

UNIVERSIDAD DE ALMERÍA

Facultad de Humanidades



GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES

Curso Académico: 2017-2018

Convocatoria: Junio

Título del Trabajo Fin de Grado: **MYTH, WOMEN AND WAR IN EDWARD
BOND'S *THE WOMAN***

Autora: Silvia García Camacho

Tutora: Lucía Presentación Romero Mariscal

ABSTRACT

In this project we are going to analyse the classical tradition and contemporary reception of the consequences of the Trojan War in the play *The Woman: Scenes of War and Freedom* by the socially committed writer Edward Bond. We will particularly focus on myth, women and war taking into account the schools of thought of feminism, social theatre and classical and reception studies. Thus, we will present the purposes of the British author when resorting to the myths from the ancient Graeco-Roman literatures in order to make his harsh indictment, from a socialist point of view, of the values of that patriarchal and warring society which have reached our times.

RESUMEN

En este estudio pretendemos analizar la tradición clásica y la recepción contemporánea de las consecuencias de la guerra de Troya en la obra de teatro *The Woman: Scenes of War and Freedom*, una obra escrita por el comprometido autor británico Edward Bond. Vamos a centrarnos en el mito, las mujeres y la guerra teniendo en cuenta tanto las escuelas de pensamiento feministas y de teatro social como los estudios de tradición y recepción clásicas. Así, expondremos los objetivos de este autor al recurrir a los mitos de la literatura grecolatina para realizar una dura crítica, desde un punto de vista socialista, hacia los valores patriarcales y bélicos de aquella sociedad que han perdurado hasta nuestros días.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	4
2. Edward Bond, the author	6
3. A first approximation to <i>The Woman: Scenes of War and Freedom</i>	9
4. Myth, classical tradition and reception	15
5. Women	25
6. War	30
7. Conclusions	36
8. References	39

MYTH, WOMEN AND WAR IN EDWARD BOND'S *THE WOMAN*

Silvia García Camacho

1. Introduction

This paper offers a critical analysis and interpretation of the play *The Woman: Scenes of War and Freedom* (1978) by the British writer Edward Bond. We wanted to undertake a research project about a twentieth-century British literary work whose topic had some connections with the classical Greek literature. Several contemporary authors in English have created their works using the Graeco-Roman mythical world as a source of inspiration; however, among all those poems, novels and plays which could eventually be linked to a classical past, we finally opted for this tragic drama with epic connotations. From the beginning, the historical context in which the play is set, the Trojan War, attracted our attention. What is more, the title itself revealed some of the varied topics which are pervasive in this play and which are extremely interesting for us at a personal level: women, war and social struggle.

The purpose of this study will chiefly concentrate on the investigation and comparison between *The Woman* and the classical texts, especially from the Greek literature, which we believe had some influence in the process of creation of this play. We plan to find out the underlying literary corpus as well as the author's purpose when using this classical tradition. In order to do that, we will resort to the schools of thought belonging to the so-called classical tradition and reception studies. In the same way, to understand the paramount importance and richness of the female figures in this particular work, we will base our project on gender and feminist studies taking into account the historical context of the play. Moreover, we will examine the main dramatic strategies used by Edward Bond both as a playwright and stage director, as well as the characters and symbols he employs. Following the latest contributions of the social theatre studies, we also aim to unveil Bond's intentions and personal theories regarding the moral goal of theatre. Finally, we will complete this paper with the exploration of the ideological, psychological and emotional aspects which are entailed in the creation of any piece of

work like this one, which exposes with severe harshness the controversial reality of human existence.

This paper is divided into five sections. Firstly, we delve into the biography of the author, his socio-historical and working-class context, his experiences in World War II and his time serving in the army. We will see how the conjunction of all the aforementioned events had a great influence on his personality, political ideology and, of course, his works. We will also explore his first years as a writer, his literary models and his productions in the Royal Court. There, Bond functioned as a fundamental figure in a new group of playwrights who created a new kind of theatre which sharply defied the established canon. Very briefly, we will also talk about his first works, which contributed to his controversial image, his poetic, didactic and directing skills as well as his literary pluralism, which has aided him in transmitting his political and social ideas.

Secondly, we will enter in the proper study of *The Woman: Scenes of War and Freedom* by presenting its dramatic, epic and tragic plot. Within its twenty-three scenes, this play offers a new and original recreation of the last days of Troy and the consequences of the final destruction of the city for the female protagonists. We will describe in a concise way the staging of this play in each of its parts together with the dramatic strategies Bond used to achieve his didactic aims.

In the third section, Bond's reception of classical —and British— tradition regarding the characters, structure, *mythos* and *topoi* in this play will be studied. We will try to detail how he has reimagined and reinterpreted this mythical heritage for his own literary agenda. Regarding the works in which Bond found inspiration for his own epic drama, we encounter the tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles, well-known Greek authors from the fifth century B.C.E, together with Aristophanes' comedies and Aesop's fables and, of course, the text of the *Iliad* attributed to Homer. Even Shakespeare's works will have an influence in *The Woman*.

In the following section the importance of women in the play will be analysed focusing on those female voices that echo, in a rational and conscious way, within an irrational society made by and for men. A patriarchal and misogynistic society is portrayed in this story, but the author grants women the socio-historical relevance they deserve. We will evaluate their complex development and how they actively revolt in an attempt to finish a conflict triggered by the warring male mentality.

Lastly, we will provide some plausible interpretations concerning why Edward Bond chooses the Trojan scenario to promote his anti-militarist ideals. We will particularly concentrate on unveiling all the warring acts that are described in the play; acts expressly cruel which, unfortunately, can be found in every current conflict. The personality of those implacable male leaders, capable of everything to reach their goals, will be examined in a socio-historical context where values such as the religious fanaticism, colonial and conquest desires together with the abuse of power take precedence.

In the final section of this paper, we will collect the key conclusions drawn after the profound study of the play and the examination of the different bibliographical sources which have helped us to interpret, comprehend and value this magnificent work of the English literature of the twentieth century.

2. Edward Bond, the author

Theatre is a way of judging society and helping to change it; art must interpret the world and not merely mirror it.

(Bond, qtd. in Presadă 2003: 241)

Edward Bond is one of the most relevant playwrights of our time. Hay and Roberts (1980: 6) affirm that, in fact, “he is widely regarded as one of the most important living dramatists. Yet his work is better known abroad than in the United Kingdom, and his plays are not as popular in this country as elsewhere”. These authors, together with Jan Harris (2011) and Hildegard Klein (1995) provide a suitable biography of the author.

Edward Bond was born on 18 July 1934 to working-class parents in Holloway, North London. They moved to London in the 30s to seek for a job, but their roots were rural. During World War II, the Bond family was evacuated to Cornwall and then to his grandparents’ house in East Anglia. In 1946 he attended Crouch End Secondary Modern School. After leaving school, he had several jobs, including working in an aeronautic factory. He served in the military service, in the occupying army, in Vienna for two years. According to Harris (2011:1), “this encounter with an organisation that demanded total

obedience in the service of violence profoundly impacted Bond's political vision, exacerbating a mistrust of established authority that would run throughout his work.” It was there where he started writing his short stories.

During his childhood and youth, the complex and compromising personality of this author began to be defined. The familiar separation and the terrible experiences endured during the war turned him into an observant, critic and sensitive author with an incipient political consciousness. His poor and working-class origins, together with the hard and unfair conditions he saw in the majority of society, led him to the harsh indictment of the distinction of social classes. For him, social truth is a moral duty. At his early stages of childhood, he was also aware of the passive and conformist character of the British school. Moreover, his experiences with the personal alienation and passive disobedience suffered during his service in the military forces were decisive in his determination to denounce any indoctrination, either military, educational or social.

His first contact with the world of theatre, according to Edward Bond himself, was his attendance with the school to a representation of *Macbeth* at Bedford, which caused him a great impact. Since that moment, he resolved to write about dignity and human values, just as Shakespeare did in this work. Back in London as a discharged soldier, he attended all the theatre performances he could, absorbing all the oral expression and dramatic techniques that led him to love and dominate the scenic art: “I went to everything, just to see how it was done – Shakespeare, comedies, thrillers, farces. In the end I found myself noticing the lighting, and decided it was time to stop” (qtd. in Klein 1995: 48).

Particularly fascinating for Bond were the works of Bertolt Brecht that were being represented at that time in London, specially his way of understanding theatre as a popular expression and as the orientation of the audience towards reflection, not the merely contemplation of the stage.

The British theatre of the 50s, poorly creative or innovative, was transformed and it acquired a critical nature due to the socio-political changes, the hopelessness and the instability of the times after the Second World War and, above all, the fall of the British Empire. The Royal Court became, from 1956, a new marginal platform of experimentation for theatre writers. This functioned as a determining stimulus for the rise of amateur authors from working-class backgrounds like Bond, who contributed to the

development of a scenic revolution in The United Kingdom. Inspired mainly by Osborne, this young people rebelled themselves against the classist British system and the abuse of authorities. Between 1968 and 1978 this new theatre became primarily a socialist-marxist political theatre whereby Bond manifested himself as one of its major exponents.

In this manner, Bond is a humanist, a philosopher, a pacific activist but, above everything, and artist who advocates for a politically committed theatre able to raise awareness among the audience. He believes in a democratic socialism based on a rational, educated, free but, of course, humane system. He proposes an epic, didactic and rational theatre whose ultimate goal is to change the attitude of the spectator, now turned into an actor in the world, for he or she ought to act accordingly to what they learnt and, as a consequence, the whole society will start a path towards a better world. Thus, Bond is highly regarded as a seer, a visionary who holds an unyielding faith in humanity.

