

RESEARCH ARTICLE



ISSN

INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print):2321-3108 (online)

## THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR AS BACKDROP: HEMINGWAY AND EDWARD BOND'S VISION AS REPRESENTED IN *FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS* AND IN *HUMAN CANNON*

SURAJIT SEN

Assistant Professor, Department of English  
MBB College, Agartala, Tripura



SURAJIT SEN

### ABSTRACT

The significance of the Spanish Civil War of 1936 to 1939 for modern Spanish and more generally for modern European history has long been acknowledged. Causing the deaths of some half a million people and installing in power an oppressive regime which continued to claim Spanish lives, the war provides an obvious caesura in Spanish history. The war sponsored an outburst of artistic creativity which in turn, over a period of more than sixty years, has aroused enormous scholarly interest. One of them is the American writer Ernest Hemingway. He experienced it firsthand, wrote dispatches from innumerable frontlines, and used war as a backdrop for many of his most memorable works. *For whom the bell tolls*, is the most discussed single work arising from the Spanish Civil War. Hemingway uses the war concept as paradoxical irony in this book, to tell the reader what he thinks about war. The whole fascist/communist aspect, up against each other, is brought up here in the novel. Hemingway denounces both since both propagate a never-ending cycle of human loss, suffering and futility. Much later, the same Spanish Civil War caught the modern British playwright Edward Bond's fancy. His play *Human Cannon* uses the civil war as backdrop and is an attempt to come to terms not with a personal past since Bond was born in 1935 but with the past of the West, the recent past of Fascism and Nazism. Bond's Spanish Civil War is an imaginative, emotional and intellectual reconstruction, a fictional account of an exemplary civil war. It is not an eye-witness report; the events in Spain serve as an emblem of a more encompassing and general conflict between the eternal 'haves' and 'have nots' of the earth, a conflict which has informed Bond's plays since the beginning. This paper tries to capture the respective visions of Ernest Hemingway and Edward Bond of the Spanish Civil War through the analysis of the novel *For whom the bell tolls* and the play *Human Cannon*.

Keywords: civil war, paradoxical irony, human loss, emblem

©KY PUBLICATIONS

The significance of the Spanish Civil War of 1936 to 1939 for modern Spanish and more generally for modern European history has long been acknowledged. Causing the deaths of some half a million people and installing in power an

oppressive regime which continued to claim Spanish lives, the war provides an obvious caesura in Spanish history. With the participation of foreign soldiers, both of the mercenary and the altruistic kind, Spain's war was also very much an international

event, a major 'incident' in European diplomatic and military history. Less widely recognized though is the central importance of the Spanish Civil War. In fact, however, the war sponsored an outburst of artistic creativity which in turn, over a period of more than sixty years, has aroused enormous scholarly interest.

In 1936 when the civil war broke out in Spain, a considerable number of intellectuals in the United States lent their support for the cause of the Spanish Republican Government. Celebrated American writer Ernest Hemingway too volunteered himself for the purpose. The story of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is set against the background of the Spanish Civil War and it was published in 1940.

In the beginning it is important to become familiar with some historic facts and background information about the Spanish Civil War. The Spanish Civil War began on 17<sup>th</sup> July 1936 with a military uprising of General Franco. At that time, Spain was a republic with a liberal government under Giral. Franco had been deported to the canary isles due to political reasons, but with the help of German planes he could return to Spain accompanied by Spanish Legionnaires and Moroccans. Several more revolts took place throughout Spain during this summer, but the eastern parts of the country remained republican in the beginning of the civil war. The Republicans were called 'Rojos'(Reds) by the fascist insurgents. Monarchists, Catholics, and the Falange (fascist group consisting of mainly upper-class students, later the name for Franco's fascist party) supported the revolutionaries and Franco's revolutionary forces were known as Nationalists. Moreover, military assistance from Italy and Germany led at that time by Mussolini and Hitler bolstered the Nationalists. Their opponents, known as Republicans or Loyalists, were assisted by the Russian communists and a motley collection of volunteers who formed themselves into what was known as the International Brigades. Ultimately, Barcelona fell to the Nationalist forces in January 1939, and the war ended in April with the surrender of Madrid and the establishment of a fascist dictatorship under Franco.

