arnold Wesker,

Howard Brenton, Howard Barker, Trevor Griffiths, David Hare, John McGrath and Caryl Churchill aspires a kind of society that is decentralized, nonauthoritarian, communist and nonsexist – a society in which people can be in touch with their feelings and in control of their lives. Bond represents much of what is best in British theatre since the Second World War. But despite wishing to influence popular thinking, a playwright like Bond has had great difficulty in being understood except by an intellectual minority.

“Rational Theatre” is what Bond calls his brand of playwriting. More than any other contemporary British socialist playwright since Shaw, Bond has theorized about his intentions about society and its problems in several interviews, prefaces, letters and essays. The core of his concern is human suffering, particularly the violence perpetrated by man against man. He compares human beings to caged animals who dote on their keepers because they bring them sufficient food. Instead, they vent their frustration on their fellow captives. What Bond proposes in the “Rational Theatre” is to create a new existence for ourselves by breaking free of our cage. He never clarifies how this is to be done. But he generally subscribes to a benign version of Marxism, one that belittles violence as a means of pursuing a social ideal. However, in the pursuit of freedom, Bond admits that violence may have to be made use of.

Bond never envisaged the theatre as something which exists in isolation from other activities. He sees the constructive engagement with violence and oppression every bit as powerful in the twentieth century as in Shakespeare’s

time. In order to change it, it must involve a theoretical analysis of the power structure as well as practical effort. His theatre is an expression of the means of living rationally, and basically his views have not changed from the earlier plays. “The plays to date reflect a continual process of analyzing the nature of modern problems as carefully as possible”(Hay 22).

Apart from Shaw, Bond is the only English playwright who has written serious prefaces clearly defining his political, economic and ethical views. His use of prefaces and pamphlets brings prophetic warnings and constantly points to the social optimism of his plays. But in his letter of 24 March 1977, he confesses to not liking to write his prefaces. He says,

I don't want them to feel that my plays are a 'serious' exposition about life that can only be understood by footnotes. They can be verified by walking down the street...So the prefaces just give the general ideas and problems behind the play.(qtd. in Hay and Roberts 22)

Like Shaw, Bond brings humour to his plays, but their humour contains deep moral concerns. He combines the grave and the peculiar and this makes the situation farcical. His comedy is much more violent and the comic elements are subordinated to a direct deception of social issues. “His theatre as a whole is much more aggressive and unsettling and is centred in action rather than in words”(Harben 217).

In theatrical terms, Bond convinces his interpreters of the modern conditions and makes the play an analysis- an interpretation of the story that is dramatised. He provides a new and enigmatic system of poetic metaphor where explanations are replaced by incidents. His images originate from the real world and so become perplexing. There is dualism in his work between a realistic style and a highly charged abstraction. His plays converge on a special area between the political and the spiritual arousing both exterior and interior landscape. As a dramatist, it is Bond's conviction that in contemporary society, no playwright can confront the audience with truth simply by telling a story. Bond makes use of punctured myths and broken stories as mere narration of a story does not facilitate interpretation.

Bond's plays can be viewed as a response to the situations around him moving in and around with violence. The revolutionary political situation, the rise of Fascism and the ravaging impact of the World Wars forced writers to react against social violence with a violence internalized in technique and imagery. It is this ability of modern societies to destroy the human race which enhances the scope of Bond's plays. He writes about the future of our society and the survival of our race. He sees politics and economics as the basis of all social and individual life and is determined to reform it. Bond wants the audience to realize that as unquestioning members of a system, they help perpetuate the evils around them. In his view, man exists as a part of society. The individual's plight, however personal, is always shown in relation to the social and political context. He believes that our most private experiences are

intermingled with our social life and in the end an individual can resolve his own conflicts only by helping to solve those of society. Bond thinks and feels in political terms and this is because he grew up in a political situation where everything was seen in terms of politics. And being a dramatist committed to a socio- political ideology, he makes a pre-meditated use of language.

Bond's professed aim may have been the analysis of contemporary British society, but in practice he often makes use of myths, fables and episodes from history. He fabricates things and makes a long series of model worlds for the stage in which he explores the problems of our culture. They are distinct and relevant myths for our times which challenge our expectations. He uses myths and stories as tools for interpretation and they are like sub-systems of a language primarily employed for analysing social consciousness. He is concerned with the relation between art and artists and their relation with society. Art is an essential element of human culture and cannot be isolated from social reality. It is this idea that he relates in his two plays- *Bingo* and *Lear*. In *Bingo* he rejects the cultural authority of the historical figure of Shakespeare, while in *Lear* his intention is to demythologize Shakespeare's finest achievement, *King Lear*.

Shakespeare remains the icon among dramatists who display life's many complexities in their fullest and honest forms in dramatic terms. His imagination is poetic and creative and his plays present exciting incidents and amusing stories, but they also offer an insight into the minds and hearts of men. He is in

“supreme possession of all essential qualities or powers that belong to a great dramatist; the passion, the thought, and the sympathy with human experience that characterize the true dramatic imagination.(Muir 28)

His works have been a major influence on subsequent writings and new play analysts consider the multifarious ways in which Shakespeare’s cultural, social and literary heritages shape the contemporary world. For many playwrights, re-interpreting Shakespeare’s plays meant updating them to the attitudes of the modern world. Their focus is on how Shakespeare appealed to contemporary times and how his cultural authority has been built over the past centuries. In fact, by emerging as a cultural icon, he has become subject to the iconoclastic tendencies of modernism. Considering Shakespeare as the pre-eminent artist of the literary tradition, writers relentlessly look for ways to come to terms with his finest achievement and make space for their own creativity. This involves a search for ways to minimize the giant Shakespeare and his heroes into more ordinary proportions.

Bond revives *King Lear* by modifying and re-adjusting them to new tastes and opinions. In *King Lear*, Shakespeare provides a stage entertainment of the kind which the audience enjoyed while extending their awareness of the consequences of their own human pressures. *Lear* is a special appeal to contemporary views of the wrong decisions taken by great people and their inability to emerge out of them successfully. Such moral attitudes are delightful in their iconoclastic implications and at the same time disturbing in their

suggestion of the social disaster they would bring upon man. Thus Bond tries to demystify the two grand icons of English Literature, Shakespeare and *King Lear*.

History has been a source of inspiration for many playwrights even before Aristotle. Bond's interest in history is related to the probing of modern issues because there he finds the present co-existing with the past. Basically, he is a materialist in his approach to man and society, and rejects the notion of a creative consciousness behind the scheme of things. According to Bond too much power and authority in the hands of a single individual is what leads to inhuman inclinations.

Shakespeare altered his sources to present a desolate and violent picture of society. From the traditional point of view, he has offended poetic justice in making both Cordelia and King Lear die in an unceremonious manner. One can take the postmodern view and say that poetic justice, which is only a myth, does not exist in modern life. Shakespeare presents a man who has been incredibly wronged by his daughters. King Lear tolerates the world's hostility and learns from his bitter experiences that he has blundered by giving away his wealth and property while he still lived. This is a lesson that history has seen being often repeated – a lesson not learnt by humanity. But Bond's reworking of the play makes the king dominate and enslave the people. He also learns from experiences and realizes that social occurrences are not controlled by individual prejudices. He goes through many difficult phases, but remains a man of integrity, doing everything for the good of his people. When

Shakespeare's character submits to his fate, Lear emerges through social evolution and becomes somewhat a social man. For him, individuals become social phenomena and their fate becomes a social concern. Bond creates two levels for his adaptation- at one level, he creates a social function to the original source text, and at the other, he offers a new narrative with contemporary relevance. Bond creates a semi- mythic, semi-modern Britain ruled by Lear.

Two main interpretations regarding *King Lear* prevailed from the turn of the century up to the 1960s. One of these interprets *King Lear* as a "Christian play" where Cordelia is sanctified. A second approach refuses *King Lear* the status of a Christian play because evil goes on unchecked and the play has a tragic ending. Characters like Cordelia, Edgar and Albany seek to do good, yet there is only a bleak future before them. They are left unprotected by divinity and are surrounded by the chaos created by evil characters. Man is alone in a godless world and is left to his own fate. We are reminded of Gloucester's words in *King Lear*: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods / they kill us for their sport"(1V.i. 36-7). If we refer the matter of injustice to the gods, they seem not to be as systematically concerned for humanity as Lear once thought. "Through kindness and shared vulnerability, human kind redeems itself in a universe where the gods are at best callously just, at worst sadistically vindictive"(Dollimore 189). Bond makes his audience witness and suffer the full force of the characters' actions and makes them feel the unacceptable nature of events.