Edward Bond's first produced play, *The Pope's Wedding*, was presented in the Royal Court Theatre in 1962, but it was not until 1965 that his fame as a polemic and controversial author was forged with the representation of his play *Saved*. In this work, he presents the story of a group of youths, victims of the system, who stone violently a baby to death. This work was fundamental in the abolition of censorship, personified in the figure of Lord Chamberlain, who imposed political, religious and sexual prohibitions in the British stages. Bond's ideological frame is the battle against capitalism, injustice and violence. He affirms:

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. (qtd. in Klein 1995: 55)

Since his first staging of *The Woman* in 1978, he has been determined to direct and produce his own plays first hand. His dramatic productions abound, but, in addition to that, he has written short fiction, librettos of operas and ballets, adaptations and film and television series scripts. In order to deliver his political message, he has used his stylistic pluralism with the adaptation to a wide range of genres such as comedies, tragedies,

historical plays, epopees or classical adaptations. Hence, Bond is also considered a great poet and an excellent director.

Furthermore, Edward Bond's didactic labour in courses, seminars and universities should also be taken into account. As Diana Presadă (2003: 241) aptly puts it, this didactic intention links him to the theatre of ideas, and many critics define his style of presenting images as a Shakespearian influence, his dramatic means so similar to those of Brecht or Beckett, and his abilities in dialogue passages as typical of Chekhov or Pinter. His dramatic style is extremely personal and his new stage formula is full of symbolic language, metaphors, poetic images, and excellent use of language, but also a characteristic structure of cause-effect. Gestures, movements, sounds and the position of the actors and actresses on the stage are also vital in Bond's performances. All this Bondian features will be analysed in the following sections of this paper, focusing on one of the most acclaimed works of the author, *The Woman: Scenes of War and Freedom*, which provides an irreverent idea of the aftermath of the most epic of all wars: The Trojan War.

In spite of the fact that Edward Bond wrote his most famous works between the 60s and 80s, his message has not lost its significance. He, a conscious moralist, has bestowed imagination, originality, rationality and life to contemporary theatre. As Hay and Roberts (1980: 22) point out:

Bond happens to be a playwright but he has never seen the theatre as something which exists in a way isolated from any other activity. His theatre is an expression of, and contribution towards, the means of living rationally, the means of making a sane world. His views have not changed fundamentally from the earliest days.

3. A first approximation to *The Woman: Scenes of War and Freedom*

I have represented history as a woman with a sword under her skirt.

(Bond, qtd. in Hay and Roberts 1980: 239)

The play we are going to analyse belongs, according to Edward Bond himself, to the so-called *problem plays* from the first phase of his creative work, which goes from 1962 to 1978, specifically to the second series consisting of a trilogy that includes *Bingo: Scenes of Money and Death*; *The Fool: Scenes of Bread and Love*; and *The Woman: Scenes of War and Freedom*. As Klein (1995: 242) affirms, most of Bond's plays have symbolic titles, and in these works we encounter sharply marked subtitles which suggest a first image of their content. Hay and Roberts (1980: 239) conclude that this "series of three 'history' plays now ends on a statement of faith in man's ability to change the world".

The Woman: Scenes of War and Freedom was the first contemporary play performed in the Olivier Theatre of London in August 1978 and was directed by Bond himself. The Olivier Theatre has a large open stage in a fan-shaped auditorium holding 1160 people, and, as Spencer (1992: 95) asserts, it is "a space specifically designed for full-scale productions of classical theatre". It was the ideal stage to perform this tragedy with epic connotations (battle scenes, crowd scenes...), which gathered a cast of 80 performers and that held a magnificent dramatization with light and sound effects which aided in its success.¹ In the introduction to his book *Plays and Players* (1969), Martin Esslin defines *The Woman* in the following manner:

It is not an easy play: it has to be followed with attention and concentration. It has to be pondered and thought about afterwards. But that very richness and density make it a great play. And it is the work of a real poet of the theatre: who thinks in entrances and exits, in ascents and descents of steps, in light rising to high intensity and fading, in the tension between group of figures. (qtd. in Bond 1978: 1)

The story, framed in ancient Greece, presents a political fable of the Trojan War. It is structured in an innovative way, with two opposing parts, alluding to the subtitle: War and Freedom. This contrast, this dichotomy between two worlds, was also maintained in the staging by means of using different sets for each of the parts; parts that could be

¹ Cf. Hay and Roberts 1980: 241.

regarded as independent but that were joined symbolically by a female religious icon, source of fanaticism and irrationality: The Goddess of Good Fortune.

The first scene of Part One, as Hay and Roberts describe, places us in a scenic frame where a shining steel wall of Troy built in red stands at the back: “the effect was to suggest the blood and suffering caused by five years of war” (1980: 242).² It starts with the sound of the funeral games in honour of the King of Troy. The passing of the old king Priam shakes the general quarters of the Greeks for they wonder how the ascension to the throne of his wife Hecuba will affect the course of the war. After five years of siege, the situation of both sides is delicate. Troy, undoubtedly the most damaged and affected, is a city in ruins devastated by famines and plagues. On the other hand, Greek soldiers and leaders, weary and exhausted, want to end the war and return to Athens. They consider that the Trojan matriarch is a cunning and cold-hearted foe, difficult to deceive and manipulate. One of the members of the council suggests sending the commander’s wife as a diplomatic ambassador of the conflict for her being in equal feminine terms to the other woman.

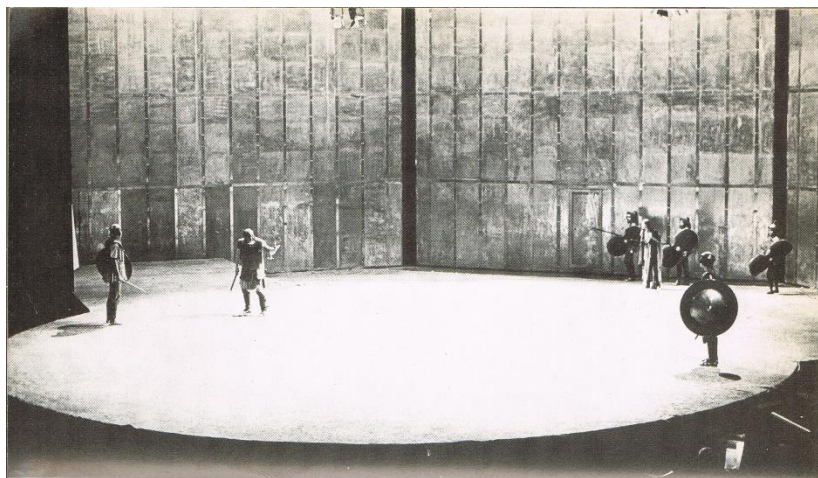


Image 1: *The Woman* Part One. London, 1978. By Davies.

Source: Hay and Roberts (1980)

Ismene, Hero’s wife, holds a meeting with Hecuba and transmits her husband’s proposal: if the stolen statue of the Goddess of Good Fortune is given back to Greece, the

² As Spencer (1992:96) pointed out, “*The Woman*’s connections to Greek tragedy is established by the heavily allusive texture of Part I”.

initial outrage will be forgotten, they will go back to Athens and Troy will not be looted. The wise old woman dismantles each of the statements of the naïve, gullible and miserable Ismene since she knows that Heros “would take the statue and still burn and kill and loot” (Bond 1978, I: 33) to satisfy his thirst of revenge. The Greek ambassador, tormented by doubts and in an act of good will, offers herself as hostage to ensure the promise of Heros. The queen accepts the proposal and resolves to return the statue. Nonetheless, her son (Son), knowing full well her intentions and aided by the priests, seizes the power away from Hecuba and imprisons Ismene, imposing his irrational and superstitious authoritarianism. Meanwhile, in the Greek camp, Ismene is considered a traitor and Heros feels, furthermore, dishonoured. Both women, deprived of their liberty, allied themselves against the war while becoming aware of the unavoidable tragedy that is to come and the futility of their attempts to seek freedom, and both decide to take action. Ismene, from the Trojan wall, appeals to the Greek soldiers advocating for the end of this pointless war, although she is later silenced by their making of noise:

ISMENE. Greek soldiers! Go home! Is there any loot worth the risk of your life? Women? There are women in Greece! The goddess? If the Trojans listened to me they'd throw it out to you over their wall. That's how they'd punish you the most! What luck could it give you? You'll go home when you've got it? You can go home now! You're wasting your life making your tombstone! (Bond 1978, I: 43)

The end of the struggle is, however, hastened by a multitude of “poor, starved, sick, wounded, lame, crazed” (Bond 1978, I: 48) Trojans victims of the plague who, in a desperate act, enter the temple, kill Son and throw, among insults and cries, the statue of their misfortune to the Greeks. In the headquarters, the Greeks sentence Ismene to immurement in the Trojan wall and she, before serving her sentence, begs for the fate of Troy. Nevertheless, the city is sacked and innocents slaughtered with unbridled violence. In the last act of this first part, we encounter a group of Trojan women waiting to be deported to Athens as slaves and, among them, a dispirited Hecuba, witness of the murder of her children and the destruction of her city. Heros, in a last act of vengeance, throws her grandchild Astyanax over the wall. She, out of madness, pulls out one of her eyes, cursing the Greeks, while the cries of the Trojan Women and Ismene from the wall are quieted by the laughter of the “drunk, oily, dirty and bloody” (Bond 1978, I: 62) winners.

