# THE ART OF ARNOLD WESKER
# THE ENGLISH DRAMATIST

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy ( Arts )
to the
University of North Bengal

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We are living in a very very singular moment of history. It is a moment of crisis, in the literal sense of that word. In every branch of our Spiritual and material civilisation we seem to have arrived at a critical turning-point. This Spirit shows itself not only in the actual state of public affairs but also in the general attitude towards fundamental values in personal and social life.

- Max Planck : <u>Where is Science going?</u>

# C O N T E N T S


| | | Page |
|---|---|---|
| PREFACE | .... .... | 1 |
| INTRODUCTION | .... .... | 5 |
| CHAPTER ONE | : Wesker the realist .... | 10 |
| | 1. The situation before and after the Second World War | 10 |
| | 2. Wesker's idea about the world and the people he deals with | 23 |
| | 3. His indebtedness to authors, and his distinctive qualities with a note of modernity | 29 |
| | 4. A dramatist with a mission | 42 |
| CHAPTER TWO | : The Organisation of Art | 48 |
| | 1. Art Through the ages | 48 |
| | 2. Poetry and drama through the ages | 61 |
| CHAPTER THREE | : Reality, philosophy and art in Wesker | 116 |
| | 1. Wesker, a committed dramatist or a propagandist? | 116 |
| | 2. Wesker's art and reality | 142 |
| | 3. His art with relation to history | 156 |
| | 4. His art with relation to journalism | 163 |
| CHAPTER FOUR | : Wesker, society and reality | 166 |
| | 1. Wesker's art in relation to society, man and reality | 166 |
| | 2. Society and individual in a class society | 180 |

Page

CHAPTER FIVE (A): Wesker's narrative art 191

1. 'The Kitchen' 197
2. 'Chicken Soup with Barley 206
3. 'Roots' 211
4. 'I'm taking about Jerusalem' 219
5. 'Chips with Everything 225
6. 'Menace' 231
7. 'The Nottingham Captain' 233
8. 'Their very Own and Golden City' 238
9. 'The Four Seasons' 243
10. 'The Friends' 251
11. 'The Old Ones' 257
12. 'The Wedding Feast' 263
13. 'The Merchant' 271
14. 'The Journalists' 293

CHAPTER FIVE (B): Wesker's art of characterization 302

1. Characters belonging to the upper class 308
2. Characters belonging to the ruling class or their supporters 324
3. Working-class Characters 346

CHAPTER SIX : Wesker's wit, humour and irony 388

Page

CHAPTER SEVEN : Parker - the short story writer 431

1. 'Pools' 434

2. 'Six Sundays in January' 436

3. 'The man who became afraid' 445

4. 'A time of dying' 448

5. 'Love letters on blue paper' 452

6. 'The man who would never write like Balzac' 456

7. 'Said the old man to the young man' 459

8. 'The Visit' 464

9. 'Patlips' 468

CHAPTER EIGHT : A summing up 477

APPENDIX I .. .. 491

APPENDIX II .. .. 514

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# P R E F A C E

On joining a college in North Bengal as a lecturer in English I happened to come across a copy of The Wesker Trilogy in the college library which induced me to make a comprehensive study of Arnold Wesker. This interest was deepened when Professor S.C. Sengupta asked me to undertake research work on Wesker. So I felt it necessary to make a thorough study of his works.

As an Indian student I was very much handicapped by the problem of judging Arnold Wesker's plays. I had no direct experience of their presentation on the stage. This dissertation has, therefore, its limitations. Naturally I followed an interpretative method in evaluation of Wesker's works. I have tried to follow the realistic tradition of richness in content and form not only in regard to its technique and its artistic approach but also in regard to its fundamental principles regarding the representation of people and life in Wesker's works.

This assessment commences with a study of the background of the English society, theatre and Wesker's indebtedness and his contributions to modern drama. This study is necessary because his plays are adjusted to the modern society.

The second chapter is a study of the history of art, literature and drama that influenced Wesker in respect of ideas, dramatic situations, technique and other relevant matters.