*For Whom the Bell Tolls* records Ernest Hemingway's changing philosophy of life. The novel reveals that its writer has developed a new attitude

to life and reality since the days he wrote of a single man's courageous action and portrayed so meticulously the tragic plight of brave individuals in a ruthless universe as in *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms*, *To Have and Have Not* as well as in the collection of short stories. Formerly, estrangement was the essential theme of Hemingway's fiction. The sense of alienation common to the young people of the 1920s is seen in Nick Adams' exploits in the Michigan woods, amongst the Indians, and in the First World War. It is also seen in Frederic Henry and Catherine's denial of society in living as virtual recluses in the hills of Switzerland, in the matador's lonesome combat with the bull, and in Henry Morgan's lonely ethos- the desire to maintain independence in the midst of industrialized and mechanized mediocrity. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls* on the contrary the author expresses an explicit desire to return to society.

Robert Jordan is seen to transcend the limits of individual heroism, integrates himself with the Republican tradition of his family by taking up the cause of Spain, an intensely humanistic service that makes him emerge as a more enlightened person as he dies. In place of estrangement, alienation and loneliness, the predominant themes of his earlier works, as stated by Sanjukta Dasgupta in her book *The Novels of Huxley and Hemingway*, a new horizon of human solidarity in the framework of savagery, conflicts and war comes into view.

Subsequently, the Despatches and articles in *The Hemingway Review* Vol. VII, No. 2 (Spanish Civil War Issue) Spring 1988, confirmed these views. In this context, a reassessment of these views on the novel is made, further incorporating a review of the Hemingway outlook.

Hemingway's experimental world of the Spanish Civil War in the mid-1930s has been artistically transfused in the scenes and characters of the novel. So, the central character of the novel, Robert Jordan constantly steps back and forth in time as he reflects on his grandfather's role as a Republican when he conceals himself in a guerrilla hideout in the Spanish Civil War. The grim realities of war are universal, they cannot be localised, and in war America and Spain seem to become equated, enacting the relentless reality of death.

References to Robert Jordan's American tradition together with Maria's Spanish family tradition to emphasize their spiritual and traditional unity in their battle against the enemy of man adds a new dimension to Hemingway's approach to life in a hostile and indifferent universe. No longer rootless and alone, but integrated with a noble past and with a sense of togetherness with others, the Hemingway protagonist here seeks emancipation from the evils of the timebound reality in order to breathe afresh in an atmosphere of timeless freedom and immortality. Anselmo, a Spanish guerrilla colleague of Robert Jordan, expresses his sense of transcendence while engaged in the act of bridge-blowing: "And now, as he crouched behind the marker stone...he was not lonely nor did he feel in any way alone. He was one with the wire in his hand and one with the bridge, and one with the charges the *Ingles* had placed. He was one with the *Ingles* still working under the bridge and he was one with all of the battle and with the Republic." (443)

The Dispatches about the Spanish Civil War are authentic documents penned by Hemingway as a war correspondent. Deeply perturbed by the Spanish Civil War, Hemingway soon enough became an ardent supporter of the Loyalists and the Republic. He went over to Spain four times in order to witness and assess the situation for himself. To realize funds for the Spanish Republican force, Hemingway also made a documentary film entitled *The Spanish Earth*. This was followed by the publication of *Fifth Column and the First Fifty-Nine Stories*, a volume dedicated to the Spanish cause.

It was while in Spain that he realized that one man alone against the world could achieve nothing. The rudimentary feeling about the necessity of human solidarity in *To Have and Have Not* gains further dimension and comes out in clear in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. The title of the book, derived from one of John Donne's sermons, illustrated Hemingway's changing *weltanschauung*: "No man is an *Island* intire of itselfe;....any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in *mankind*; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

Hemingway's Dispatches will clearly show that the bell tolled for 'thee' in the Spanish Civil

War, and this feeling has been fictionalized in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in 1938. Hemingway was witness to many of the most important battles of the war- Bailuega/Guadalajara, Casa de Campo (Madrid), Quinto and Belchite, Ternel, Gandesa, Tartosa and the whole Ebro front in April 1938.