In Part Two, the stage is more austere and minimalist: the same steel wall that now simulates a horizon, a grey cracked floor and a little hut with rocks by its side define the set, recreating the image of a lost island (Hay and Roberts 1980: 242). This part opens with an idyllic description of an island, which possesses an aura of joy, peace and concord. The islanders celebrate their spring festivities with songs and dances and, among them, we find two non-native women: Hecuba and Ismene.



Image 2: *The Woman Part Two*; Yvonne Bryceland (Hecuba) and Susan Fleetwood (Ismene). London, 1978. By Davies.

Source: Hay and Roberts (1980)

Twelve years have passed since the fall of Troy when they were put on Greek ships together with other slave women and the statue of discord towards the city of Athens. A great storm surprised them and, fortunately, they both survived the shipwreck and reached the island, where they were welcomed. They have now a simple, quiet life although they still suffer the consequences of their tragedy. Hecuba has adopted the infantile, defenceless and disturbed Ismene whose amnesia has deprived her of identity and memories, but whose eyes serve as the blind woman's guidance. This tranquillity is broken when Greek ships reach port. They look for Hecuba so as to interrogate her about the location of the statue of the Goddess of Good Fortune. She confesses that she ordered to throw it overboard in an attempt to save the ship during the storm. Heros, in his unflagging obsession with the cold and grey deity, obliges the fishermen of the island to look for it in the sea.

The old woman laments how the past has come back to her, how that fateful final day of the war is not finished yet. It is now Ismene who makes Hecuba confront the past to face the present and have a future. In order to do that, Ismene makes the old woman uncover her eyes, for she had resolved to blind herself as a tribute to her beloved ones. Devastated, Hecuba realises that now she cannot see with either of her eyes. “No light. Not even a shadow. Nothing!” (Bond 1978, II: 84). However, this total blindness brings her the courage and shrewdness necessary to act against the tyranny and abusive power of the Greek dictator. She starts devising a plan with the aid of Man, a runaway Greek slave from the silver mines of Athens, recently sheltered on the island.³ Taking advantage of Heros’ religious fanaticism and lying about her own prophetic powers, Hecuba states that the goddess has proposed a race around the island between Heros and the slave: the winner will have the statue and the loser will die. Heros falls in the trap and accepts to run against the deformed and hunchbacked slave. Hecuba’s planned ruse succeeds and Heros is killed at the hands of Man:

HEROS.[...] How- how- tell me how this lame man could run round this island in half an hour?

HECUBA. How could you sit and smile under a tree while your life was thrown away? I can’t answer your questions. Ask your goddess.

HEROS. I would! Everything! But she’s not in my hands! I’d ask the sea if I could!

HECUBA (*to* MAN). This is your only chance.

MAN. I take it!

(Bond 1978, II: 106)

The Greek soldiers, tired of their leader’s irrationality, opt for sailing back to Athens without attacking the islanders. The next day, Hecuba’s shattered corpse is found on the shore for she had been trapped by a storm the previous night. Nevertheless, she had already reached her goal: she had defeated tyranny and irrationality, she had bestowed hope and future for the islanders, and her beloved Ismene was recovering her sanity

³ This character is often denominated Dark Man in Bond’s notes due to his dark, dirty face. In Bond’s (1978, II: 76) play we find also the reason:

“ISMENE. And what’s that dirt in your face?
MAN (shrugs). Dust from the rock.”

thanks to the love of the courageous Man. Little by little the island wakes up and the funeral games for Hecuba's passing begin.

In conclusion, Bond recreates in the first part of *The Woman* the apocalypses of a civilisation as a metaphor of the possible fall of humankind. Nonetheless, these images of chaos, suffering and mourning are transformed in the second part into a message of optimism, security, and faith by the possibility of healing of a decaying society through the collective action against an imperialist, nationalist, classist and repressive system.

4. Myth, classical tradition and reception

[The Woman] isn't a play about the past. It's a play about the present.

Greek society created us. We live in the world of the Greeks.

(Bond, qtd. in Klein 1995: 280)

In this section we are going to analyse the remarkable traces of the classical tradition in *The Woman: Scenes of War and Freedom* by Edward Bond and explain the purpose of the author when resorting to the myths from the ancient Graeco-Roman literatures in his play. As a first approximation to the concept of myth, we chose the one provided by El-Sawy (2016: 344): "Myth for Barthes is a type of collective illusion, a story that society tells itself in order to justify its own world the way that it is."⁴ Myths are continuously reformed and conditioned by the historical context. Thus, they are always political in the sense that they are the result of the power structures of a specific society in a specific time. Bond, as we will see, will use "myth", according to El-Sawy (2016: 344), "to describe dominant, historically-rooted, cultural beliefs and values which should be called into question".

The literature of Great Britain has made use of classic mythology throughout its history and across the different literary genres. Classical history, literature and fine arts began to gain importance in the Renaissance period and the Elizabethan Age, where a

⁴ El-Sawy's definition of myth is based on the marxist perception of the term provided by Roland Barthes in *Mythologies: Roland Barthes* (1972).

wide variety of motifs and allusions to ancient sources were used by noteworthy writers. Among them we find John Milton and his *Paradise Lost*, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* or even William Shakespeare with plays like *Timon of Athens*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Troilus and Cressida*, among others. Later, in the seventeenth century, emerged in Britain the so-called neoclassical literature, whose followers aimed to imitate the Graeco-Roman style of writing. Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* is a well-known representative of this movement. Romantic writers of the nineteenth century also regarded classical art and literature as a source of inspiration and experience. Lord Byron's *Don Juan*, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and John Keats' "Ode to a Grecian Urn" are some of the greatest examples of this movement. Even modernist writers of the twentieth century used in their works names, places or characters that incorporate the classical tradition in British literature. This was the case of James Joyce in his *Ulysses*, for instance; others like Virginia Woolf simply referred or praised this ancient heritage in their works. Regarding contemporary literature in Great Britain, a wide range of different writers (Alice Oswald, Elisabeth Cook, Tony Harrison..., and a long etc.) have emerged and have been also able to capture the magic of the classical mythology, using this interculturality to express their own personal message.

Nevertheless, it is in the dramatic genre where the classical myth has mainly survived in current times. The new British playwrights focus on a less realistic theatre, more epic and allegorical, by means of making the most of the stage as a vehicle to express their ideas. They present new points of view on the genre, the politics and the society with the final aim of producing the cathartic effect in the footsteps of the ancient Greek tragedy. They attempt to tackle universal issues using classical tradition as a reference, obtaining, in this way, a high level of representation and timelessness.

Klein (2003:21) states that Edward Bond "[has] repeatedly expressed [his] admiration for the Greeks, their myths and culture and its repercussion on Western civilisation". *The Woman* appeared after Edward Bond's immersion in Greek tragedy, comedy and epic just as Hay and Roberts (1980: 239) explain:

[Edward Bond] had also spent two holidays on Malta: 'I wanted to soak myself in the Mediterranean background...just to face the sun on the rocks, as it were, as simple as that. I re-read all the extant Greek tragedies while I was there and the

comedies too [...] I wanted to go back and re-examine that world and how moral and rational it was, and whether or not it could be a valid example for a society like ours. I came to the conclusion that it wasn't.

The story of the Trojan War, the most well-known ancient Greek myth, serves as a backdrop for the entire play. The violent struggles it addresses are still prevailing in modern times. As Diane Thompson (2004:12) affirms:

Troy stories were a marvellous source of plots and characters, centring on major issues of European civilization. Trojan themes included power and war, love and deceit, loss in victory and success in failure, the heroic West and the suspect (decadent) East, the tangled connections between human desires and divine will, the end of the world, and the beginning of a new way of life [...] Troy stories provide a sense of substance and continuity, tying the ancient past to the future present.

This same author (2004: 12, 36) wonders about the reasons that have determined the huge influence and survival of this narrative and concludes the following:

Troy stories have been narrated by some of the world's greatest poets, playwrights and novelists, including Homer, Aeschylus, Euripides, Virgil, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Racine, Goethe and Joyce. [...] The *Iliad* has not only survived but flourished, carrying memories of Troy into the twenty-first century.

This paper attempts to define which are the fundamental sources or subtexts of the classical tradition that underlie *The Woman*, detailing the analogies and differences in terms of context, *topos* and characters. We are aware that, in general, myths are "flexible" in their adaptation to a text, albeit also resistant since their footprints remain indelible. In the majority of the cases, when a tragic author recreates a drama, they tend to invert or modify the classical myth in a way that we can find a new Achilles, or a completely changed Penelope. In this way, Klein (2003:22) sustains that "Bond disposes of his

literary and historical source material with freedom, conflating characters and re-ordering events.”

The oldest source of the legend of The War of Troy is found in the *Iliad*, attributed to the poet Homer. With this epic poem about the intense, brutal and pathetic battle between Achaeans and Trojans, composed around the eighth century B.C.E., the Western literary tradition began. However, the *Iliad* solely narrates a specific moment of all the cycle: the rage of Achilles and the deaths of Patroclus and Hector.