Shakespeare expresses King Lear's insight into society through madness, because it was the only coherent way it could have been expressed at that time. Bond has designed his play to confine an audience emotionally and then jolt them to question the realities which they may normally accept uncritically. He has reacted to the contemporary sensibility in an attempt to make his play challenging to the modern audience. His *Lear* performs a double function of interpreting society to its audience and at the same time questioning the values of that society. The re-enactment of tragedy testifies to the belief that life endures and becomes optimistic. In fact, all these provide the social and historical references by which the contemporary audience recognizes the situation as their own. When we analyse the mythical story of *Lear*, we find society corrupting itself through its organization and philosophy. To quote Alan Sinfield, "walls can be removed, if enough people see the need"(188). Our sense of order and decency is, in part, a means by which we build walls against a nauseating reality. Bond took up the task of re-writing Shakespeare to make the myth challenge contemporary society.

To Bond epic is a philosophical undertaking rather than a style which emphasizes the origin of morality and reason in human work and creativity. Art, according to Bond, is not universal, nor is it something that appeals to all people, but is class-derived and historical. Art is the creation of value by integrating the structures in human historical development into human images and into new enriched, more rational forms of consciousness.

Epic is the form of the new drama. An epic play tells a story and states why it happened. That gives it a beginning, a middle and an end combined together in an honest way. Theatre must, indeed, talk of the causes of human misery and suffering and the sources of human strength. Bond's plays betray his emphatic commitment to an ideology. This commitment is translated into a dramatic form which reflects and affirms his argument through its structure, gestures and language. Bond needs the theatre to teach truths which he thinks cannot be taught through traditional institutions of state, school and church which are crippled and corrupted by capitalism. Society, by which Bond means the social order, resists change, because it is based on laws and property relations that benefit the rulers.

Epic is also a term used by the German poet and dramatist Bertolt Brecht to describe his kind of drama. The most important feature of the Epic theatre is that it appeals more to the spectator's reason than to the feelings. It does not renounce emotion, least of all the sense of justice, the urge to freedom and righteous anger.

Human behaviour, according to Brecht, is alterable and man, who is dependent on political factors, is also capable of altering them. Brechtian epic is different from the earlier, traditional forms of epic which endorses society's sense of its principles and practices. On the other hand, Brecht challenged those very assumptions to reinterpret stories from the past- whether they seemed useful to illuminate the present- examples are his reinterpretation of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* and Marlowe's *Edward II*.

Bond's intentions are closer to Brecht than to Homer, Virgil or even Shakespeare. He himself has emphasized on the distinction between his theatre and that of Brecht. In one of his letters Bond declares, "Brecht wrote in the time of the 'masses', I write in the time of the 'individuals' - yet this must be seen not as a reactionary retreat but as a further concretization of socialism" (L4 March, 1982). Bond explains that it is through the section and relating of events that he intends to reveal the historical political and social forces controlling people's lives.

Two ideas recur in Bond's play – rationality and each man's need to understand his relationship with the society he inhabits. He argues that rationality means socialism as opposed to capitalism or fascism. Both fascism and capitalism are irrational in that they violate man's inherent right to freedom, to dignity and to the pursuit of happiness. Through unjust class divisions and the inequitable distribution of wealth and power the rational is threatened by the irrational.

The aim of Marxism is to bring about a classless society which is based on the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. Basically Marxism is a materialist philosophy that tries to explain things without accepting the existence of a world, or of forces beyond the natural world around us and the society we inhabit. When other philosophies only seek to understand the world, Marxism seeks to change it. It sees progress as something that comes about through the struggle for power between

different social classes. Hence history is viewed as a class struggle- as the exploitation of one social class by another.

Marxist thinking has been influenced by the French Marxist theoretician Louis Althusser. As for all Marxists, ideology is a key term for Althusser also. Althusser's definition of the term is quoted by Goldstein:

Ideology is a system (possessing its logic and proper rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts according to the case) endowed with an existence and an historical role at the heart of a given society. (23)

Hence, the concept of ideology is central to an understanding of Marxism. It is not merely a set of doctrines, beliefs and values that prevent people from a fuller understanding of the world they live in. The best-known British Marxist critic Terry Eagleton, sees literature as something not reflecting reality, but influencing an ideology that creates reality. Human behaviour is examined as a product of ideological forces transmitted through arts, and other institutions. Literature does not exist in a vacuum. It is an expression of the ideological condition of the time. Marxism presents the real world as it is, without any conscious distortion.

Marxist literary criticism preserves that a writer's social class and its ideology- that is outlook, values and assumptions have a major bearing on what is written. In fact the nature of literature is influenced by the social and political circumstances in which it is produced. Another Marxist practice also relates the

literary work to the social assumptions of the time in which it is consumed. This is a strategy which is used, particularly, in a variant of Marxist criticism called cultural materialism.

Graham Holderness, the British critic, defines cultural materialism as a politicized form of historiography. It is the study of historical material within a politicized framework. The term cultural materialism was used by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield as the subtitle of their edited collection of essays, *Political Shakespeares*. One of the four characteristics in this critical method is the historical context which “undermines the transcendent significance traditionally accorded to the literary text.” The word “transcendent,” here, means “timeless.” Hence, the fact that we are today still studying and reading Shakespeare means that his plays have indeed proved themselves “timeless”(Dollimore and Sinfield 3). They are obviously not limited by the historical circumstances in which they were produced.

“Culture” in cultural materialism includes all forms of literature. It does not limit itself to high cultural forms like the Shakespeare play. Materialism implies the opposite of idealism - the belief that culture cannot transcend the material forces and relations of production. Thus, when dealing with Shakespeare, the relevant history is not just that of four hundred years ago, but that of the times in which Shakespeare is produced and reproduced. Hence, cultural materialism lays emphasis on the functioning of the institutions through which Shakespeare is now brought to us – the film industry, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the publishers who produce textbooks for schools and

colleges and the National Curriculum which decides which Shakespeare play is to be prescribed for study. A good deal of its outlook is taken from the British left-wing critic Raymond Williams. Cultural materialism particularly involves using the past to read the present, exposing the politics of our own society by what we choose to stress or suppress of the past. The cultural materialist critics use a combination of Marxist and feminist approaches to the text, mainly to break the previous command of conventional social, political, and religious beliefs in Shakespeare criticism in particular.

According to Bond, Shakespeare was a significant dramatist at a particular period in history. He should be seen, therefore, in terms of his historical period. Bond in *The Rational Theatre* reacts against the idea of a universal Shakespeare. He writes that Shakespeare “is not for all time, and even in his own time he was in many ways already out of date”(x). However, Bond pays tribute to Shakespeare the writer of the tragedies as a dramatist of strength. He continues:

He pursued his questions in many ages and countries, among many races and conditions of men. And although he could not answer his questions he learned to hear them with stoical dignity: this is at least an assurance that he was facing the right problems—otherwise his dramatic resolutions would have been sentimental and trite. Lear dies old, Hamlet dies young, Othello is deceived, Macbeth runs amok, goodness struggles, and there is no good

government, no order to protect ordinary men. Shakespeare cannot answer his questions but he cannot stop asking them. (ix-x)

Bond is very much concerned with the relation between the artist, his art and his society. In his introduction to *The Fool and We Come To The River* he states:

We're the product of material circumstances and there's no place in art for mysticism or obscurantism. Art is the illustration, illumination, expression of rationality - not something primitive, dark, the primal urge or anything like that. (xiii)

Therefore Bond brings into question bourgeois notions of culture which regard art as detached from social reality. Bond thinks that playwrights must be morally responsible to their societies. Their plays must suggest ways in which societies can better themselves. The belief that theatre is immoral often encourages playwrights who have no political awareness to foster uncritical attitudes towards plays that have become classics. Bond argues that such plays may have been moral enough in their days, but that they may have outlived their historical moments and entered the realm of myth. That is dangerous because myth codifies and perpetuates the values of the old order. Bond is trying to help his audiences escape from a mythology of the past and thus be free to correct injustices. Theatre must, therefore, commit itself to political reform. That is why Bond turns repeatedly to our most revered cultural myths as subjects for his plays. Hence, in *Lear*, he tackles one of the most acclaimed

plays in the English literary and theatrical tradition, *King Lear*. Nineteenth century writers like Schlegel and Coleridge deified Shakespeare as having the supreme wisdom of humanity. The basis of English culture is Shakespeare and the notion prevails that he is inseparably tied to the English way of life.