The third chapter is devoted to a study of Wesker as a committed dramatist in relation to modernism.

The fourth chapter is devoted to a study of Wesker's art in relation to man and reality in a class society.

The fifth chapter is a study of Wesker's narrative art and his art of characterisation.

The sixth chapter deals with wit, humour and irony in Wesker's works.

The seventh chapter is completely devoted to a study of Wesker as a story writer. In this chapter an attempt has been made to trace another dimension in his works.

The final chapter under the caption "A summing up" is a rounding off of the whole thesis.

In this study there are collateral issues, which if not directly related to the topic, are nevertheless not irrelevant.

The primary sources for the present dissertation are, of course, the works of Arnold Wesker. I have also consulted a considerable amount of biographical and critical materials. It was also been necessary to make use of a variety of other works, including the histories of the theatres and drama. The Select Bibliography is appended at the end of the thesis.

Staying as I do far from the metropolis, I had to face enormous difficulties regarding books, both textual and critical. Many of the books, listed in the Select Bibliography had to be

produced on loan from different libraries of India and abroad. I thank the library staff of the North Bengal University Library, the Calcutta University Library, the Gauhati University Library, the Kaliyaganj College Library, the Scottish Church College Library, the Presidency College Library, the Raiganj University College Library, the National Library, the Howrah District Central Library, the British Council Library, Calcutta, and the British Council Library, Delhi, and the American Library, Calcutta.

I am deeply indebted to (1) my supervisor Professor S.P. Sengupta, M.A., Ph. D. (London) who gave me an impetus to do a piece of research work on Beaker, (2) to Dr. Amalendu Bose, M.A. D. Phil. (Oxon.), F.I.A.L., quondam Sir Goorooodas Banerjee, Professor and Head of the Department of English, Calcutta University, who helped me with many practical suggestions, (3) to Professor S.C. Lahiri, M.A., quondam Head of the Department of English, Calcutta University, and (4) J.L. Maiti, M.A. (Triple) B.T., Headmaster, Balur High School, who encouraged me to complete the thesis. I, however, owe the greatest debt of gratitude to Arnold Bennett, who took a very kindly interest in my work and not only facilitated my research work by providing many relevant materials but also took the trouble of going through some pages of my manuscripts. I thank in particular Miss J. Rose of the British Council Library of Calcutta who kindly furnished me with some valuable data. My grateful thanks are also due to the Department of Drama, University of Bristol for their kindly permitting me to reproduce some photostat copies of articles that are

incorporated in my thesis. I am also grateful to Prof. Shyamal Behari Bose and Mr. Pijush Das who facilitated my research work by supplying copies of books published in India and abroad. My thanks are also due to Mrs. B.A. Holstenholme of the British Deputy High Commission in Calcutta and Prof. Nautosh Roy for their valuable suggestions. I thank Principal S.K. Sarkar of Kaliyaganj College, Principal S.N. Ray of Raiganj University College, and Dr. M. Sohrin, Professor and Head of the Department of English, Gauhati University, Mr. B.K. Rajpaie, Registrar, North Bengal University and the teaching and the non-teaching staff of Kaliyaganj College for their sympathetic attitude towards the completion of my thesis. While two of my examiners wrote eloquently about my thesis the third examiner made some constructive and valuable suggestions for its improvement. I have thoroughly recast my thesis and incorporated those suggestions, which, I believe, will heighten its importance. In conclusion, I thank everybody who has in any way helped me in the preparation of this thesis.