Even though it is clear that the point of departure is the last days of Troy, Bond places his story under a different context than the Homeric tale. Athens has been during a lustrum, and not a decade, sieging Troy. We are still facing a religious and superstitious society, but the Gods do not intervene in human affairs. Just as Klein (2003: 22) states: “Religion is not represented by the Olympian Gods, but by cynical Greek and Trojan priests, who seek political influence and manipulate the masses.” With the decease of old king Priam, by natural death and not by assassination, the tragic end of the war is triggered. A war which does not start with the famous kidnap of the beautiful Helen by the Trojan prince Paris, but with Priam’s theft of the “Goddess of Good Fortune” from the Athenians.

Bulman (1986: 507) explains that the Goddess of Good Fortune becomes “a skillful compression of Helen and the Olympian gods into a primitive stone statue, an idol of doubtful value that brings Homeric myth down to a human scale.” We can also connect this idea with the myth of the Palladium which, although not mentioned by Homer, is actually described in the poems of the so-called Epic Cycle. This myth describes the Palladium as a divine statue representative of the goddess Pallas, whose virtue was to guarantee the integrity and immunity of the city that possessed and worshipped her. It was supposed to have been made from Pelops’ bone and the tradition reveals that Paris took it at the same time he abducted Helen in an attempt to defend Troy. Ajax, after the war, recovered it so as to give it to Agamemnon together with Cassandra, Priam’s daughter.⁵

As regards to the characters used by the English playwright, he has avoided using the classic characters of the Homeric myth such as Hector, Aeneas, Achilles and Odysseus in an attempt to eliminate any trace of romanticism and heroism. He employs the figure

⁵ Grimal (1989) s.v. Paladio.

of the Greek commander, called ironically Heros, as a mixture of the most terrible mythical heroes of the warring-epic tales: ambitious, ruthless, haughty and without honour, albeit remarkably young and attractive, just like Helen. Perhaps this character can arguably be compared with the mythical Theseus, the king and hero of Attica par excellence, jealous of Heracles, killer of the Minotaur, founding father of the democratic government in Athens and infatuated also with the fair Helen.⁶ Given that Heros appears in the second part of the play as a leader, boasting about the *pax Athenaea* and his new and silvered Athens (based on slavery) in front of Hecuba, we may also draw an analogy with the figure of Pericles, the great politician in the golden age of classical Athens.

Conversely to Homer, Bond concentrates the plot of his work not in legendary battles, but in the collective action of two women, Hecuba and Ismene, who will try, unsuccessfully, to avoid the plundering and destruction of Troy. Hecuba, in the *Iliad*, plays a minor role as Priam's wife and mother of famous heroes and heroines. She is concerned about Hector's wellbeing and desperately asks him not to encounter Achilles at the gates of the city. She is most definitely a figure of pathos but she is also a figure of rage: She wishes she could eat Achilles' liver, whom she blames for the death of her son.

The Trojan saga continues with the Athenian tragedy composed by a plethora of playwrights in the fifth century B.C.E. Distinguished and truly influential authors like Aeschylus, Sophocles or Euripides built their dramas on characters and materials from the Trojan legend. Euripides' influence is undoubtedly detected throughout *The Woman* in a very explicit way. This author is regarded as a "philosopher of the scene" who tackles and criticises in his works the conflicts and passions of the irrationality of mankind. All of that, combined with his anti-war attitude (he did not take part in any military campaign), show his close relationship with the dialectic and critical personality of Bond, although the latter is more politically committed. Bulman (1986:507) theorises about the reasons of this connection between Bond and Euripides: "I think, because plays such as these at once embody and criticise the *ethos* of Homeric mythology. They preserve the hero worship, the violence, and the exploitation celebrated in Homer even as they censure such things as socially and morally repugnant."

⁶ As Spencer (1992: 96) aptly explains it, Heros might be simply the epitome of the Greek hero: "Heros is a composite portrait of Greek leaders: implacable and cruel, he rationalises his desire for fame and fortune with appeals to honour, duty, and the common good. Like the Heros of Greek myth, he is young, attractive ambitious and proud."

Among Euripides' works, it is worth mentioning *The Trojan Women*, an exceptional tragedy, which starts with the end of the city of Troy now turned to ashes, a devastated waste land, and culminates in a dreadful solitary pain of the war victims. This author with his characteristic dramatic mastery, retells the Iliupersis with appalling scenes of violence, sacking, sacrilege and the especially wrenching episode of Astyanax's death, Hecuba's grandson and last male of the Priamic lineage, which leaves us the image of a queen turned into a wretched, crestfallen slave with tears streaming down her face. As Thompson (2004: 7) cogently argued, "Euripides' *Trojan Women* is perhaps the bitterest anti-war play ever written. In it he presents the victorious Greek heroes as cruel monsters and focuses audience sympathy on the suffering of the captive Trojan women and children, victims of war".

Hecuba is another tragedy by Euripides based on the Trojan cycle which describes how after the fall of the city, the Greeks, in their journey back home with the captive Trojan women, stop at Chersonese.⁷ There, Hecuba, the great Trojan matriarch, suffers again the loss of her daughter Polyxena, sacrificed in honour of Achilles, as well as the loss of her son Polydorus, killed at the hands of Polymestor, the king of Thrace and Hecuba's best friend. But on this occasion, we see how Hecuba, desperate, turns her cries into vengeance and, with the help of her Trojan women, in retaliation kills the sons of the traitor Polymestor and pulls the latter's eyes out. Bond, then, attempts in his play to transform that act of revenge into a revolutionary act but using the same arts of planification, shrewdness and deception. Bulman (1986: 512) claims, "just as Euripides's Hecuba defeats Polymestor with a ruse, so Bond's Hecuba brings about the death of Heros with a trick".

The figure of Hecuba is significantly developed in Euripides' tragedies, to the point that she becomes a symbol of greatness and misfortune and the epitome of the sorrowful mother. Bond gives to the heroine of this drama a powerful position. As Krzyzaniak (2004: 203) affirms, there could be also some possible similarities with Medea: "Bond resembles Euripides, whose *Medea*, in which the author gave voice to the emotions of an abandoned wife and allowed her to express all the pain connected with the injustice of the patriarchal society that formed her". In *The Woman*, Hecuba becomes the queen of

⁷ According to Spencer (1992: 97), "a case could be made that *The Woman* subtly remarks the imagery, episodic structure, and thematic impact of Euripides' *The Trojan Women* in Act I and *The Hecabe* in Act II".

Troy after Priam's passing, although she is deposed by her own son, an impersonal Son who cannot evade the disastrous fate of the city. Nevertheless, Bond goes even further and presents us with a Hecuba who learns from the hardships she has endured and acts actively and consciously so as to prevent any society from suffering the horrors of war.

Bond is also immensely inspired by Sophocles, the most classic of the Athenian playwrights, and by several of his famous tragedies. In *Antigone*, the heroine embodies the ideal of a sister determined to fulfil her moral duty, which leads her to disregard the commands of the tyrant Creon and bury the corpse of her brother Polynices. Edward Bond creates the character of Ismene as the innocent and rational wife of Heros and names her after the mythical sister of Antigone, daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta. In *The Woman* Ismene betrays her husband, deserting his side and she is sentenced, just like Antigone, to be buried alive. Both of them refuse to withdraw their principles, regardless the consequences. Bulman (1986: 509) explains that Bond "recognized in Antigone's civil disobedience an attitude necessary for the cultural revolution wherein myth would give way to history". Contrary to Bond's Ismene, Sophocles' Antigone cannot be considered a social activist. As Bulman (1986: 509) points out, "where Antigone defies her uncle only to obey the equally oppressive demands of religion, Ismene defies Heros in the name of the common man who, she thinks, ought to serve himself, not others."⁸ On this matter, Bond writes a poem entitled "Antigone" in his *The Activist Papers* (1980), lamenting her being unable to change Creon's patriarchal mentality: "If Creon has power he can't be just / And Antigone's weakness can't make her wise / Or her pain teach her the law." (qtd. in Bulman 1986: 509)

When analysing another well-known tragedy by Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, we notice correspondences with Bond's protagonist, Hecuba. Oedipus is the tragic hero par excellence. Unable to dodge the ill-fated prophecy and being naïve and fair, he commits parricide and incest. Hecuba also experiences suffering as a result of the thoughtlessness of her son Paris, also sadly foretold. Their cities endure a terrible plague and they both are in search of the truth, the origin of their misfortunes. Bond reutilises the "Oedipic" act of pulling his eyes out before adversity. However, as Carney (2004: 20) affirms: "Hecuba's blindness is not the symbolic blindness of Greek tragedy or King Lear, in

⁸ Spencer (1992: 96) notes that "Bond's Ismene also provides a variation on the legendary Helen, deserting the Greeks for the Trojans for quite different reasons; and her rescue from the wall by scavenging soldiers gives an ironic twist to the Euripidean Helen, who was spirited away by a goddess leaving an image in her stead".

which the loss of eyesight paradoxically reveals a deeper understanding and acceptance of the significance of human life, but rather a willed blindness towards the past.”⁹ Bond’s Hecuba, conversely to Oedipus and even though she is aware of her kingdom’s end, does not flee and, most importantly, she tries to encounter a rational solution to the war, weighing up the possibility of returning the statue of the Goddess of Good Fortune to the Athenians. Bulman (1986: 510) asserts: “Bond uses Sophocles as an antidote to Homeric myth. Through characters inspired by Antigone and Oedipus (each of whom has, in his view, the potential for social awareness) he subjects that myth to a Marxist analysis and, as he does so, makes it history”.