In his very first Dispatch, Hemingway exposed the hypocrisy of the Non-Intervention policy ironically in the denial of passport to the newsman Franklin to Spain, while in Dispatch No.2 he wrote to state that the American State Department, following its policy of strictest neutrality, could not prevent 12,000 Italian troops being landed at Malaga and Cadiz: "I am informed from a most reliable source that Italian regular troops now in Spain number 88,000. German troops...between 16,000 and 20,000." No wonder such a non-intervention generated pro-loyalists attitudes in Hemingway, and that was reflected in the character of Robert Jordan.

The ruthless reality of this 'unnecessary' civil war is envisaged by Hemingway as a threat to 'mankind'. A typical description in the novel runs thus,

They stood in the mouth of the cave and watched them. The bombers were high now in fast, ugly arrow-heads beating the sky apart with the noise of their motors. They are shaped like sharks, Robert Jordan thought... But these, widefinned in silver...these do not move like sharks. They move like nothing there has ever been. They move like mechanized doom. To Maria, 'What do they look like to you, guapa?' 'I don't know,' she said, 'Death, I think'. (87)

Hemingway's fiction on the Spanish Civil War can be divided into two categories. The first, the play and the stories, depict the war as Hemingway experienced events. The second, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, is largely invented.

Spanish critics have objected that *For Whom the Bell Tolls* does not give an accurate historical picture of the Spanish Civil War. But the stories and the play, in fact, do give us an accurate rendition of that part of the war that Hemingway actually experienced, in and around Madrid.

There is no doubt about Hemingway's disgust with the outcome of the Spanish Civil War

and with European policies in general, especially the democracies' capitulation to Hitler in Munich. As he told Arnold Gingrich from Paris in 1938, "Things here are so foul, now, that if you think about it you go nuts." A week later he described the European situation in a letter to Max Perkins as a 'carnival of treachery and rottenness.'

These stories about the real war, and to a lesser extent the play, precisely because they were both political and personal, served as a purging of Hemingway's feelings about the turn of events. By writing them, he got rid of the dreadful reality of the war as he had experienced it. The play and the stories, then, became a thinly veiled fictional memoir of the problems of the Spanish Republic.

Human sensibility is heightened in the novel with Jordan's growing sense of companionship with the Spanish guerrillas, Primitivo, Fernando, Andres, Anselmo, El Sordo, Pablo and his remarkable wife Pilar. Even in that short period, the sensitive Robert Jordan recognizes the individual temperaments of each of his comrades. He realizes that the gipsy Agustin is extremely frivolous and unreliable; that Primitivo has more heart than head as observed during his nervous emotion when El Sordo's band is attacked by Fascist planes; that Pablo, the erstwhile guerrilla leader suffers from war fatigue; that Anselmo, the seventy-year-old hunter-turned-guerrilla, can be a trusted friend and moral companion; that Pilar is a tremendous source of energy and courage to the guerrillas. Jordan realizes that each of his comrades has certain limitations, but together, they are a force to reckon with and this awareness is the essential purpose of the novel-the recognition of the need for human solidarity.

British playwright Edward Bond is one of the most prolific and influential playwrights of Britain now and his plays embrace violence as naturally as Jane Austen's novels do social manners. Over the years, he has composed many significant plays (*Saved*, *Lear* to name a few). *Human Cannon* (1983), which deals with the relationship between individual and revolution in the Spanish Civil War, is one of the present day efforts to foreground the war and its aftermath.

As it stands, the play *Human Cannon* is divided into two parts of respectively 5 and 7

scenes. It involves ideally a cast of 67 performers and requires a great scenic flexibility to suggest no less than 8 different locations. The place of action is simply described as 'Spain', an indication vague enough to leave free reign to the designer's imagination but which spells, in its very brevity and vagueness, the playwright's intention to avoid falling into the trap of local colour. Bond's village of Estarobon where a good deal of the action takes place is no more to be located on a map than Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna* to which the play owes at least one scene, the reason being that the socio-political conflict to which it is a background is not limited to its arid hills and ancient walls but concerns the whole country and, as the play amply suggests, beyond that, the West and even man in general. The time indications further underline Bond's desire to remain as free as possible from specifics: "the action of the first scene takes place in the late twenties, the other scenes from 1936 to 1940". By setting apart chronologically one scene from the other eleven, Bond emphasizes that the roots of the social evil that becomes manifest later, the fundamental causes of the determination of his main characters, which might otherwise appear suicidal and therefore atypical, go back many years and are the result not of a self-destructive outburst of revolutionary fervour but the violent expression of slowly maturing aspiration towards social justice and liberty.