Bond explains that the Elizabethan aesthetic was quite different from ours. In soliloquy, Hamlet and Lear spoke not only through their own consciousness, but through the consciousness of history itself. Now, more than ever, society can no longer be expressed politically and morally in terms of the individual and so soliloquies don't work any more. Changes in social and political relations make a new drama urgently necessary, because the bourgeois theatre which clings to psychological drama cannot deal with major dramatic themes.

Many dramatists have, in the past, dug up classical material. The phenomena had become so common that distinctions between original plays and adaptations often seemed absurd. But in the twentieth century affected use of the classics has given rise to a family of plays that might be identified as theatre of quotation. George Bernard Shaw, Eugene Ionesco, Bertolt Brecht, Tom Stoppard and Heine Muller have all written modern transformations of Shakespearean plots. Jean Paul Sartre, Jean Girardoux and Jean Cocteau are best known for their use of the classical Greek material. In such cases both the humour and the intellectual force of the plays depend upon the knowledge of the original. Hence, should *King Lear* disappear from our cultural repertoire, the peculiar power of *Lear* would go with it. Similarly, the intellectual sheen

and depth of Sartre's plays would be lost without the knowledge of the classical material they re-work.

However, the principles of adaptation controlling Bond's use of a classic are quite different. Both *The Woman* and *Lear* draw comparison with their source; but Bond reverses our expectations. In *Lear* he invites comparison with Shakespeare's finest achievement. As Tony Coult remarked, Bond's success is one, whereby he creates a work that "summons up Shakespeare's play, yet exists entirely free of it as an autonomous work of art"(21). Unlike his contemporaries, Bond struggles with Shakespeare and the Greeks on their own terms to write tragedies for his own age. He seeks a more intense imitation of his tragic sources. Thus, he elevates rather than diminishes the tragic stature of his plays. Michael Scott in *Shakespeare and the Modern Dramatist* claims, "for Bond the challenge is to demythologise Shakespeare's drama, finding a point of contact with the audience which disturbs, distracts and problematises the issues in a naked but rational manner." His *Lear*, though an entirely original work, feeds off certain ideas of class and cruelty served up in Shakespeare's original play.

Bond's attraction with Shakespeare has been duly acclaimed by critics and reviewers of his work, but the fascination is not simply eccentric. Shakespeare patronises a literary convention and governs the British repertory. As such, he is a personality whom Bond can neither disregard nor genuinely accept. To write a new *Lear* is to affirm an important hold for contemporary dramatists over the centre stages of their own society. On the other hand,

Shakespeare's cultural supremacy, socially established and historically secured, seems ripe for deconstruction. In his notes on *Lear* Bond articulates his responses to Shakespeare's play by saying that *King Lear* is a play he enormously admires and that he has learnt more from it than from any other play. But he affirms that as a society we use the play in a wrong way. And for that reason he would like to rewrite it so that we can use the play for ourselves, for our society, for our time, and for our problems.

In an interview with the editors of *Theatre Quarterly*, Bond explained, "Lear was standing in my path, and I had to get him out of the way. I couldn't get beyond him to do other things that I also wanted, so I had to come to terms with him"(8). On several occasions Bond has stated why he feels the need to quarrel with Shakespeare's play. What he does not like is its stoicism as is clear from the program of Liverpool Everyman's production of *Lear*, 1975. "The social moral of Shakespeare's *Lear* is this: endure till the time the world will be made right. That's a dangerous moral for us. We have less time than Shakespeare."

Hence Bond's *Lear*, Michael Mangan claims, is born out of a passionate argument with Shakespeare's play, a sense that *King Lear* is too big, too important to be left alone, and that the messages which it offers to contemporary culture needs to be challenged (23).

King Lear may have been a creature of Celtic legend, but his story belongs to a class well known in European and Oriental Folklore. The story of

King Lear and his three daughters belong to the domain of old romance and popular tradition and it has been told in many different forms. When Shakespeare first took the story in hand, it was already very old.

The story of the legendary King Lear came in to England through Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, four hundred and fifty years before Shakespeare. In Shakespeare's time it had been told twice in verse by John Higgins in *A Mirror For Magistrates* in 1574 and by Edmund Spenser in his *Faerie Queene* in 1590. In Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicle History of England and Scotland* it had been told in plain prose and dramatic form in an old play, *The Chronicle History of King Lear* printed in 1605 which appears to have been Shakespeare's principal source. He may also have been familiar with Camden's *Remaines* and Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* from where he seems to have got the story of Gloucester and his two sons. "Apart from all this he may even have been prompted by the topical story of Brian Annesley, who in October 1603, was reported to be unfit to govern himself or his estate"(Muir 8).

What then has Shakespeare done to this many times-told tale? As was his custom, "he amplified and complicated his original fable by using incidents, ideas, phrases, and even words from a variety of books" (206). Out of a moral story with a happy ending and an irrelevant, despairing epilogue, Shakespeare created a homogenous tragedy. This tragic version was altered by Nahum Tate to have a happy ending. It held the English Stage from 1681 to 1838.

King Lear dramatizes the death and rebirth of a king, but his pattern remains obscure till we realize that the different aspects of the play are refractions of the central unit of kingship. Shakespeare starts with the microcosm of disorder in the individual life of a king to dramatize “disorder” in society. There is an arrangement of disorders in the play. By dramatizing them, the dramatist moves towards a possible view of order, though in the ultimate analysis it remains only a tentative view. Shakespeare succeeds in showing through Lear’s death the emergence of the “kingly” ideal in Edgar who we must remember, is not only Lear’s “God-son” but also a partner in Lear’s progress towards self knowledge.

What! did my father’s godson seek your life?

He whom my father nam’d, your Edgar? (*K L.II.i.90-91*)

Lear’s education is also a part of Edgar’s education, so that in acknowledging the spiritual inheritance of the “old”, Edgar rightly acknowledges the meaning of their sacrifice.

Individual destiny is subordinated to collective destiny. The catharsis of the king also involves the catharsis of the society, but with the difference that while the king dies, society continues to live. In the symbolic death of the old King, society discovers its new king. There is a note of healing, reconciliation and regeneration in the final lines of the play, which deserves to be noted. Order and disorder are parts of a dialectic through which both the individual and the society move towards a peaceful equilibrium.

An approach to the political idiom in *King Lear* shows how this dialectic had been largely influenced by contemporary political attitudes. Shakespeare's discovery of the king in *Lear* begins with the repudiation of the very basis on which the foundations of Tudor absolutism were built, namely the political idea of Order. Therefore, *King Lear* opens with the rejection of the theme of order and develops from that point with increasing complexity. In a technically accurate dramatic Act, Shakespeare discards, one by one, the premises on which the foundations of absolute dynastic rule were built, as Stampfer describes them "the formal sancta the institutions of society"(7).

We are given a traditional image of disorder in Gloucester's speech on the influence of stars:

Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide: in cities, mutinies, in countries, discord, in palaces, treason; and the bond crack'd twixt son and father...there's son against father; the king falls from the bias of nature; there's father against child. (*KL*. I ii 101-106)

Nothing could have been more appealing or interesting than these lines to an audience familiar with the perils of intrigue, plot, and foreign invasion. The kingly ideal has been thrown to the winds; tyrants have been enthroned; the king is subjugated to the control of the tyrants' "hard rein" (*KL*. III. i. 27); the kingdom is divided, foreign agents are ready to come out into the open, and there is conspiracy among the rulers. *King Lear* dramatizes the lapse of the

kingly ideal; the limitations that lead to its lapse; and the process of education whereby it is restored and regained.

However, Bond creates a completely new situation out of the elements of the original. He alerts us by the freedom he takes with the new treatment of the Lear “King” which immediately implies that Bond is interested in Lear’s function as an individual in an oppressive state rather than in the royal nature of the king. As Richard Scharine points out in *The Plays of Edward Bond*: “To Bond, whether Lear gave up his control over society or had it wrested from him is beside the point”(216). Bond’s Lear is king only for the first two scenes, whereas Shakespeare’s Lear retains “the name and all th’ addition to a king” and in the fifth act is still referred to as “King Lear.”