In addition to this, from Bulman’s point of view (1986: 510), we can also encounter echoes of the plot of Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus*, where a blind and defeated Oedipus, guided by his daughter Antigone and looking for a sanctuary to die, is chased by the new king Creon. Likewise, in the second part of *The Woman*, after the shipwreck of the Greek ship where the enslaved Ismene and Hecuba were, these two women reach port on an Aegean island, where they live anonymously in peace, trying to forget the past and helping each other. Ismene has become Hecuba’s eyes, while Hecuba pour all her maternal instinct in the now disabled and tormented Ismene. Nevertheless, the past, embodied in the figure of Heros, comes back before them with all its crudeness.

Bond could also be influenced by Aristophanes. This playwright used to mock and present a distortion of reality with a didactic purpose. In *Lysistrata* we encounter a sorority among women in flippant and funny terms. A female pact is established and carried out by them with the aim of finishing the war. Bond shares, in a more formal and serious way, his anti-war ideology, his social criticism, providing also a vision of warring conflicts from a female perspective.

The Woman is an example of a Greek drama in terms of staging, epic scope and themes. Although it lacks a proper chorus (the Trojan Women might serve at the end of Part One as a sort of Greek chorus), this tragedy possesses many of the ingredients typical of Greek tragedies: it deals with high class characters who face a dilemma, the *mythos* or plot is the most important part, it demands a profound reflexion (that can lead us to a *katharsis*) and infuses us with two feelings, *phobos* (fear) and *eleos* (mercy). However,

⁹ However, according to Spencer (1992: 96), “the image of self-blinding carries similar symbolic weight in both plays”, i.e. in Bond’s *The Woman* and Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

we have before us a tragedy not incited by Gods, but by the cruelty of humankind. In this sense, we can find traces of the British classical tradition, especially Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*. In this play by the acclaimed English bard, the conclusion is that only humans could have caused the fall of Troy and the destruction of civilisation. Both Shakespeare and Bond agree on blaming humans, not gods, for the sacking and fall of the city.¹⁰ They coincide also in providing a simple solution to end the war: giving back Helen. Is Helen worth a war? Is, in Bond's case, the statue of the Goddess of Good Fortune worth a war? As Diane Thompson (2004:117) affirms: "Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* is the first truly modern version of the Troy story, as it unequivocally faces the anguish of inadequate human decision-making in the context of a disorderly universe".

Other characters used, omitted or refigured by Bond can be traced back to the classical tradition and mythology. For instance, Helen is substituted by a grey stone figure; it serves, however, in the same way, as the excuse for the Greeks' conquest plans. Polyxena's sacrifice is omitted by Bond, perhaps with the aim of avoiding the image of conformism and submission this woman's act represented. Cassandra, Hector's sister, is refigured as Astyanax's mother, and no prophetic powers are attributed to her, conversely to what the Greek mythology says.¹¹ Nestor is the archetype of the wise old man, brave and excellent in the council, one of the few that returned safely back to Greece; in *The Woman*, he is portrayed together with the soldiers as a lecherous, alcoholic man who takes pleasure in killing. Contrary to Nestor, Thersites, who is described in the *Iliad* as the most unpleasant and coward of all Greeks participating in the campaign (even accused of sedition) is, ironically, the one in charge of accompanying the ambassador Ismene before the Trojans in a supposedly diplomatic mission. Regarding the chorus of women, the Trojan women play a role which goes beyond the wretched, epic and tragic victims from Euripides, to raise their voices with other men, poor men and slaves in favour of rationality, thus enhancing the dramatic force.¹²

¹⁰ To Spencer (1992: 97), "the alternation of the Greek war council with the Trojan defense council recalls the pattern and demythologizing thrust of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, but the various betrayals of Bond's play are quite different in nature."

¹¹ She plays the role of Andromache, the wife of Hector and hence the actual mother of Astyanax. The reasons for this blending of characters might also be due to the fact that Cassandra is possibly a better-known character from the Trojan myth than Andromache, at least for a general audience.

¹² Susana Nicolás (2007a:40) claims that "A pesar de las similitudes temáticas y estilísticas que se encuentran entre Bond y Eurípides, el dramaturgo inglés trasciende la crítica social de la Grecia clásica para denunciar la irracionalidad de nuestra sociedad y la necesidad de un cambio."

Another interesting source of inspiration for Edward Bond, specially for the final denouement of the story, is an Aesopic fable. If Homer is considered the father of the epic narrative, Aesop is the creator of the fable, a brief and simple narration in which animals are personified in order to portray the flaws and weaknesses of human condition in accordance with the popular morality. Bond chooses the fable of “the Hare and the Tortoise” to dramatize the plan of the cunning Hecuba, who takes the role of the fox and judge, in order to kill the Greek dictator. In this case, the race is run by an athletic military man and a lame, slave man and a ‘divine intervention’ leaves the former character under a spell. We can state that the apologue writer Aesop, born in the VI century B.C.E., and Edward Bond, a twentieth-century writer, share the same ironic analysis of human relationships and power structures with a moral and didactic goal. This fable is, after all, a critique of human arrogance and a praise to guile, which takes advantage of the vanity of those who are overconfident.¹³

Revising Homer’s, Euripides’ and Sophocles’ myths, Bond unveils that the legendary war and conquest of Troy, devoid of any kind of glorious or legendary aura, is full of destruction, violence, suffering and tyranny: the pillars of the irrational capitalist society. The English playwright transforms the epic narrative into dialectics, with the final aim of demystifying the history of our civilisation. For Hildegard Klein (2003: 33), it is obvious that “in Bond’s play it is his insistence that the past has to be remembered, not as myth, but as history, to be able to analyse the irrational power, to examine the present and to trace a path towards a more rational future for our society.” This very same author (2003: 21) asserts that Bond tries to make his audience think about the foundations of our current social system:

He wants the audience to be able to rationally analyse the truth about Greek history, the birthplace of capitalism. The author feels that the capitalist society justifies its repressive methods through a recourse to sacred myths to perpetuate an unjust society. Bond’s artistic form - a rational, socialist theatre - is conceived as a medium to expose the self-destructive force of our sacred myths maintained by a repressive system.

¹³ “When the time came both started off together, but the hare was soon so far ahead that he thought he might as well have a rest: so down he lay and fell fast asleep. Meanwhile the tortoise kept plodding on, and in time reached the goal” (Aesop 1994: 99).

Thus, in her words once again (2003: 22), we can state that *The Woman* has a political purpose, just like the original *theatron* of the Greek culture, with significance that has the purpose of connecting with people and question the nature of humanity:

The play is a political fable on an epic scale where the author proceeds to demystify the most classic of myths, the Trojan War and the Greek Heroic Age. The play comprises the whole cultural heritage of fifth century B.C. Greek Drama, being based on the work of Homer, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and the Athenian dramatists, especially Euripides' two Hecuba plays, *The Trojan Women* and *Hecuba* and Sophocles' *Oedipus* and *Antigone*.

5. Women

Instead of writing from the woman's "point of view", I tried to treat the women in the play as normal human beings. I showed them capable of facing and understanding and resolving the same moral and political problems as men.

(Bond, qtd. in Hay and Roberts 1980: 251)

Ancient societies, including the Greek one, were immersed in a patriarchal ideological system. The existence of an otherness was born from a gendered system, according to which women were placed in an inferior position and were held unequal to men in terms of legal rights as well as social and cultural opportunities. All of that was legitimated by a male power discourse and supported by law, myth and religion. Despite those female stereotypes that have reached our times, we can deduce that not all women were submissive and conservatives: many of them were transgressive women that explicitly or tacitly rose up to participate in the historical events of their times, leaving behind that secondary role as grieving and tragic women normally attributed to them in classical texts.

Edward Bond introduces in *The Woman* female characters that defy the established patriarchal paradigms to pronounce themselves as defenders of peace. They act against tyranny,

abusive powers and imperial belligerence in an attempt to avoid the destruction of Troy, whose siege need to cease after five long years. In spite of the fact that the main female characters belong to the leading, upper class group, they will not be unaware of the horrors of the war. What is more, their revolutionary acts in defence of truth and freedom will make them victims of the conflict.

A sharp dichotomy is presented in this play with regards to gender. On the one hand, men are portrayed as cruel, proud, conceited and always longing for power; on the other hand, women's souls are full of humbleness, compassion, kindness and humanity. This being said, we should take into account the critical view of Oliver Taplin (1978: 931), according to whom:

The Woman tries hard to be a feminist play. The men are brutish and callous. Hecuba and Ismene are subtle, imaginative and uncorrupted. I oversimplify in order to argue that this underlying contrast is nothing new (it is common in Greek tragedy); nor is it very helpful. It does not help women to find real influence in addition to moral superiority, nor does it help men to yield privilege or to live down their inherited burden of guilt. The cause of women is not served by the simple expurgation of the great sexist myths, in annihilating Clytemnestra or by turning deadly Helen into a lifeless statue.

Hecuba and Ismene, albeit living in an irrational environment, have learned from past mistakes and their sensitive nature has obliged them to act under the light of reason. Bond demythologises the constructed gender roles from historical perspectives elevating the woman figure to a "model of honour, justice, and freedom in a society that is notoriously considered patriarchal and even misogynistic" (El-Sawy 2016: 347).