The enormous cast of 67 constitutes an exception even on Bond's usually crowded stage. Moreover they divide into groups of 'villagers' and 'civil guards', 'sentries' and 'prisoners', 'soldiers' and 'judges' strongly suggesting that the drama which unfolds is a collective drama, the tragedy of a people or of the people, and not that of one particular individual.

Scene One is entitled *The Nameless Child* and introduces us to Agustina and Nando, two peasants from the village of Estarobon as they prepare without outward show of emotion to bury their dead infant. The baby has no name because its parents were too busy eeking out a miserable living to get baptized before it died. The priest blames them for their impiety and the death of the child. When he is gone, Nando explains to his daughter

Tina, an adolescent who works with him in the fields, how the world's first weapon and the world's first policeman came into being. In illustrative counterpoint, Agustina simultaneously prepares the dead baby for burial and a tin of food for Nando who will take the small coffin further up the arid mountains and drop it there in a gulley because he cannot spare the space of even such a small plot on his own land. A play's opening scene is usually a good guide to the writer's skill and this opening scene shows with what economy and speed character, location and society are conveyed. The narrative inserted in it, yet apart from it, a parable designed to make issues clear, sets the tone as in many comparable passages in the mature Brecht, for the rest of the play.

Socio-politically, the views have a definite Marxist ring; dramatically the impulse is akin to the famed distanciation by which theme, the very form and dramatic genre are announced as such as if to prevent any misconception: the ensuing events of the Spanish Civil War are, like this narrative, an illustration of the broader struggle of the classes. The class system, in turn, is diagnosed as rooted, since time immemorial, in the nature of man. At the end of this first scene, as Nando disappears behind their mud house carrying the small coffin under his arm, a short direct address to the audience, a sort of public soliloquy by Ignacio, an inhabitant of Estarobon summarizes the events of the civil war in fifteen lines.

IGNACIO : On the fifteenth of February nineteen thirty-six the Spanish Popular Front defeated reaction at the polls.

The reactionaries began to plot.

Franco had the appetite of the wolf

The caution of the snail

The eye of the hawk

And the arrogance of a man

After four months he revolted in Marocco with an army of thirty-six thousand

He had to move his army to Spain before the Popular Front could create an army to fight him

The Republican fleet blockaded Morocco

Franco sent messengers to Hitler and Mussolini.

Within days fascist planes were carrying his army to Spain

The people's militia- poorly armed and untrained- stopped Franco forty miles from Madrid

The snail spoke to the wolf and Franco opened a new front in the north

In the first days of the fascist rebellion the villagers of Estarobon stood ready to defend the Republic

The landowner fled (6).

The space apportioned to the historical background of the play, the relative unimportance, almost anonymity of the character who is given to speak the lines contribute to establish the impression that, although crucial to the plot, this historical information is not so essential to the broader meaning of the play, and that the events cited constitute just one of the many guises of a set of socio-political problems.

Scene Two takes place presumably shortly after the beginning of the revolt. It is entitled *The Trial*. On trial in the village school is the local priest, a young man around thirty, the objective ally, as a representative of the established church, of the local landowner, a small aristocrat who has managed to get away. Indicted and imprisoned by the villagers, the priest talks an old woman parishioner into releasing him while the three sentries are away looting the deserted local mansion. When it is discovered that the prisoner has escaped, two of the three young sentries are executed in his stead.

Another short address by Tina now informs the audience of the passage of time. Four lines thus briefly account for the three years of civil war whose consequences are chronicled in the rest of the play.

Scene Three, entitled *The Surrender* takes place in a city factory workshop where Agustina and many other women have been producing ammunition for the Republicans. Franco's troupes are about to take over, and it is decided that the women will stay in town while their husbands continue a guerrilla war against the fascists. The women will then go on producing ammunition which will ultimately be used to kill their husbands and brothers thus again exemplifying the idea that the alienated proletariat produces the means of its own destruction or as Nando puts it, 'they are making their own chains' (16). The scene ends with a lyric effusion in rhymed verse by Agustina, musing about a time when there will be justice between nations

and that, she says, 'will not be till there is justice within nations'.