Bond maintains the fundamental narrative structure of *King Lear*: an autocratic ruler loses power, then comes into fierce conflict with his daughters, setting free a stream of political and personal violence. Many features of Shakespeare play are used in *Lear* for example, both show a king and father acting arbitrarily and being opposed by two daughters whose only concern is the acquisition of power. Both Lears drift from autocratic behaviour into a sort of insanity and come towards some understanding and sympathy. To each of the versions is common – the partition of the kingdom, the imprisonment of father and daughter and the general use of animal imagery. However, most of the characteristics of Shakespeare’s play, are basically modified, and Bond makes the story very much his own. For instance, there is no subplot to set off the horrors through which Lear travels, no heroic Edgar to hide in disguise on

the heath and to turn up at the last moment to overpower the wicked in a deadly encounter; nor any loving followers such as Kent or a redemptive daughter to struggle for his life. Bond's Cordelia (whose name is kept in suspense right up to the very end of Act one) is his guerrilla leader, a more cruel force altogether. Bond turns the third daughter into his guerilla leader, taking the Shakespearean cue of Cordelia returning to England at the head of France's army to rescue her father. Withholding Cordelia's name until the very end is specifically aimed to destroy any persisting notions on the part of the audience that someone in the play will exemplify traditional goodness. The moment of revelation is inherently shocking and this is the point at which Bond forcefully pushes Shakespeare's play well into the background of his own play. Goneril and Regan become Bodice and Fontanelle. Considering the way they have been brought up by Lear, it is not surprising that they have become every bit as evil and vicious as Shakespeare's originals. But they also bring in some comic element as the comedy of the play pivots around its vile characters. Yet another significant change is how the function of Shakespeare's unnamed Fool is substituted by the ghost of the Gravedigger's Boy, which persistently offers illusory refuges for Lear and which he must finally part with in order to go on. Bond's Lear has no witty and wise fool to keep him company on his pilgrimage through insanity, but only a sad, forlorn ghost who follows him around. The Shakespearean sub-plot is done away altogether, and the blinding of Gloucester is transferred, although with the same metaphorical effect, to Lear himself. Where King Lear abdicates, Lear is determined to build his wall to keep his

kingdom together. And most important of all , King Lear dies powerless and weak, unable to change the situation at the end of the play; Bond's Lear dies attempting to destroy some of what he has made during his life. To put it bluntly, Bond's Lear advances from a Shakespearean to a modern archetype.

Lear is a play about a society in the process of birth. It is concerned with the problem of how freedom becomes a 'practical possibility in the present world' and its conclusions present a figure who accepts moral responsibility for his life and who acts to show this acceptance.(Hay and Roberts 103)

Bond's *Lear* shows a semi mythic, semi-modern Britain ruled by Lear, a benevolent tyrant. As the play opens, Lear is obsessed with holding his country together as against Shakespeare's Lear who gives away his kingdom to crawl unburdened towards death. He engages himself in building a great wall which will keep his enemies out and guarantee eventual peace and freedom inside. But his daughters, Bodice and Fontanelle, marry Lear's hereditary enemies, the Dukes of Cornwall and North and cast the kingdom into civil war. Warrington, Lear's adviser, is captured by Bodice and Fontanelle and mutilated. Lear becomes a refugee and finds temporary refuge in the house of a gravedigger's son and his wife. The following scenes portray the perverted lusts and cruelty of Bodice and Fontanelle as they involve themselves in war-time strategies, including the brutal torture of Warrington. Their soldiers kill the Gravedigger's Boy and rape his pregnant wife, whose

name is Cordelia. They seize Lear and take him back to stand trial. Cordelia leads a guerilla army and overcomes the forces of Bodice and Fontanelle. They are killed, but Cordelia who has no love for Lear orders that he be blinded (like Shakespeare's Gloucester) and put to stumble around the countryside. Attended by the ghost of the Gravedigger's Boy, he finds his way back to their old house and lives there with a new community which is growing up there. He becomes famous as the teller of politically charged parables. But when Cordelia visits him and tries to prevent him from telling his subversive stories, his time of peace ends. The ghost of the boy "dies" (for the second time) and Lear makes his final gesture; he goes back to the wall which he built around his kingdom, and is shot trying to dismantle it.

Shakespeare's Lear makes a spiritual journey, Bond's a social and political one. King Lear is colossal and his character defies analysis because it needs none. He is a man; he is a father, he is a king and he is old. He must have love; but he requires obedience too and reverence as befits the kingly office. He has reigned too long and too well to be able to give up reigning.

King Lear is violent, intemperate, resistant to the wrong he has to suffer, an irascible tyrant who probably as Regan declares, "Hath ever but slenderly known himself" (*KLi*.294). Habitual arrogance has become an "unruly waywardness" (*I.i*.298). His abdication, division of the kingdom, rejection of Cordelia and banishment of Kent are one "hideous rashness" after another

(I.i.151). His lack of self-control and his tendency to rant and rave are apparent on several occasions.

Shakespeare had to rely on the weapon of dramatic poetry to portray Lear's agony, his spiritual death and resurrection. The storm may not in itself be important but in its effect upon Lear it is most significant. Thus the physical torment is metaphorically indicated in:

Blow winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
 You cataracts and hurricanes, spout
 Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!
 You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
 Vaunt – couriers to oak – cleaning thunderbolts,
 Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
 Smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world!
 Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once,
 That make ingrateful man! (*KL. III.ii.1-9*)

Shakespeare contrives within this harmony the full range of the effects he needs. The two Lears –the Titan integrating the storm and the old man breaking under it remain one in the accommodating realm of dramatic poetry. These contrasted aspects are shown in the swift descent from magniloquence to simplicity, from rivalry with the elements to the confession of-

Here I stand, your slave,

A poor, infirm, weak and despis'd old man. (*KLIII.ii.19-20*)

This anguish expressed by the storm is represented in Bond's version by the exaggerated physical brutality of much of the action. Shakespeare's cracks of thunder, for instance, become rifle shots as the natural storm metaphor is recast onto the social plane of modern warfare.

Much has been written about Bond's exercise of violence, but the exact nature of Bond's debt to Shakespeare is rarely recognized. We are acquainted with King Lear's moments of physical cruelty and psychological violence but as Caroline Spurgeon points out, Shakespeare presents Lear's ordeal most powerfully through the language itself. In a study of Shakespearean imagery, she records:

In the play we are conscious all through of the atmosphere of buffeting, strain and strife, and at moments, of bodily tensions to the point of agony ... kept constantly before us chiefly by means of the verbs used, but also in metaphor, of a human body in anguished movement, tugged, wrenched, beaten, pierced, stung, scourged, dislocated, gashed, scalded, tortured, and finally broken on a rack. (338-9)

The violent scenes in Lear supply one instance of Bond's tendency to concretize ideas suggested by Shakespeare's imagery. Thus King Lear's accusation that his daughters have formed an "engine beating at my head", tearing and tormenting the mind, becomes an actual tool of torture that blinds its victim by wrenching out the eyes; King Lear's desire to "anatomize" the

soul of Regan becomes an actual autopsy ; the unseen “army of France” becomes Cordelia’s triumphant guerilla forces (III.vi.77,IV.ii.4). Jenny S. Spencer avers:

What separates Bond from Shakespeare on the question of the representation of violence is this constant move from the metaphoric to the literal, from the verbal gesture to the materialist poetic of Bond’s plays as well as to their didactic function.(83)

It is difficult to talk about Bond’s *Lear* without reverting to questions about the violence of the play. Bond himself began his Preface to *Lear* with his comments on violence:

I write about violence as naturally as Jane Austen wrote about manners. Violence shapes and obsesses our society, and if we do not stop being violent we have no future. People who do not want writers to write about violence want to stop them writing about us and our time. It would be immoral not to write about violence. (v)

Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, since its first appearance, has proved to be an offensive play, where Shakespeare has altered his sources to present a starkly violent picture of society not relieved by any comfortable conclusion. Nahum Tate, in 1681, published his revised version, which held the stage for the next 150 years. The Fool was eliminated, Cordelia was made to fall in love with Edgar and neither Lear nor she died, instead Lear resumed his kingly role, over a united country. This happy ending was endorsed by many because