Hecuba is undoubtedly the woman who inspired the title of the play. She is depicted as a "dignified public figure" (Bond 1978, I: 26), a noble and cultivated old woman, heir of a kingdom which is haunted by her husband Priam's senselessness and religious fanaticism. She claims: "A good husband. A wise king. But useless" (Bond 1978, I: 30). She knows the fall of Troy is unavoidable and she is determined to accept the selfless help of her political enemy to avert the suffering of her people. She is a strong, shrewd woman capable, in Part One, of infusing Ismene with the determination, leadership and confidence she needs to increase the

conviction of her altruistic ideals and awake in her the imminent necessity to take action.¹⁴ But even the bravest woman is defeated by the male irrationality embodied by her own son and the priests, who have no hesitation in taking the power away from her. Without any possibility of political action, Hecuba's suffering will gradually increase until the day of the massacre when, in a desperate act, she will blind herself to the world. Regarded as the universal symbol of oppression to women, the Trojan leader goes from married to widow, from mother of a great lineage to the loss of her children, from a proud queen to a humiliated slave and from embodying the moral strength of her people, to the representation of the most profound dejection and sadness.

In Part Two Hecuba becomes a decrepit and vulnerable old woman who has, however, found a sanctuary in a quiet island and that, consciously, opposing her now adoptive daughter Ismene, has decided to block her memories from the past: "I don't want to remember" (Bond 1978, II: 72). However, the past does come back in the form of a Greek army. This time is Ismene who will give Hecuba the strength to open her eyes to this world of horror and to act consequently.¹⁵ The clever and strong leader emerges once again and directs the plan to kill Heros with the aid of a proletarian and revolutionary force embodied by Man, the slave. Her tragic death can be interpreted as a vengeance of the forces of nature, as a suicide or even as a divine punishment. Hay and Roberts (1980: 263) affirm that "her death, when the storm hits the island again on the night after the race, remind [them] of the cost of bringing about change".¹⁶

Ismene is the other essential woman in Bond's play. Her personal development throughout the story is more complex than Hecuba's. Overshadowed by the figure of her husband Heros, "the cleverest woman married to the handsomest man, my dear. Not a wise match" (Bond 1978, II: 71), Ismene's initial behaviour as submissive and quiet clearly fits what is expected from her in this male world. According to Carney (2004: 11), she "enacts the combined elements of radical doubt and innocence that Bond imagines as the truth of the human, free of ideological encumbrance." Her presence and participation in the military council is considered as something exceptional for a woman since, as Nestor affirms "No women in council. Bad luck" (Bond 1978, I: 11). The quick interview with Hecuba acted as an 'eye-opener' for Ismene and she realises her lack of affective relationships, her dependence to her

¹⁴ "Una nueva Ismene 'hecubizada'", as Susana Nicolás (2007a: 22) defines her.

¹⁵ "Instead, my enemies come – and I must be ready again. Yes, ready for all my old anger to sweep through me, like the fire of Troy. Help me to take it off". (Bond 1978, II: 83)

¹⁶ Bond (1978, II: 68) explains the inevitability of human mortality in a metaphorical and poetic way: "And all the time the branches grow into the tree, and the weight of the arms tightens their roots in the trunk till it's knotted and rimed and the tree stops bearing fruit. Then it's cut down and burned".

husband¹⁷ and, above all, Hecuba makes her aware of the horrors of war. Her initial idealism is transformed into commitment and, ignoring the consequences, she offers herself as a hostage to Troy so as to oblige the Greeks to keep their promise.

Imprisoned by Son with the Trojan queen, Ismene is finally enlightened by a new sense of autonomy guided by reason. “In prison you’re free to tell the truth” (Bond 1978, I: 29). She becomes the representative of all political prisoners of all times. From the wall of Troy, she encourages the soldiers to return to Greece and avoid Troy’s destruction with an anti-violence speech. After Son is murdered and the Goddess of the Good Fortune is taken back to Achaean territory, she is sentenced to immurement by the Greek council, whom she again defies as a dignified female political activist. Ismene curses them and states the following: “No, I shan’t kill myself. I’ll be alive when you go into Troy. I shall sit in the dark and listen till the last wail. Not to tell tales when I go to heaven, but so that the truth is recorded on earth” (Bond 1978, I: 55). As Bulman (1986: 509) asserts, “Ismene would shake the foundations of western culture by refusing to subscribe to its myths”.

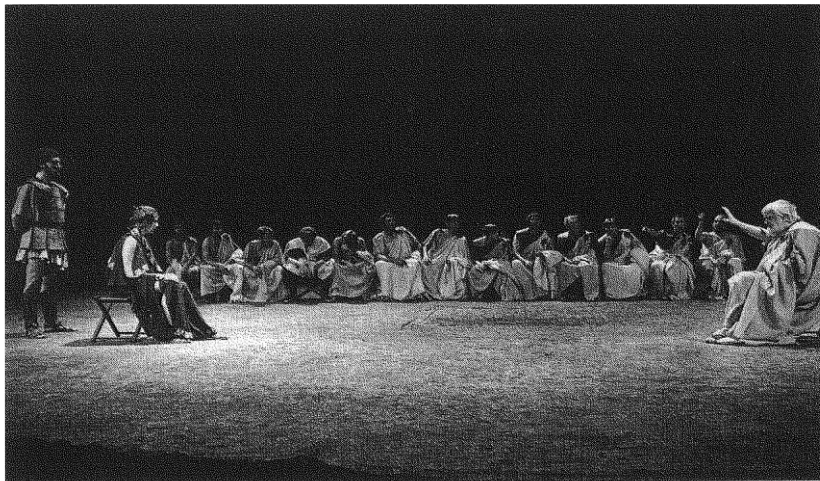


Image 3: Ismene faces “Greek justice” in the tribunal scene of *The Woman*.

Source: Jenny Spencer (1992)

Ismene’s sanity, memories, maturity and intelligence were buried in the wall of Troy. In the fishermen’s island, twelve years later, she survives thanks to Hecuba’s care. Nonetheless, behind that infant and defenceless aura, Ismene still keeps that revolutionary seed, that courage

¹⁷ “It’s easy for you now your husband’s dead. Mine’s alive. You tell me to make his decisions – but I have no power”. (Bond 1978, I: 33)

that led her to face the Greek imperialism and now succeeds in making Hecuba act to overthrow Heros. Edward Bond, at the end of the play, focuses the hopes on a fairer and more rational world on people like the innocent and recovered Ismene and the dauntless and committed Man.

It is not risky to affirm, just as Hay and Roberts (1980: 264) do, that Bond does not aim to have his tragedy sustained by two or three central characters; he offers a minor role to other characters who have, at the same time, a huge weight in the development of the story, such as the wretched Trojan crowd or the inhabitants of the island. In this section, however, we are focusing on the female roles so it is compulsory to talk about the Trojan women, all of them victims of a warring conflict for a grey and mundane statue. It is worth pointing out the suicide attack of three women against Greek soldiers beyond the Trojan wall. These courageous women are determined to sacrifice their lives as infection agents against the enemy. Under their veils, the devastating ravages of the plague of the city are visible. Unfortunately, this incident does not make Heros withdraw his troops and, backed by the protection of the goddess, he decides to continue the siege. Another group of women are the refugees, the slave women who wait to be deported to Athens¹⁸. These powerful women raise their voices in unison to avoid Astyanax's death, Hecuba's grandson, also unsuccessfully: "No! He's our only child. Our son. The rest are dead. Leave us this child. We're all his mother. Don't kill our son, you'd kill hundreds of children at one blow. Make a hundred women childless!" (Bond 1978, I: 59)

El-Sawy (2016) defines all these women as lights of truth who challenge social repression and show us the ability that human collectivism possesses to change the world. Susana Nicolás (2007a) speaks about heroines, energetic, autonomous and subversive voices that create a female league defying a male world in search of peace and the defence of the poor and oppressed groups. "Perhaps two women could find some way to solve this", expresses Bond (1978, I: 28) in words of Hecuba.¹⁹ Hay and Roberts (1980: 251) conclude that "Bond places all the moral development in the character of the two women", making them the models of fight and hope in an irrational and chauvinistic world.

¹⁸ Edward Bond resembles in this scene an image he watched in a documentary that hugely impacted him: "There was a line of women, about to be taken off somewhere by soldiers; they were so terrified that, when the soldiers moved behind them, they immediately started moving in the direction they had to go. It's that the effect we want." (Hay and Roberts 1980: 255)

¹⁹According to Susana Nicolás (2007a: 13), "Bond confía en la figura femenina como exponente revolucionario de la transición hacia un cambio social."

6. War

War and peace are the products of irrational society. They are siamese twins trying to strangle one another.

(Bond, 1978: 135)

Edward Bond, as we pointed out in section one of this paper, suffered in his childhood and youth from the traumatic experience of World War II. In his infantile mind, planes ceased to be toys and became symbols of destruction and death; war lost any heroic or glorious connotations. In the following lines Bond (2000: 2) tells his own story with the war, the army and the human self-destruction:

I was first bombed when I was five
The bombing went on till I was eleven
Later the army taught me ten ways to kill my enemy
And the community taught me a hundred ways to kill my neighbour.

The figure of Hitler, whom Bond considers the embodiment of evil, obsessed him throughout his lifetime. This is reflected in his works, where he has depicted irrational and inhuman characters who resemble the German leader, declaring himself an antimilitarist.