# INTRODUCTION

Arnold Wesker (1932 - ) is a much-discussed dramatist of the English stage introduced by Lindsay Anderson, George Devine, and John Dexter right down from the nineteen fifties. Different critics have assessed his contributions from different perspectives. Robert Brustein called him a secondary dramatist, whereas according to Sheridan Morley, Wesker is one of the "four discoveries of the fifties". According to J. Chiari, Wesker, who is one of the members of the new wave of British dramatists, has "dedicated to the task of bringing art and enlightenment to the masses". P. Hartnoll calls him a dramatist of the school of the "kitchen-sink drama". "Wesker", says David Daiches, "is a left-wing moralist who has used the drama to say things about contemporary society". According to Clifford Leech, Wesker is "one of the Romantics, Harold Pinter being the other Romantic". Dr. J.R. Taylor calls Wesker "the perfect example of the new working-class dramatist" or according to Christopher Booker Wesker is "romanticising lower class vitality". With due regard to the above critics the present assessor would like to submit that his method is to explore the mind and art of Arnold Wesker who naively says - "I cannot simply 'write' plays, I have to write them in such a way as to suggest a play is worthwhile writing for something more than telling a tale". Therefore writing drama becomes an art medium to him, and this art is, of course, not "an escape from life" but

"an escape into life" at the cost of new form, content or even myth.

Wesker, in fact, is related to a particular age and also to a particular class, i.e., the working class, and it is quite natural that all the major characters portrayed in his plays belong to the tens of millions of the working people — 'the flower of the country, its strength and its future'. As a dramatist he remains true to his class keeping pace with the spirit of the age save despair, for he must not ignore the interest of the working class as he feels the dire necessity of exercising his responsibility as an artist towards the class and the society to which he belongs.

Wesker might personally be a furniture maker's apprentice, a carpenter's mate, a book-seller's assistant, an enlisted airman, a plumber's mate, a farm labourer, a seed sorter, a kitchen porter or a pastry cook but his success as well as workmanship as a dramatist rests upon a spectrum of colours through his art so that the real life of the working class vibrating with hopes and aspirations is reflected in various aspects. That he belongs to the working class does not mean that he is mean as an artist. Far from it. All that is much more important for an artist is, whether his sensitivity is so keen as to notice 'diamond' in 'carbon' or to transform the 'carbon' into 'diamond'. Drama, to Wesker is a medium of art through which he attempts to express the impulses and expectations of the major sections of people of his age in terms of a struggle for existence. He strives to project the moment

not only to give permanence to the present but also to forge a link between the past and the future or to propel history forward if and when possible. He, of course, is bent on creating as many living and lively symbols as possible in his plays. These symbols have some definite relation with the environment or society of his age. These will certainly lose their own entity as well as identity whenever these are divorced from environment and age.

It may further be noted that these symbols take shape amidst environmental forces when they interact and counteract with each other. All that seeker endeavours to do is to clarify, intensify, dramatise and interpret the world about him in all its physical, psychological and social aspects. Hence he tends to create images in order to ask questions of life, to offer understanding or to reflect poignantly a significant moment of time in a significant individual so as to give a close-up view of an epoch with all its adequate potentialities and apparent failures. Eventually his is the attempt to establish and embellish a social relation which is meant never to be bound up with a set pattern which, it proves, not only stale but also rotten at the core, neither healthy nor convincing at all. The said pattern is on the verge of utter disintegration because of uneven socio-economic relation between man and man. Hence the conflict between those who want no change at all and those who strive, seek and find new values but who are not to yield. If it be the duty of the artist

to reproduce life with the note of transforming varieties. Wesker is certainly an artist. If it be the sincere task of the artist to bring about permanent interaction between the experience of the past and the experience of the present Wesker deserves to be a great artist.

While Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco and Harold Pinter, the contemporaries of Wesker, resorted to allegorical drama, and grotesque farce, groping in the dark finding no way out in the labyrinth of phantasmagoria, while some tend to existentialist ideologues, while John Osborne, another contemporary of Wesker, looks back in anger with the childish vanity and disarming egoism of youngsters, Wesker makes himself useful in every possible way of art to pave the way for a better tomorrow ushering in Eros - the life force instead of Thanatos - the force of death.

Wesker says : "I believe that the purpose of life is the perpetual re-enactment of the first great myth of all time : the creation of order out of chaos". What matters most in Wesker's art is the quality and nature of the artist's commitment that all is not lost though the field had been lost for a long time. He is right in thinking that "art is about something, that it has reference to something beyond itself by which it must ultimately be judged".