Shakespeare has offended natural justice in the construction of the play in which both Lear and Cordelia die unceremoniously. Michael Scott in *Shakespeare and the Modern Dramatist* talks of the problems implicit in the raw dialectic of the play:

Shakespeare's original dramalogical score is one of a series of stark visual emblems: Kent in the stocks, Lear stripping himself naked on the barren heath, Gloucester's sight being hacked out and trampled underfoot, the blind man thrusting himself from the top of a non-existent cliff, the old King entering with the body of his dead daughter. These visual signs of the play are linked to the verbal remonstrations of the characters bewailing, manipulating or loving in a world of power, violence and lust. (Scott 37)

Shakespeare's play certainly contains images of extreme violence but the violence in Bond's version is almost overpowering. As with Shakespeare, Bond makes use of sexual violence but he places it within a new context. In Act I, Fontanelle expresses her disappointment with her husband who fails to satisfy her sexually:

That's long enough. Then I wait till he's asleep and work myself off. I'm not making do with that for long. I've written to Warrington...(Lr10)

The whole action of the play is constructed around a series of violent stage images; a worker is killed by chance ; another put to death ; troops march

to war ; Warrington who is captured is mutilated by Bodice and Fontanelle; the insane Warrington makes an assault on Lear and wounds him, soldiers rape Cordelia, capture Lear and kill Warrington and the Gravedigger's Boy ; the Carpenter in turn kills four of the soldiers ; an arrested soldier is killed by Cordelia's men while another soldier succumbs to his wounds ; Fontanelle is shot and her body autopsied; Bodice is knifed to death by soldiers; Lear's eyes are put out; the ghost of the boy dies, pierced by pigs; Lear is shot to death.

Bond's *Lear* portrays a world where the frustration is seen within the ruling class itself. Fontanelle's discontented sexuality is symbolic of the tyranny to which she aspires and the political system of which she is a part. Bond intentionally shocks and offends his audience by assaulting their sense of decorum, thereby, illustrating his point by heightening audience's awareness. This portrait of Fontanelle is matched by the strong physicality of Bodice who like her sister lusts for Warrington. At this point, the parallel is Shakespeare's play, where both Goneril and Regan, in love with Edmund, plan to destroy each other so as to enjoy him in power. Warrington soon moves from being the Edmund figure to the Gloucester figure in that the women decide he has to be silenced:

BODICE. He didn't attack my sister's men, so I couldn't risk him
talking about my letter. I had his tongue cut out. (*Lr* 12)

The sadistic delight with which both Bodice and Fontanelle indulge in torturing Warrington is disgusting. Fontanelle exhibits an ecstatic physical

longing, instructing that his hands and feet should be killed by being stamped and jumped on. Finally, she demands his lungs to sit on. Bodice silently goes about in her own means of depraved sexual violence, but comments on the irrational behaviour of Fontanelle. Before coldly silencing his ears, through an act of grotesque degeneracy, she makes him beg for his life:

BODICE. ...We must shut him up inside himself (She pokes the needles into Warrington's ears). I'll just jog these in and out a little. Doodee, doodee, doodee, doo.

FONTANELLE. He can see my face but he can't hear me laugh!

BODICE. Fancy! Like staring into a silent storm.

FONTANELLE. And now his eyes.

BODICE. No... I think not. (*Lr15*)

Bond's concept of violence is dependent, to some extent, on the audience's prior knowledge of Shakespeare's play- a knowledge which is employed as an alienation device. Michael Mangan in *Edward Bond* traces the influence of Brechtian theatre on Bond:

Where Brecht developed theories of performance based on his "alienation effects", Bond replied with his concept of the "aggro-effect" designed to commit an audience emotionally and thus to jolt it into questioning the realities which it might normally accept uncritically. Bond even annexes the famous Brechtian term "epic theatre", redefining it for his own purposes. (Mangan 22)

This device of audience alienation is made to operate throughout the play. Parallels are established between Shakespeare's play and Bond's *Lear*. For instance, the blinding of Gloucester in *King Lear* parallels and reflects Lear's inner blindness. However, in Bond, Warrington, who parallels both Gloucester and Edmund, is not blinded. Lear's eyes, though, are removed by a scientific device—a Nazi-type experimental machine—and then preserved in “a soothing solution of formaldehyde crystals”(63). This “soothing solution of formaldehyde” exploits the audience's knowledge of Shakespeare's flax and egg whites after Gloucester's blinding.

Throughout the play, Bond maintains a sign system of physically violent images which through their advancement state the outcome of the intricacy of the play's issues. They include Lear's execution of the soldier in scene one, the torturing and murder of Warrington, the rape of Cordelia in the midst of the screaming of the pigs, the desertion of the wounded soldier, the execution of Fontenelle and her autopsy, the bayoneting of Bodice, the blinding of Lear, the shrivelling of the ghost and the execution of Lear. Each image is based on another image in the dramatic mosaic of violence According to Scott:

Lear executes the soldier at the beginning of the play with a single shot because of the wall. He is similarly executed with a single shot when at the end of the drama he attempts to dig up the wall. Fontanelle longs to have Warrington's lungs removed so that she can sit on them but it is her body that is opened for autopsy, and it is within her body that Lear's hands fumble

looking for the essence of her evil and from which they emerge covered with blood and viscera. (Scott 41)

Lear discovers that the truth of evil, such as is found in Bodice and Fontanelle, is not within the womb but within a social structure and mode of thought which causes men to resort to violence upon one another. It is in this that Bond's play differs greatly from Shakespeare's as Alan Sinfield has demonstrated in the *Critical Quarterly*:

Shakespeare's and Bond's attitudes are dependent finally upon divergent views of human nature. When Shakespeare's Lear demands 'Then let them anatomise Regan, see what breeds about her heart: Is there any cause in nature, that makes these hard hearts?' (*KL III. vi.74-7*) there is no reply. It seems that we must refer the answer to the gods, who are not systematically concerned for humanity as Lear once thought. The autopsy on Fontanelle in Bond's play leads Lear to appreciate the potential beauty and goodness of humanity. 'She sleeps inside like a lion and a lamb and a child. The things are so beautiful. I am so astonished I have never seen anything so beautiful' (*Lr.59*) For Shakespeare the problem begins when authority is weakened. That is why there is no prior motivation for Lear and his daughters: established hierarchy guarantees order and no remoter source is in question, except perhaps the gods. Bond, however, shows that his characters have been socialized into paranoia and

violence. Shakespeare's Lear spends most of the play discovering what the world is, essentially like; Bond's Lear discovers that things do not have to be the way they are."(5-6)

Bond's *Lear* is a debate about society that corrupts itself through its organization and philosophy. Bond's Cordelia enjoys a power that is as corrupt as that of Lear at the beginning of the play. When Lear begs Cordelia to pull down the wall in Act 3 and receives a refusal from her, tells her "Then nothing's changed! A revolution must at least reform!"(Lr. 84) Cordelia, thus, becomes not the true revolutionary, but the new oppressor. The image Bond projects here is clear: "Destroy the barrier of darkness in society and true freedom will be found and with it true justice"(Scott 42) which Bond defines in his Preface as "allowing people to live in the way for which they evolved"(xii) Thus, as Jan Kott in *Shakespeare our Contemporary* writes, "the exposition of King Lear shows a world that is to be destroyed"(131).

The impetus for Lear's parable of the bird is derived from King Lear's comfort to Cordelia in Shakespeare:

Come, let's away to prison.

We two alone will sing like birds i'th' cage;

When thou dost ask me blessing. I'll kneel down

And ask of thee forgiveness...(KL.V.iii.8-11)

Bond extends his statement of reality beyond two individuals asking for forgiveness or blessing, “to the interaction of an entire society; a society where walls – of class and inequality – cannot be allowed to exist.” (Scott 43) In Shakespeare there is a metaphysical transcendence brought about through knowledge of the self and the human condition. But Bond’s *Lear* “transcends not metaphysically but socially in his attempt to destroy the wall which mistakenly he originally created.”(43) Here the social corruption is so profound that it has become a mode of thought. Lear is finally ignored and shot. But in his debt, Bond makes an “optimistic statement that through persistence the truth can be perceived, a truth that is appropriate to the twentieth rather than the seventeenth century” (43).