Scene Four constitutes a turning point and a change of tone. It is entitled *The Gunnery Lesson*. Set in the city factory yard it shows us in a comic mode how Agustina, who now emerges as a central character, manages to circumvent the suspicions of Juan, a simple fascist soldier who stands guard over an enormous and strategically placed cannon and who introduces her, out of his desire to communicate with another human being, to the loading and firing procedures. This time the events are summarized by Antonia, another villager working at the factory.

**ANTONIA:**

From time to time Agustina spoke to the lonely soldier. Not every day, to arouse his suspicion. Sometimes she only nodded. At others she gave him his darned socks neatly folded round a bar of chocolate. She didn't speak again about the cannon. Many distinguished visitors came to the factory to gaze at the workers or demand more shells. Agustina said: they shall not sleep in their beds, they shall not sleep in their beds, they shall hurry through the streets like criminals fleeing from their crime, their possessions shall not give them the joy of use but the fear of loss. And she waited. (20)

Scene Five entitled *The Shot*, constitutes the end of the first part of the play. On the day of the official inauguration of a plaque commemorating the fascist dead Agustina is accompanied on her regular visit to Juan by her attractive daughter Tina whom she passes off as a lodger. Juan is immediately excited and the comments of Agustina about Tina's daily bathing kindle further. The scene of a mother prostituting her daughter to a sentry to get access to cannon is both comic and horrifying.

The two young people are urged to retire behind a wall while Agustina will keep watch. When they are out she aims and sets the cannon, adjusts it level with the building where the General, the Bishop, the Chaplain and other officials have gathered and fires. The building collapses on the dignitaries and the scene ends as predicted in the beginning of the play in tragedy and farce with soldier Juan, by now a grotesque caricature of Don

Juan, running on with his trousers around his ankles, awkwardly trying to pull them up, roaring like a wounded animal.

Aspects of Bond's typical outrageousness are clearly visible here in this emotionally charged scene which constitutes the climax of the first part. We are made aware that by pandering her daughter to the soldier Agustina acknowledges the necessity to subject personal integrity, individual pain and humiliation to the larger caused of the oppressed. It also reveals her awareness that her desperate choice is between acting immorally or accepting the immoral oppression. She chooses and thus becomes a model of resistance and a symbol of hope.

The second part of the play chronicles in seven scenes the consequences of the Republican defeat. Scene VII, entitled *The Trap* opens with a short address arranged in twelve lines of poetry by Agustina, a sort of surrealistic description strongly reminiscent of Salvador Dali- the references to painting and literature abound in this play- describing with sarcasm the return of the Marquis of Estarobon and restating the idea that the people are the ultimate victims of the historical upheaval.

**Agustina:**

The Marquis and I have returned to Estarobon  
The people took back the loot: not to the house  
Instead they left it along the road  
Strange sight! As if the countryside were the  
Marquis' house  
In a field a circle of 'quinze' chairs: empty when the  
sun rose and when it set  
Tapestries and curtains hung on rocks: no hand or  
breeze parted them  
Pots and pans on a tree as unused as in a painted  
kitchen  
A woman returning from work drank from her  
cupped hands not the crystal glass by  
the stream  
Children sang but the lid of the portable organ with  
the marquetry cherubs was as shut as a lid in the  
grave  
The owner drove back to his house and sent out his  
gangs  
They returned with his loot: he checked each item  
against his lists:



He charged the community for what was missing. (24)

Agustina has returned to her house and Nando, her husband is hidden in the cellar. But the house has been confiscated and reassigned to Jose and Maria, two poor collaborators in return for services rendered to the Franquist cause. The new occupants arrive flanked by the young priest. Agustina is given five minutes to pack and leave. At night as the young couple prepares to go to bed, Agustina delivers a short song entitled *The Curse* which spells out the victimization of the proletariat and the contradictory nature of their plight.

Agustina :

THE CURSE (Song):

You set each man against his brother  
You hire the father to fight the sons  
You drive the daughters from the mother  
The workers live by making your guns  
You teach the child to walk in darkness  
Your city is the gate of hell  
You price men by their heap of money  
Or by the blood they have to sell  
The earth groaned when you sat on your thrones  
And it will still groan when you are dead  
Because it must find you a place for your bones  
May the stone lie heavy on your head! (25)

Jose and Maria are in bed in the darkened house when Nando comes out of hiding: the scene, typical of the kind of inevitable, almost serene cruelty that is one of the trademarks of Bond's drama, demonstrates in action what the song anticipated in words.