The main topic of his works is violence and in *The Woman: Scenes of War and Freedom*, he describes the most extreme form of all: war. In particular he uses the Trojan war, timeless paradigm of all conflicts, as the starting point for this play. Its cruelty has survived until our times immersed in several violent states of warfare, providing a sense of contemporaneity. As Lappin (qtd. in Susana Nicolás 2007b: 410) puts it, “the mutual suspicion of the Greeks and Trojans resembles East/West tensions and reflects the political turbulence of the Cold War in the fifties and sixties. The figure of Heros especially defines the demagogic leaders of the twentieth century”. Bond employs the ancient legend to show his reasoning against an unjust, selfish, useless and extremely destructive war, demolishing the memorable and epic concept of the Homeric battle and

following the footsteps of Euripides' tragedies. Krzyzaniak (2004: 207) speaks about the uselessness of war: "the inanity of war in which there are no winners, with the only outcome for both sides being inevitably suffering and death".

The historical context of the play is set in the Greek civilisation from the fifth century B. C. E. Athens is in a constant commercial expansion and the prosperous Troy is a hindrance in its hegemonic plans. Heros affirms: "When I was a child people still called Troy the fabulous city of the East. We played sacking Troy. Now I stand in front of it and it's a closed coffin with someone moving inside" (Bond 1978, I: 20). Bond demythologises the idealised Athenian democracy and describes it as imperialist, patriarchal, xenophobic and based on slavery in order to maintain its opulent status. In this way, Bond makes a harsh indictment of all the institutions from the army, one of the most barbarous kinds of oppression, to the corrupted law courts: "money buys power" (Bond 1978, I: 31). It is a society dominated by fanaticism, "war breeds fanaticism faster than plague" (Bond 1978, I: 37), religion and irrationality. Bulman (1986: 507) asserts: "This irrationality leads them to believe that prosperity can result only from war and conquest. Common men - soldiers, slaves - are exploited for such ends, while their leaders deceive them into thinking that rape and plunder will bring them honour." Power is based on brutality as well as superstition and sets reason aside, portraying a dehumanised civilisation rooted in violence. In this manner, El-Sawy (2016: 349) explains that the "traditional views of Greece as the cornerstone of honour and justice for Western civilization, with law courts and democracy, are ironically reversed and undermined through the devolution of the Athenian parliament and Heros' leadership."

Through his skilled narrative conforming to his didactic goal, Edward Bond expresses extreme forms of violence that show the human suffering in times of war. In order to do this, he even tainted the whole stage of the Olivier Theatre with blood, which can be considered the best stage to deliver his transgressive ideas and simulate the looting and burning of Troy. His command of the dramatic strategies led him to reach a catastrophic climax, a landscape of chaos, a dehumanised image with the power of provoking a great impact on the audience that, although aware of the original narrative of the Homeric myth, was made to start a mechanism of self-reflection upon this situation presented on the stage.

The British playwright succeeds in creating characters with great social and political force. As already stated in the previous section, male characters in *The Woman*

are representatives of irrationality, immorality and corruption. According to Sean Carney (2004: 12-14), Heros, the Trojan leader, “is a dramatic representation of a modern colonialist, nationalist ideology and how it figures itself through the rhetoric of destiny [...] Heros embodies the mind of authoritarian fascistic thinking”. We have before us a messianic leader (“I’m God to my men”, Bond 1978, I: 20), an inhuman, implacable, cruel and ambitious leader who justifies his barbaric acts by terms of honour, duty and greater good. For him, the end justifies the means. When Ismene implores him to avoid the sacking of Troy, he answers that “If I left Troy tomorrow, Troy would attack us – or someone else would attack Troy”; when reproached for the murders he had committed, Heros says that “in war the good hides behind the bad. [...] A good leader knows how to hate. [...] From time to time the people must be afraid” (Bond 1978, I: 89).

Carney (2004: 22) establishes a connection between Heros’ ideological blindness and his religious fanaticism: “His obsession is the dramatization of an ideology, the ideology that shapes the bourgeois consciousness around the interminable, nostalgic search for a lost object. Over the course of the play, Heros comes to represent the false consciousness of the narcissistic ego”. Hecuba defines him as a monster incapable of showing any pain or mercy when immuring Ismene. Nonetheless, the most savage act is perpetuated against Astyanax, whom Heros throws over the wall of Troy. “He’ll die and you’ll see his body!” (Bond 1978, I: 59). His cold heart ignores the begging of the child’s mother, Cassandra in Bond’s version, of the Trojan women, of his own wife and the desperate words of forgiveness, humiliation and submission expressed by Hecuba, Astyanax’s grandmother (“Teach him to hate us. Tell him I stole the statue. Say I ruined Troy. Heros think of the ways you can gratify your hate! Teach him! I’m a whore!” Bond 1978, I: 58). In short, for Carney (2004: 22) “Heros’ consciousness is the imperialist’s social psychosis, the tragic paradigm degraded into the ideology of destiny and predetermination, a tautological, destructive logic that seeks to map over reality in its image.”

In the Trojan side we encounter the male figure of Son. He is a young, greedy tyrant who gets his mother’s power over Troy. Hecuba reprimands him: “I saw this war corrupt almost everyone it touched. It’s taken you to the limit of corruption” (Bond 1978: 37). His avid desire for power, his ferocious loath towards the Greeks and his great thoughtlessness result in his warring paroxysm when exclaiming “They think they’re at war? Tell them the war starts now!” (Bond 1978, I: 36). Just like Heros, he shows an

extreme religious fanaticism and trusts blindly the sacred icon (“With the goddess we can resist all our enemies”, Bond 1978, I: 39). Even after arresting the hypocritical priest, he names himself as one of them, sealing the unavoidable destiny of his people: “I am the priest now. We can fight and die o surrender and die” (Bond 1978, I: 46).

Under the light of the behaviour of these characters we can affirm that Bond displays religion as an instrument of power, of ideological manipulation, another motif for triggering and justifying war. Both leaders use the Goddess of Good Fortune for their own political purposes of exploitation, alienation and conquest. Conversely, in the second part of the play, we see a society which is not ruled by any religious icon, a free society, with no ideological contamination but within a rational basis. It constitutes a model for any human being that should stop living –or dying– for a mere symbol, religion or ideology. In an interview to the author, he explained: “but religion is about learning to be afraid. It is a very cruel idea that somebody should torture and kill somebody in order to save somebody else from something called sin. Murder is murder whether it is done by God or civilians or soldiers” (Mulligan 1993).

Following this line of images of war provided in the play, we cannot forget the snapshots Bond offers of the oppressed groups. They are the real victims of the conflict and among them we can find different behaviours and reactions to the events they are experiencing. Firstly, the soldiers of both sides, mere numbers under strict military codes. Most of them miss their homes and wonder about the end of the siege “like staring at the back of a mirror for five years. You end up forgetting what you look like” (Bond 1978, I: 22); others are portrayed as frenzied, flippant and intoxicated by cruelty on the prospect of the forthcoming looting of Troy. Ajax claims: “When we get through those gates: women, loot, drink, arson!” (Bond 1978, I: 18). Ismene invites them to abandon the city to avert more suffering and she prophesies about their possible future: “You’ll be thrown into a grave on top of women and children you killed. Rubble from the ruins you make will be thrown on top of you! Soldiers peace! Peace! Peace!” (Bond 1978, I: 47). Ironic are the words pronounced by Nestor once Troy is devastated and after a day of raping and pillaging: “O lads let us remember the solemnity of the world and the awfulness of war” (Bond 1978, I: 63).

Another fundamental group is the ravenous, disheartened, furious crowd of Trojans. They are the one directly affected by the imperialism and absurd belligerency. Desperate, they not only achieve to assassinate Son in front of the divine temple, but also get to unify

their voices and their movements in a precise choreography of hands by which they throw the statue of misfortune to the Greeks, showing a great rationality. In a poem called “Hands” attached to the published version of *The Woman*, Edward Bond (1978: 130) wrote:

The crowd roars: The goddess!
Their hands wave like branches and clothes
In a storm
A voice: to the Greeks!
The hands swing in one common direction
Then waving and pushing
With gestures of hate and rejoicing
They take their curse to the shore

The Trojan refugees, as we explained in the previous section, constitute the spoils of war for the Greeks. Despite the state of shock they are immersed in, they also raise their voice to defend the last Trojan child, turning into active figures of protest away from the formal Greek chorus of mourners.

In addition to that, Bond offers symbols of oppression that can be found in any totalitarian political system. The wall around Troy which dominates Part One is, in words of El-Sawy (2016: 347), “reflecting the divisiveness of war, the alienation of one nationality from another, and the separation of human beings in the name of a meaningless abstract idea”. It is an obstacle that prevents them from finding truth and justice. The prison, in the same way, serves as a gag for silencing people like Hecuba and Ismene, political prisoners that proclaim historical truths so as to preserve human living and that fight for justice, logic and reason. The futility of war is one of those truths lamented by Hecuba when she says: “If men were sensible they wouldn’t have to go to war” (Bond 1978, I: 31). This senselessness can be explained by the following: “The war itself is necessary to unjust societies to justify their sick desires” (Krzyzaniak 2004: 207).

Troy is eventually destroyed by the bloodiest of all wars. In Part Two, when the Greeks appear, Heros brags about his reconciliation with the world, his *pax Athenaea* and his silvered city of Athens: “We have replaced fear with reason, violence with law, chaos

with order, plunder with work-” (Bond 1978, II: 79). However, the old woman suspects that all that is pure fiction, that history will be repeated now in the island; and this is confirmed by Heros himself in a conversation with Ismene: “In effect that would mean the painful destruction of these islanders and the razing of their village” (Bond 1978, II: 90). Hecuba only conceives one solution, of course out of the Greek laws, to end with the abuse of power and irrationality: killing Heros taking advantage of his own obsessive religious fanaticism.