The array of killing and maiming seems to be continuous and inevitable. “Yet to say this is to do an injustice to the play’s dramatic texture, for the variety of tone within this parade is remarkable” (Spencer 26). Take, for instance, the dismembering of Warrington - a terrible scene, made all the more gruesome by the pantomime performances of Fontanelle and Bodice as they spur on and engage in Warrington's punishment. Fontanelle jumps up and down, crying delightfully.

Throw him up and drop him. I want to hear him drop. O Christ, why did I cut his tongue out? I want to hear him scream! ... Kill his hands! Kill his feet! Jump on it - all of it ... I've always wanted to sit on a man's lungs. (*Lr.* 14)

The little-girl excitement of the language contrasts comically and alarmingly with the terrors acted out on the courtier. In the meantime, Bodice calmly sits by and knits. A little later she joins in to enact a farce whereby the soldier who is tormenting Warrington is forced to make a plea for his life so that she can refuse - "That always gives me my deepest satisfaction" (*Lr.*15). Then she decides that they "shut him up inside himself," and pokes the knitting needles into Warrington's ears saying, "I'll just jog these in and out a little. Doodee, doodee, doodee, doo"(15).

The scene in which Lear is blinded acts out a parody of Lear's former majesty; his robes are transformed into a straitjacket, and a square frame which is placed over his head and eyes is alluded to as his crown. Michael Mangan in his book *Edward Bond* avows that "the relationship between violence and technology is a recurring theme in Bond's writings, and the eye-extracting machine is a powerful symbol of the dehumanising uses of technology"(26).

The excessive use of violence as a kind of shock-therapy on the audience sharply distinguishes Bond from Brecht. In this, he is clearly indebted to Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty", even though Scott opines that Bond took pains "to deny an affinity between Artaudian theory and their work"(9) and thus to a theatre heavily drawing on psychological, emotional and sensual effect. Bond's analysis of society, the ideological content of his plays may be rational but his way of communicating this analysis to the audience is built on emotional shock and unrelieved tension. He confronts the spectator with the full impact of the dramatic experience which Bond calls the "agro-effect" as

against Brecht's "alienation effect" where the audience is detached from the action.

The metaphysical cruelty in Shakespeare's *Lear* has been reconstituted by Bond in contemporary political terms. In spite of his admiration for *King Lear*, Bond attacks Shakespeare's spirit of resignation and acceptance. He points out that the human evil which feeds on political evil should be resisted. Lear's madness gives birth to Lear's sanity, in both plays. In Shakespeare, this madness produces a transcendental quality placing Lear beyond the reach of human wickedness or pain. But in Bond, Lear's madness is portrayed as a ruthless subjection to political ambition and his sanity, the realization that only pity can save the world. In religious terms, the answer to struggle and the methodical dehumanization of man may be an awakening of pity. But in political terms, it resists those forces that snuff out the divine spirit in man. Bond can only say that violence breeds violence and revolution is only the lever of counter-revolution. The great virtue in *King Lear* is the subtlety with which Shakespeare shows the gradual deterioration of Lear's powers, the painful transition from monarch to old-age pensioner. But Bond is unconcerned with transitions. He places Lear in terms of his own dialectic making Lear move from monarch to madness to saint. His enlightenment helps him to recreate the communal feeling his reign has destroyed. But finally, he is casually shot when trying to pull down the wall he himself had built to fence in his kingdom. In *Confessions of a Counterfeit Critic*, Charles Marowitz comments on the play:

The play smoulders with the intense concern that Bond feels about the issues. His sincerity gives it an aura which, if sincerity could produce art, would have produced a masterpiece. But one is too conscious of Bond's propositions, of what he wants his actions to imply and his characters to stand for, and one begins to watch the play as an unfolding intellectual argument raised to demonstrate the author's commitment. Bond's *Lear* moves through the jerky, schematic scenes of the play like a premise in search of verification. Structurally, it leapfrogs rather than builds. (198)

Thus *Lear's* violence is inspired not by a longing to revitalise the original, but a desire to redefine the meaning of Lear's suffering. In order to do so, the violent passages of the play are thoughtfully arranged to produce a complicated series of impressions. Here, Bond's "aggro-effects" are similar to terrorist approaches that depend upon a certain amount of shock and play upon the audience's socially conditioned fears. Different from the aim of Aristotlean "pity and fear", the final effect of these violent moments is not cathartic but emphatically unsettling. One of the most obvious examples is the trying sound of rifle shot that coincides with the opening execution, the killing of the Gravedigger's Son, the dying soldier's last words, the two daughter's deaths and the play's final moments. Bond is making a comment on the world we inhabit by picturing violence as something casual and emotionless. His vision of modern society is reflected in the disturbing detachment of the torturers.

The storm, bursting on Lear's head at the psychological moment, converts the emotional strain into real madness. It rouses his pity for all suffering creatures in consequence of which the old man emerges to be much grander a personage when his "wits begin to turn," than when he was imperial Lear (*Lr*III.ii.67). During the long years of his reign he had the chance to notice the ingrained corruption in the heart of man. He could see through the mockery of the rich swindler hanging another "cozener," less wealthy than he, and the power with which money protects the rich criminal from the clutches of the law:

There thou might'st behold, The great image of Authority:

A dog's obey'd in office,

The usurer hangs

Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear;

Robes and furr'd gowns hide all.(*KL* IV.vi.158-61,164-7)

This sordid spectacle has always disturbed Lear's conscience. But he had contrition and compunction that he could never bring solace to the destitutes and the poor houseless wretches. All the elements of his higher nature that had lain hidden, are awakened by madness. There is more justness of intellect in Lear's madness than in his right senses, as if the indestructible divinity of the spirit gleamed at times more brightly through the ruins of its earthly tabernacle.

Lear has been dreaming that he has ceased to be and that his spirit has been consigned to a place of torture and fastened to a wheel of fire thus being punished for his unjust treatment towards his innocent Cordelia.

The Lear that comes back to normal consciousness and sanity is one whose spirit has undergone an alchemy. A great contrast is easily discernible between the two Lears; the one that exclaimed “Come not between the dragon and his wrath”, “the bow is bent and drawn, make from the shaft”, and the other that is meek and submissive (I.i. 112 ,133). He is scarcely awake, but the picture drawn by the poet is most pathetic. He utters:

Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight?

I am mightily abus'd. I would e'en die with pity

To see another thus. (*KL. IV.vii. 52 - 54*)

When Cordelia wants him to hold his "hand in benediction" (IV.vii. 58) over her, Lear, his spirit altogether purged by an incessantly agonizing conscience, utters in utmost humility:

Pray do not mock me:

I am a very foolish fond old man, Fourscore and upward,

not an hour more or less. (*IV.vii. 59 -61*)

Now his only ambition is to live with Cordelia and be contented to remain in a prison, knowing as he does, that “upon such sacrifices the gods

themselves throw incense” (V.iii. 20, 21). And when she, his only prop is no more, he can only mutely follow her to where the rest is silence.

Bond has transformed Shakespeare's original into a Brechtian critique of contemporary culture. He does not allow Lear a loving Cordelia to forgive him his sins and allure him into the antisocial resignation of “come, let's away to prison. We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage” (V. iii 9-10).

Where Shakespearean man is helplessly handed over to his fate or his emotions, both Bond and Brecht argue the modern counterpart to be a social man. Lear is an outsider to the play's given social order. But as a witness and victim of that order, he is accorded an overview which amends the controlled perspective of other characters. Ultimately, he becomes a spokesman for change. By the end of Act II Lear has learned the lessons of humility and compassion. Much of Act 11 traces Lear's slow movement from insanity to sanity, with Bond's allegory of a caged animal reinstating Shakespeare's storm as the controlling image of Lear's mental panorama.

In the reworking of Shakespearean language and imagery lies the most important difference between Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Bond's *Lear*. Bond maintains a certain Shakespearean quality by accommodating Shakespeare's grand metaphors and salvaging many recognizably tragic themes and patterns of imagery madness and sanity, blindness and insight being a few among them. Bond tends to literalize certain Shakespearean ideas, to flesh out Shakespeare's metaphors with the events they inspire (Lear's mock trial, the blinding,

Fontanelle's autopsy) and with bare visible stage images (the wall, the prison, the ghost, the onstage murders). King Lear's map becomes an important stage prop in *Lear*. It is used by the government aides to reconfirm what is apparent "Isn't it a swamp on this map?" (*Lear* 16); Bodice controls her war from it "the map's my straitjacket" (62); and the soldiers get lost with it "useless bloody map" (*Lr.*63).