The passage of time is indicated in a short narrative that focuses on Agustina, on her arrest and release after six months of prison after the double murder.

Scene Six entitled *The Vendors* is devoted to the first signs of 'normalization'. On a country road in the mountains, English businessmen are shown around by a Spanish industrial collaborator, his wife and son. The foreigners want to see for themselves how 'pacified' the country is and to what degree it is again a safe place for investment. They come across a squad of soldiers and two prisoners led by Captain Mani who invites them to watch the execution and treats them to Spanish brandy from

the newly reopened nearby country inn. Agustina happens to be buying food there. She is on her from Zaragossa, where she had been imprisoned for six months, to a guerrilla outpost in the mountains. As she leaves a Chorus warns all profiteers and collaborators that the fascists 'normalization' is only a temporary respite.

**Agustina :**

What use is a legend? People hear them and say: they're the big ones, we're ordinary. What do I want? A dry roof over my head and a warm blanket. Isn't that ordinary? And that no one blows up my world- that ought to be the most ordinary thing of all. People used to make revolutions to get bread – isn't it ordinary to want to eat? Now we have to make a revolution to stop them blowing the world to bits. We cant live with ignorance any more. We must fight everyone who stops us trying to understand ourselves. Today we have the power of god and so we must finally become human beings. To keep the ordinary things – the dry roof, bed, table – we must make a revolution. If we don't, everything will be blown to bits. Don't tell me about legends. The gun was there. My enemies walked in front of it. I fired. It was the most ordinary thing I've ever done. I did it for the same reason I lay the table or sweep the floor. If I'm a legend my life is wasted (33-34).

The scene ends with a lyrical outburst by Agustina, the longest in the play, reminiscent of both the poetry of Federico Garcia Lorca, extolling the beauty of Spain and that of Walt Whitman singing the New World. It is the poetic climax of the play expressing this 'simple' woman's attachment to her country. Through it Agustina transcends her personal limitations to become the spokesman of the people at large.

In Scene Nine entitled *The Arrest* Agustina has returned to Estarobon to blow up the recently rebuilt church which has been mined by one of the masons. She sets the time bomb for the moment when the authorities will be assembled to inaugurate the building then sets out for her old house where she plans to hide in the cellar. But the new occupants, a civil guard and his wife have buried the trap in six inches of concrete. Shortly

after the church blows up, Agustina is discovered, arrested and taken into town.

Scene Ten switches to Nando who has also been arrested and taken into the mountains by the squad and their leader to be executed. The scene is entitled *The Soldier's Training* and is again characteristic of the cruelty of Bond's dramaturgy: to teach one of his men to aim properly when he is on a firing squad, the Captain forces him to shoot at Nando's outstretched right hand on which is draped in derision the Republican flag. The soldier misses a first time but then shoots into the hand. Nando sways but is forced to hold the flag with the left hand which is promptly shot at too. Then the Captain delivers a short lecture on the state of the prisoner and orders him shot dead.

As if called forth by the spectacle of these events which she cannot however have witnessed Agustina concludes the terrible scene by a Song, the *Song of Agustina Ruiz Known as 'The Human Cannon'*. It is the expression of her determination, her revolutionary creed.

**SONG OF AGUSTINA RUIZ KNOWN AS THE HUMAN CANNON**

The fire will consume itself  
The tempest will exhaust itself  
The flood will return to the still deeps of the sea  
But I will ride the world with my two talking horses  
Till the generations of the earth are free  
I do not ride in greed or scorn  
I do not fight in rage or hate  
Such passions as these are too brief and weak for me  
But I will ride the world with my two talking horses  
Till the generations of the earth are free  
The seed that falls on stony ground  
Shall turn the stones to fruitful earth  
A garden will grow in the wastes of tyranny  
And I will walk beside my two talking horses  
As they gently bow their heads and graze the fields of liberty  
For when the human will is weak  
The laws of change shall still be strong  
I will ride the world with my two talking horses  
Till the generations of the earth are free  
My womb and the earth shall give birth to liberty  
And I will ride the world with my two talking horses