In the second part of this play it is also worth mentioning the appearance of a character that would be crucial for the final denouement of the plot: Man. He is a runaway slave from the silver mines of Athens who functions as an antagonist of Heros. El-Sawy (2016: 350) aptly calls this confrontation a “Master versus slave, the oppressor versus the oppressed”. Man is presented as a dehumanised figure due to slavery and the unnamed character’s description draws us into a political reading of his condition for he embodies the consciousness of the working class. Thanks to Hecuba’s intelligence and plan, he is aware of his power and confronts the most powerful man of the world. In the first place, he exposes him the cruelty of life in the mines when exclaiming “When you built your new city our hell grew with it” (Bond 1978, II: 97); later, he would assassinate him with a sword. Ismene is then substituted for Man in Part Two as a revolutionary agent and succeeds in liberating the world from the oppression and belligerence of the Greek dictator. With his death, Edward Bond finishes with all the immoral values that imperialism has instilled in our culture. Justice is now possible with the end of that obsessive and ambitious ideology that, to that point, had only brought death and destruction as a consequence; a justice that can only turn into freedom for the future.

Within the pages of his play, Bond hides a fierce critique towards war. He shows the injustice and violence of the Greek imperialism in an attempt to achieve, through extrapolation, a reversal of the moral principles established in our contemporary society. Traces of these indictments can be found in his notes and poems attached to his book, where he dares to tackle, in a courageous way, other controversial issues such as the Holocaust or the H-Bombs. He leaves room, however, to hope. Edward Bond (1978, II: 136), a pacifist activist, wrote the following: “H-Bombs and death camps cannot be blamed on human nature. They are the consequences of social organization. It follows that war is not a consequence of human nature but of society. So, a society without war is possible.”

7. Conclusions

After this thorough analysis of Edward Bond's *The Woman: Scenes of War and Freedom* we can conclude that we have before us an iconoclastic author, a poet of the theatre and a major exponent of the contemporary literature of Great Britain. His working-class roots and tragic experiences during the war were decisive in the formation of his controversial personality. Bond's mastery in scenic arts and in other literary genres has helped him in spreading his left-wing political ideas by presenting a fierce critique of violence, human alienation and the corrupted capitalist system, which he blames for instilling injustice and suffering in our society. Hence, his rational and epic theatre is clearly associated with his moral and didactic purpose of social reform, making him a polemical, pessimistic and philosophical playwright who defies the established rules in British literature.

The Woman was developed in a period of great social contradictions and its perusal must be made from a contemporary point of view. Edward Bond creates a secularised human tragedy framed in the classical culture full of poetic language and symbolic images in order to transmit to his audience the necessity of self-reflection. This compendium of myth and political allegory within a plot dealing with the legendary Trojan War is loaded with irony and contrast between both parts (War and Freedom, alluding to the subtitle) and along the story with a dichotomy between destruction and reform, cause and effect, problem and action, and female and male differences.

It goes without saying that Edward Bond uses the classical tradition, Homer's, Euripides' and Sophocles' myths as well as stylistic devices such as a reinvented Greek chorus, for instance, so as to expose the irrationality of this mythical world, which he presents devoid of any sort of romanticism or heroism but, instead, laden with violence and tyranny. According to Bond, mythology, epic narratives and tragedies have always been idealised and, for him, they constitute the root of our contemporary exploitation and injustice. The past must be remembered as history, not myth, for he considers the latter a destructive force that serves unjust and corrupted societies.

In this manner, Bond's purpose in *The Woman* is to demythologise the past and, at the same time, explain the myths' relevance to our own history. He wants the audience to reflect upon the origins of our society, making us realise how that past heritage remains alive in our modern world and the dangers of letting it determine our future. Thus, by the

use and reconfiguration of characters, settings and topics of the classical tradition, he explores the causes of the deterioration of our society.

Regarding women, the title of the play alludes to the character of Hecuba and, in addition, to Ismene. Bond creates symbolic female figures, revolutionary and rational heroines who revolt in search of a political and social change in opposition to the patriarchal tradition and the corrupted male attitudes. Particularly we find the Bondian reelaboration of Hecuba, a wise and diplomatic woman able to empathise with the wife of her enemy and with the dehumanised Man, a representation of the working class, to fight for truth and justice out of the oppressed ideology of the Greek leader. Ismene, the other great woman, has a radical transformation from a silent, innocent and submissive wife to an independent woman, defender of peace, and who is eventually sentenced to death by her own people.

Nonetheless, there is not a mere dichotomy between the female and male worlds. Edward Bond also portrays a magnificent sorority and cooperation among women beyond the alliance of the two protagonists, with the suffering and united cry of the Trojan women or with the incorporation to the story of the infected women who, in a suicide act, sacrifice themselves as infection agents.

Furthermore, Bond succeeds in creating an exceptional visual paradigm of the effects of war, especially in the last scene of Part One. He shows violence, murder, cruelty, chaos, despair, death and devastation. We encounter extremely brutish acts such as Ismene's immurement, Astyanax's murder, Hecuba's self-mutilation and the burning and pillaging of Troy. What is more, whereas women embody rational and humane consciousness, male characters are representatives of immorality, corruption and religious fanaticism. Heros on the Greek side, is the personification of an imperialist, xenophobic and authoritarian leader; Son, Hecuba's son, is portrayed as a young ambitious despot longing for power.

Demythologising the heroic Greek past, Bond makes a harsh indictment of any type of apology for war. His antimilitarist discourse aims to appeal directly to our moral and raise awareness against the different conflicts that haunt and threaten our modern society. That being said, it is also true that the mythical narratives of the Trojan war prove a treasure trove of inexhaustible allegories for both epic and anti-war messages.

In conclusion, we can state that *The Woman: Scenes of War and Freedom* captivates the audience for its mythical subject based on the epic narratives of Ancient Greece, for the richness and interaction among its characters, its poetic and evocative style but, above all, for its political and social message. Even though Edward Bond presents an irrational society based on myths and abusive values, he also transmits the final message that justice, peace and freedom, that is, a better world, is possible. In this play, he offers an instructive and positive end affirming that human destiny is in our hands. In fact, Bond (2002: 2) defines himself, in a poetic way, as a future citizen of a fairer world:

I am a citizen of Auschwitz and a citizen of Hiroshima
Of the place where the evil did evil and the place where the good did evil
Till there's justice there are no other places on earth: there are only these two places
But I am also a citizen of the just world still to be made.

8. References

- Aesop. "The Hare and the Tortoise". *Aesop's fables*. Translated by V.S. Vernon Jones. Wordsworth Editions, 1994.
- Bond, Edward. *The Hidden Plot: Notes on theatre and the state*. Methuen Publishing Plc, 2000.
- Bond, Edward. *The Woman: Scenes of War and Freedom*. Methuen, 1978.
- Bulman, James C. "The Woman and Greek Myth: Bond's Theatre of History" *Modern Drama*, vol. 29, no. 4 (Winter 1986). 505-515.
- Carney, Sean. "Edward Bond: Tragedy, Postmodernity, and *The Woman*". *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, vol. 19, no.1(2004). 5-33.
- El-Sawy, Amany. "The Re-creation of the Past in Edward Bond's *The Woman*". *International Journal of Advanced Research*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2016). 342-353.
- Grimal, Pierre. *Diccionario de la mitología griega y romana*. Translated by Francisco Payarols. Barcelona. Ediciones Paidós, 1989.
- Harris, Jin. 2011. "Bond, Edward", Literature Online biography [Date of access: 13/03/2018]
- Hay, Malcom. and Philip Roberts. *Bond: a study of his plays*. London. Methuen, 1980.
- Klein, Hildegard. "Violence, Silence and the Power of Language in Edward bond's *The Woman*, and Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Love of the Nightingale*: Transformation of Greek myths for our time". *Gender Studies*, no. 2 (2003). Universitatea de Vest din Timișoara. 22-34.
- Klein, Hildegard. *El teatro didáctico de Edward Bond*. Tesis Universidad de Málaga, 1995.
- Krzyzaniak, Dagmara.: "Aspects of Classical tragedy in Edward Bond's *The Woman*." *Aspects of suffering: Classical themes in literature in English* (2004). Edited Liliana by Sikorska. New York; Frankfurt. 199-214.
- Mulligan, Jim. 1993. <https://www.jimmulligan.co.uk/interview/edward-bond-tuesday> [Date of access: 30 may 2018]
- Nicolás Román, Susana. *La figura femenina en el teatro de Edward Bond: las heroínas*. Universidad de Almería, 2007.
- Nicolás Román, Susana. *Voces femeninas en el teatro de Edward Bond*. Tesis Universidad de Almería, 2007.
- Presadă, Diana. "Edward Bond, a Distinctive Voice in Modern British Drama". *Reviste Recunoscute Philologica* (2003). 241-244.

Spencer, Jenny S. *Dramatic Strategies in the Plays of Edward Bond*. Cambridge University Press: CUP, 1992.

Taplin, Oliver. "What's Hecuba to him?" *The Times Literary Supplement* (August 1978). 931.

Thompson, Diane P. *The Trojan War: Literature and Legends from the Bronze Age to the Present*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2004.