More than a humorous touch, the use of the map concretizes an entire set of social conflicts, reinforcing the territorial nature of the war and joining a series of images that highlight the contrast between the land as a natural habitat, an open living space, and the land as a wasted, unfarmed battleground. (qtd, in Spencer 85).

King Lear's foolish division of his kingdom is replaced by Lear's equally foolish wall-building project. A potent visible symbol of oppression in *Lear* is the high wall which Lear's soldiers are building when the play begins in order to keep away his enemies. Lear is totally preoccupied with the construction. A soldier whose carelessness briefly obstructs work on the wall is arbitrarily put to death and Lear explains:

I started this wall when I was young. I stopped my enemies in the field but there were always more of them. How could we ever be free? So I built this wall to keep our enemies out. My people will live behind this wall when I'm dead... My wall will make you free. (*Lr.*17-18)

Evidently, the wall imprisons both Lear and his people rather than serve as a protection from the enemies beyond. Towards the end of the play Lear has been imprisoned, blinded and banished, his country has been split by civil wars. The wars' result is the rise to power of Cordelia, a cruel revolutionary leader, who repeats the oppressions of Lear's own reign.

It is significant that the audience does not really see Lear's wall until the last scene of the play. Its presence and importance has been established up to this point only orally. But as soon as the audience sees the wall on stage, Lear tries to bring it down as if he were undoing the wrongs he had done during his lifetime. Lear's gesture to tear down the wall is neither final nor futile. It is an indication of Lear's integrity to those that are left behind that action is both necessary and possible. This is a play where Bond argues that direct action is imperative. But revolution in *Lear* is not an ideology made operational and it does not accept the idea of ends justifying means. The play constantly testifies the nature and interaction of social and personal circumstances as the leading determinant of consequent action. Bond also shows the growth of organized resistance to a repressive government and relates effects to causes:

Lear's last action is one of both destruction and self destruction: he dies mounting a lone assault on the wall which he himself started to build. The hopelessness of the action is clear, yet the gesture is an optimistic one. His attack on the wall shows him taking responsibility for the culture of death which he created and which Cordelia can only perpetuate. In contrast to the private

tragic illumination of Shakespeare's *Lear*, Bond's *Lear* dies performing a gesture which is simultaneously personal and political (Mangan 29).

Images of violence apparently distinguish Bond as a dramatist and *Lear* is, in that sense, his most violent play. The wall stands as a symbol of oppression derived from fear. It is, probably, needed to keep enemies out, but people have to be deprived and their labour exploited in order to build and maintain the wall. The nuclear armaments stocked by both Western and Eastern nations, were, like the wall, a response to fear of an unpredictable enemy, and as Bond has said at the programme of Liverpool “fear has always been a more potent force than violence in human affairs”(52). The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament’s Festival of Life was conducted on Easter Sunday, 1971, in the middle of his work on *Lear*. Millions of dollars pounds and roubles have been spent on arms, which would be suicidal if it ever were to be used. The social fabric of the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union has been made weak by poverty, unemployment and underfunded social services. Therefore, in *Lear* the wall is made to represent the perverse logic of an oppressive reign that considers that it must defend its ‘stability’ and ‘freedom’ by sacrificing both to the policy of national defence. What is most disturbing for *Lear* is the revelation that Cordelia, having won her revolution, plans to maintain and extend the wall further:

LEAR. Don’t build the wall.

CORDELIA. We must.

LEAR. Then nothing's changed! A revolution must at least reform!

CORDELIA. Everything *else* is changed!

LEAR. Not if you keep the wall! Pull it down!

CORDELIA. We'd be attacked by our enemies!

LEAR. The wall will destroy you. It's already doing it . How can I make you see? (*Lr.84*)

By adopting the same repressive measures as that adopted by Lear and his daughters, Cordelia betrays the revolution thereby representing Bond's view of Stalinism. In a letter written to Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts in 1977, Bond wrote: "Cordelia represents Stalin, it's as simple as that." Again, in an interview to *The Guardian* he explained: "Lenin thinks for example that he can use violence for specific ends. He does not understand that he will produce Stalin, and indeed must produce a Stalin...So a violent revolution always destroys itself" (qtd in Patterson 148). Bond's confrontation with Stalinism was one of the major reasons for writing the play. He declares: "The play was a preparation for what would follow. I needed to distance myself from Stalinism because that was a propaganda- a block to socialism in the West"(140). This is one of the first attempts by a British political author to come to terms with the realization that socialist revolutions, most notably in Russia, created more

repressive states than the capitalist countries of the West. It was a familiar argument with the right-wing apologists to point to the Soviet Union as an example of the failure of socialist thinking. However, it was also usual with the left-wing apologists to insist that Marxism-Leninism was the only way to a more just and humane society, though it seemed difficult to achieve it in practice. The figure of the self-righteous Cordelia was, therefore, created by Bond to warn against a mistaken application of a socialist philosophy.

In contrast with Shakespeare, Bond has no wholly positive characters in *Lear*- no good daughter, no Kent, no Edgar, no Gloucester, not even an Albany. Instead, we have Lear's own gradual enlightenment, not by being cast out in the storm, but through his own suffering and his insight into the suffering. Even by the third act, Lear is uncertain as to how to use this understanding, even though he is able to see clearly. The Ghost of the Gravedigger's Boy tempts him to withdraw into his own world avowing silence to the authorities:

Ghost. Yes. That's the world you have to learn to live in. Learn it! Let me poison the well.

Lear. Why?

Ghost. Then no one can live here, they'll have to leave you alone. here's a spring hidden in the wood. I'll take you there everyday to drink. Lie down. Look how tired you are. Lie down.

Lear *lies down*

Cordelia will come tomorrow and you can tell her you know
how to keep silent at last. (81)

King Lear is set in ancient Britain but has elements of Jacobean society in it. Hence it is impossible to date the period of Shakespeare's play with any precision. But, by frequent use of anachronisms, Bond deliberately thwarts all attempts to place *Lear* historically. Bond's *Lear* is set in pre-Christian Britain, though, there are guns, photographs, knitting, a chauffeur and an aerosol can. In a letter to Gaskill Bond explains,

Anachronisms are rather important and part of my style... The play isn't...a period piece. Any creation of any age on the stage is arbitrary...So I'm allowed to bend the arbitrariness in a direction I choose. The anachronisms are for the horrible moments in a dream when you know it's a dream but can't help being afraid.(65)

Lear also shows the same vagueness about its geographical setting. Considering the fact that the wall is such a central image in the play, one would imagine that some geographical logic would reinforce its meaning. The opening scene tells us that the wall has been erected to protect the nation from "the enemies on our borders- the Duke of Cornwall and the Duke of North"(Lr.4). The plural use of "borders" suggest that *Lear* has to defend his territory on two fronts Yet there is only one wall and there is a far greater vagueness about the function of the wall after Cordelia's victory. Apparently, Bond confessed that he cherished such vagueness so that the play will have the

quality of a dream. By avoiding any definitions and by engaging in both historical and geographical vagueness, Bond creates a political theatre that dispenses with facts. In *Lear* William Gaskill recognized the tension between the poet and the political thinker:

Bond makes a dream world in which the reality of rifles jostles a Shakespearean myth. The poet and political thinker are trying to co-exist, a struggle that has gone on in Bond ever since. But the play, as far as it is polemical at all, is pacifist, against violence, and sceptical of political change by the masses. It is finally the action of one man that counts.(Gaskill 122)

The political disturbance in *Lear* is never explained though Bond seems to regard such unrest as inevitable, like the weather. And just as the weather, he thinks, it would be pointless to seek rational means to change it. Therefore, Bond's political theatre is not a "Rational theatre" whatever claims he may make as a political thinker. On the other hand, Bond's strength lies in making myths. More than any other contemporary dramatist, except Beckett, he has created images for our age. This capacity to create images that are arresting, through the use of compassionate characterization and minimal poetic dialogue, has made Bond one of the most important political playwrights of the second half of the twentieth century

An arresting feature of the new theatre is its grotesque quality. It deals with the conflicts, problems and themes of tragedy such as: the meaning of

existence, human fate, freedom and inevitability, the discrepancy between the absolute and the fragile human order.”Grotesque” in Jan Kott’s words “means tragedy rewritten in different terms.” (132) It exists in a tragic world and both the tragic and the grotesque vision of the world are composed of the same elements. While tragedy brings catharsis, grotesque offers no consolation whatsoever. Shakespeare has made use of this with great effect in the scene after Gloucester’s blinding.