And you'll never never never conquer me. (37)

Illustrating the central commitment expressed in Agustina's Song, Scene Eleven entitled *Human Cannon* shows us Agustina together with ten other women hostages under arrest. Agustina refuses to confess that she placed the bomb in the church. Yet if she does not all the women will have to die. From them the Investigator is unable to get a clear answer. When asked who placed the bomb in the church they invariably answer, like their predecessors in Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna*, 'Estarobon' until the Investigator announces to Agustina that Nando has been executed and the Captain shows her a picture of her he carried on him which is now covered with blood. At the sight, one of women recognizes the Captain as the Chief Executor in the region and she panics – she accuses Agustina of being the terrorist of the church. The Investigator then decides to have one of the group executed together with Agustina : the Court clerk is to designate the victim at random. As a guard starts taking out the woman, the others surround Agustina who restates her revolutionary beliefs in a group public soliloquy.

**AGUSTINA:**

When you make us weak you teach us to be strong  
When you use secret police you teach us to be secret  
Its in our heads! You cant get rid of it!  
When you rob us you teach us to sabotage  
When you exploit us you teach us to strike  
When you make laws you teach us to break them  
*CIVIL GUARDS move towards AGUSTINA.*  
INVESTIGATOR( *to the CIVIL GUARDS*): Leave them.  
AGUSTINA :  
When you use weapons against us you teach us to arm  
When Fascists imprison a country they teach it to be free! (40)  
While she is thus expressing their collective beliefs and determination to resist, in a striking scenic manipulation, the women 'hold her and her feet leave the ground so that her body becomes horizontal...  
*AGUSTINA strains towards the INVESTIGATOR, the WOMEN hold her and her feet leave the ground so that her body becomes horizontal. The WOMEN*



*stand round her like gunners limbering a gun. She raises her head to shout at the INVESTIGATOR. The WOMEN exclaim in astonishment. AGUSTINA RUIZ has become the human cannon.* (41)

The last scene, entitled *The Smile*, takes place on a mountain road minutes before Agustina's execution. Tina, her daughter manages *in extremis* to join her with her newborn baby. As she motions to pass the infant to her mother, one of the soldiers snatches the shawl that the baby is wrapped in fearing that it might conceal a pistol or a grenade. When this seems not to be the case, Agustina is allowed to look at the baby and she smiles brightly while commenting that 'all these years from now it will remember me smiling' then Tina is forced to leave and Agustina stops smiling and turns to the soldiers who lead her off.

The past, Bond said in 1977, two years before the first notes on the present play, "the past works as a myth on the present. It is a burden on our back and from time to time we have to manage it so that it becomes comfortable and we can go on with our journey".

*Human Cannon* is just such an attempt to come to terms not with a personal past since Bond was born in 1935 but with the past of the West, the recent past of Fascism and Nazism. *Human Cannon* is neither *For Whom the Bell Tolls* nor *Homage to Catalonia*; it cannot be the personal testimony of an eye-witness, the diary, however fictionalized, of an active participant. Bond's Spanish Civil War is an imaginative, emotional and intellectual reconstruction, a fictional account of an exemplary civil war. It is not an eye-witness report; the events in Spain serve as an emblem of a more encompassing and general conflict between the eternal 'haves' and 'have nots' of the earth, a conflict which has Bond's plays since the beginning and most clearly since the publication in 1978 of *The Bundle*.

Scene Eleven of the play *Human Cannon* may help clarify Bond's position on this central issue.

The enquiry into the bombing of the church is led by an Investigator who is not out to establish the truth or the extent of Agustina's involvement. He says "she denies placing the bomb. It would be