Gloucester’s suicide is a protest against undeserved suffering and the world’s injustice, and has meaning only if the gods exist. The suicide mime is grotesque and will not solve or alter anything if the gods and their moral order in the world do not exist. It will only be a somersault on an empty stage. The whole situation, not just the pantomime, is then, grotesque. Hence Gloucester’s grotesque suicide ceases to be a protest. It becomes a surrender, an acceptance of the world’s greatest cruelty- death. He finally realizes that

...Henceforth I’ll bear

Affliction till it do cry out itself

‘Enough, enough,’ and die.(*KL IV.6*)

It is easy to imagine the scene where Edgar supporting Gloucester, pretends to walk uphill. Gloucester, apparently expecting the ground to rise, finds only air beneath his feet. “This entire scene” as Jan Kott states in *Shakespeare our Contemporary* “is written for a very definite type of theatre, namely pantomime” (142). In its theatrical expression, Shakespeare creates a

landscape on an empty stage. This is a scene where a madman leads a blind man and leads him to believe that they are climbing a non-existing mountain. This abyss of Shakespeare's imagination which has created a landscape that is precise, exact and clear, is more than commendable. The mime continues till they are atop the cliff. "Shakespeare makes use of all the means of anti-illusionist theatre in order to create a most realistic and concrete landscape" says Jan Kott. (144)

Bond's *Lear* is a debate about society that corrupts itself through its organization and philosophy. Bond's Cordelia enjoys a power that is as corrupt as that of Lear at the beginning of the play. When Lear begs Cordelia to pull down the wall in Act 3 and receives a refusal from her, tells her "Then nothing's changed! A revolution must at least reform" (84). Cordelia, thus, becomes not the true revolutionary, but the new oppressor. The image Bond projects here is clear: "Destroy the barrier of darkness in society and true freedom will be found and with it true justice" (Scott 42.) This is what Bond defines in his Preface as "allowing people to live in the way for which they evolved"(xii) Thus, as Jan Kott in *Shakespeare our Contemporary* writes, "the exposition of King Lear shows a world that is to be destroyed" (131).

Bond recaptures Shakespeare's animal imagery too. The images of tigers, wolves, vultures and serpents in *King Lear*, emphasize the unnatural vileness of Goneril and Regan. The line, "unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art" (*KL*. III iv 109-10), coincides with Lear's consciousness of his own mortality. Lear's development is similarly

attended by a change and growth of the animal imagery. He refers to his people as cattle and sheep in Scene One; but after he is defeated he refers to himself as a caged and broken animal. Lear's discovery of guilt comes as he witnesses his daughter's autopsy:

She sleeps inside like a lion and a lamb and a child, The things are so beautiful. I am astonished. I have never seen anything so beautiful. If I had known she was so beautiful... Her body was made by the hand of a child, so sure and nothing unclean... If I had known this beauty and patience and care, how I would have loved her. Did I make this - and destroy it? (*Lr.* 59)

This is a rejection of everything he has ever said or done. Perhaps he would not even have built the wall. We are made aware of the magnitude of the moment - the realization that Lear has wasted his life. *Lear's* conclusion is a calculated account of the difficulty of action in an unjust society, but it also testifies that action is the only honest response in such a situation.

Bond establishes a complete biological register which continuously points to the body as the place of goodness, beauty, health and the like. Thus, the human values of Bond's play are steadfastly fixed in the awareness of an ecological or which is not corrupt but has been misused and disregarded.

As in Shakespeare, the change in Lear's language complements his sudden change of circumstances and marks the levels of his mental

development. Lear's obsession with his daughter's wickedness here predominates:

No daughters! Where he lives the rain can't be wet or the wind cold, and the holes cry out when you're going to tread in them ...
 'The mouse comes out of its hole and stares. The giant wants to eat the dragon, but the dragon has grabbed the carving knife ...
 My daughters turned a dog out of its kennel because it got fond of its sack? (*Lr.* 19)

Lear's language changes from the lightly arrogant parables of an old man, to the temper tantrums of a discontented child, to serene images of solemn emotion, to enlightened arguments for social change.

There is an unstable mixture of periods in Bond as is true of Shakespeare's play also. The power which Lear uses at the beginning of the play is essentially feudal but the technology of violence in the play is very modern: Soldiers carry guns, and the prison doctor works in a modern laboratory. Bond differs in the fact that there are no conventionally good characters such as Kent, Albany and Edgar. The role of Shakespeare's unnamed fool is substituted by the Ghost of the Gravedigger's Boy. He is always there when Lear wants to break free from truth and duty.

Lear's progress is shown in three movements. They are described by Bond himself in his preface:

Act One shows a world dominated by myth. Act Two shows the clash between myth and reality, between superstitious men and the autonomous world. Act Three shows a resolution of this, in the world we prove real by dying in it. (xiv)

The myths of Act One are associated with Lear himself, his presumptions and his blind refusal to see and perceive what is going on around him. Lear's main characteristic is either to relate the events of the first act to the evil represented by his daughters in rebelling against him or to withdraw into a private world which cannot be touched by external happenings. The outcome of his actions are played out in the resistance of Bodice and Fontanelle, the primitive military strategy he uses against his enemies and his perplexed incomprehension of the completeness of his deposition. The first act ends with a Lear who is a prisoner of his beliefs as he enters the pastoral world of the Gravedigger's Boy. Only occasionally does he ask himself about where the responsibility lies for what has happened, but almost always directs such blame away from himself. He is extraordinarily similar to his Shakespearean counterpart in being a prisoner of his own wilfulness. Just as King Lear is forced out onto the heath after his abdication and consequent rejection by the two elder daughters, so Lear is promptly cast out from his autocratic position into the countryside. Both act as if nothing had happened to alter their beliefs. Both have a long way to travel before they are ready to relate causes to effects.

One of the main threads of *Lear* is the anti-thesis of justice against law and order. The play is a demonstration of one's rights, which can only be

attained in a society of justice and not one of law and order. This anti-thesis which is central to Bond's beliefs holds that justice is a human expression of evolution against which is placed the institutionalized expression of authority, law and order. On the one hand, *Lear* is the individual's search for freedom; on the other, it is a suggestion of the myth of the innocent destroyed by the wicked. What charms Bond is how King Lear as a person contains elements both worthy of reverence and condemnation. Bond's Lear is a character who is eventually cast within the definition of justice and law and order. His progress is a struggle for supremacy of those two mutually exclusive tendencies. Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts opine that: "Bond's notes for *Lear* reflect both a profound admiration for *King Lear* and an insistence upon the use of the Lear story in terms which make it intelligible to and a parable for our own time"(116). The impetus for Lear's parable of the bird is derived from King Lear's comfort to Cordelia in Shakespeare:

Come, let's away to prison.

We two alone will sing like birds i 'th' cage;

When thou dost ask me blessing. I'll kneel down

And ask of thee forgiveness...(V.iii.8-11)

Bond extends his statement of reality beyond two individuals asking for forgiveness or blessing, "to the interaction of an entire society; a society where walls – of class and inequality – cannot be allowed to exist." (Scott 43) In Shakespeare there is a metaphysical transcendence brought about through

knowledge of the self and the human condition. But Bond's *Lear* "transcends not metaphysically but socially in his attempt to destroy the wall which mistakenly he originally created"(43). Here the social corruption is so profound that it has become a mode of thought. Lear is finally ignored and shot. But in his death, Bond makes the "optimistic statement that through persistence the truth can be perceived, a truth that is which is appropriate to the twentieth rather than the seventeenth century"(43).

The play's conclusion is a measured record of the arduousness of action in an unfair society but it also shows that action is the only honest response in such a situation. For Bond *Lear* is a play which is concerned with the need to recognize the nature of current problems as a basic antecedent to solving them. Lear's final action of razing the wall simply means that he realizes the things he has done wrong in his life. But our problem is not a wall which we can dig up like Lear does. The only way towards making genuinely revolutionary activity is to identify our real dangers.

Lear shows a modern writer utterly absorbed in the tiniest details of Shakespeare's play but equally clear that the story is one which is capable of refashioning for the second half of the twentieth century. (Hay and Roberts 117)