better if she confessed. Then we'd be quite sure. Its not pleasant to think of a terrorist wandering round with another bomb. Confess or not she'll be shot" (37). And when asked why the other hostages are women, his answer reveals the socio-economic principle behind their selection: "Estarobon is a village of women. Most of the men died in the war. The Marquis cant lose any more labour. He has enough difficulties as it is (38). Political theory takes precedence over humanitarian consideration: this is establishment efficiency at work. This however leads to the women's awareness of the necessity to pool their resistance in order successfully to oppose the oppression- that is the meaning of their startling collective transformation into cannon aimed at the Investigator. The people, the scene conveys, have for a brief moment grown aware of the necessity to band together, to harness their collective energy to efficiently oppose the systematically oppressive fascism. The totally unrealistic scenic image suggests that Agustina's actions prompted by her awareness and losses have become exemplary, an incentive for others to further action. The scene spells the women's understanding however confused and short-lived that individually they are bound to remain victims, oppressed, exploited, driven to madness or suicide while collective action rooted in class solidarity protects them and turns them into a fearful weapon that may eventually destroy not other individuals but the oppressive social system itself. Bond's work has evolved from plays in which action taken against injustice was contained in the revolt by certain individuals and therefore was to a large extent isolated action to plays such as *Human Cannon* in which a group of individuals combine to overthrow another group of oppressors. Change is shown to be a practical possibility. This is again illustrated by the evolution within this play from the first cannon scene in which Agustina's isolated action destroys the factory while the plaque is being inaugurated to the trial scene in which the group of women collectively and symbolically turn into cannon themselves. That new consciousness, the play states, will not die with the death of one or two individuals. However pathetic or cruel the last scene, it remains one of hope because the final smile of Agustina is her message to the baby just as her

identification with the cannon was her legacy to the women. Bond could not and does not naively suppose that the act of revolution would solve the problem. It does however bring home a new apprehension of the social order, a consciousness that action and resistance are possible, that there is no innate necessity in the class structure: these are the foundations of a new order which cannot obviously come into being immediately because such is rarely the reality of social change but makes the status quo or the slipping back into the past oppression equally improbable.

*Human Cannon* is not an unashamed apology of revolutionary violence. It does not subsist upon the comparatively safe refuge of unexamined and unquestioned ideology or upon a simplistically humanistic, romantic assertion of the perfectibility of man, still less upon anything like a socially deterministic view of human nature. Rather it explores through incidental and largely fictional circumstances of the Spanish Civil War, the fundamental problems and dilemmas of that era and ours and envisages the practical ways at man's disposal to resolve them.

Having analysed the novel of Hemingway and the play of Bond, both of which has the same backdrop of Spanish Civil War, we find both writers echoing the same message of the need of solidarity. The women in the end of the play *Human Cannon* realize that individually they are bound to remain victims, oppressed, exploited, driven to madness or suicide while collective action rooted in class solidarity protects them and turns them into a fearful weapon that may eventually destroy not other individuals but the oppressive social system itself. In the novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, the central character Jordan realizes that each of his comrades has certain limitations, but together, they are a force to reckon with and this awareness is the essential purpose of the novel- the recognition of the need for human solidarity.

#### WORKS CITED

- Bond, Edward. *Plays:5*, London: Methuen Drama, 1996.
- Dasgupta, Sanjukta. *The Novels of Huxley and Hemingway*, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1996.

- Debusscher, Gilbert. *Human Cannon* :: Edward Bond's Vision of the Spanish Civil War. In: *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*. Tome 65 fasc. 3, 1987. *Langues et littératures modernes - Moderne taal-enletterkunde*. pp. 604-618. doi : 10.3406/rbph.1987.3598 [http://www.perse.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/rbph\\_00350818\\_1987\\_num\\_65\\_3\\_3598](http://www.perse.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/rbph_00350818_1987_num_65_3_3598)
- Hemingway, Ernest. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, New York: Scribner, 1940.
- Payne, Robert, (ed.), *The Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*, New York: Premier Books, 1964.
- Roberts, Philip: "Making the two worlds one"- *The plays of Edward Bond*. *Critical Quarterly*, 21, 4, pp. 83-84.
- Watson, B. William. "Hemingway's Spanish Civil War Dispatches", *The Hemingway Review (Spanish Civil War Issue)* VII: 2, 1988, pp.14-15.

---

#### A short biography of the author

The author is presently working as an Assistant Professor in English at MBB College, Agartala, Tripura. He has composed a book of poems titled '*Maiden Flight*' in 2007 and *Foundation English Book* in 2014 and to his credit, there are several publications. He has also contributed papers in different journals across the country and attended international and national seminars, workshops on English. A freelance journalist and an avid sports and music-lover, Mr Sen's fields of interest include Modern British Drama, Literary Theory, Post-modern Poetry, Indian English Fiction etc. He has submitted PhD thesis in Contemporary British Drama from Assam University, Silchar.

---