Wesker's dramas are not to be rigidly demarcated as tragedies or comedies, but they are dramas only where the characters are not puppets that strut and fret their hour on the stage or like a

Sisyphus driving a boulder in vain. That his characters are not so is obvious for two reasons - because Wesker is well acquainted with those whom he portrays, and secondly he is at the vantage point of understanding them. This clear-cut knowledge and understanding of the people has prevented him from being insipid and inadvertent. He makes an assiduous study of the society he belongs to, the various classes in society, their mutual relations and respective conditions, their physiognomy and their psychology. Yet it is remarkable to note that he is not primarily interested in man-as-an-individual in his plays, his subject is man-in-society. I have tried to understand and estimate Arnold Wesker more as an artist of social realism that demands a consciousness of the fate of humanity than as one who conforms to pure aestheticism that prefers art to the great struggle for the new Renaissance.

## CHAPTER ONE

## ARNOLD WESKER THE REALIST

### 1. The situation before and after the Second World War

To understand Wesker we have to understand Britain, the hopes and sufferings of Britain, the rules of conduct and honour in Britain, the pride of the people, life and death in Britain. Throughout his entire work Wesker is excessively a British, both in thought and action.

Today Arnold Wesker (1932 - ) has been accepted as one of the leading dramatists of England. As a literary figure his works spread over a period from the early fifties uptill now. He was born at a time when England with Europe was suffering from economic depression. He was brought up in a period when Britain was making strenuous efforts to develop its own remedies for its economic problems with the financial aids from America. In those days the rates of profit and interest were much lower[1]. He came from the East End slums of London where his parents of Austro-Hungarian origin, came to settle as Ashkenazi Jew evacuees. He was in his early teens when the Labour Party, for the first time[2], gained complete control in the British Government in 1945 at the end of the Second World War. As a British dramatist internationally recognised he has possessed a basement flat in a trim suburban

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1. William Ebenstein : Today's Isms, p. 15

2. The first Labour Government was in 1924 and the second Labour Coalition Government in 1929 - 31.

avenue, with a living room, a television set, record player, contemporary standard lamp, abstract paintings alongside a photograph of young men playing football in a street, a bookcase devoted to good books bound in boards and a long shelf of excellent paperbacks resembling those of many mid-century lovers of the cultured way of life[3]. But there was a time in his early youth when there was food rationing[4]. Misery and depression were his constant companions till 1958 when he began to earn averaging £ 15,000 a year[5]. There were the days of chill penury when he spent for consumption whatever little he had earned. He, in his early years, could afford a little out of his individual income for future study.

Wesker came of a working-class family and lower middle-class backgrounds. He tended to be left-wing[6]. He was a furniture maker's apprentice, a carpenter's mate, a bookseller's assistant, an enlisted airman, a plumber's mate, a farm labourer, a seed sorter, a kitchen porter, and a pastry cook[7]. He had no god-father to rescue him from the East and slums. Yet schooling he had and

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3. Lawrence Kitchin : Mid-century Drama, p. 194
4. W.N. Medlicott : Contemporary England (1914-1964), p. 506
5. Ronald Hayman : The Set-up, p. 236
6. I. Quesman : Britain Today, p. 196
7. The Wesker Trilogy, p. 1

the ground was being prepared for him to take the task of a literary artist. When many of the westerners saved money for investment[8], and when everybody made money during the war[9], his father cared little for it, and obviously had little or no prospect at all. He had, therefore, to struggle as much as any toiling man. He had, however, ample scope to have a slip and a fall as a slum-dweller, or he might have been a renegade like Monty Blatt[10], Libby Robson[11] or Alfred Harrington[12]. But his is the way quite different from theirs. There were two ways open for him - to tread on the way to individualism symbolising the loneliness of modern man with a view to serving the interests of the establishment or upholding the greater cause of his class conjuring up inspiring ideals from arid Marxist jargon and humanism. He brings his works in tune with the grandeur and achievement of actual life. Wesker prefers the latter because he has a profound sympathy for the class to which he belongs, and he never abandons his class as W. H. Auden, Arthur Koestler and many others did.

With the keen eye of an observer he observed that while the industrial labourers in a city like London actually got two rooms

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8. Gunnar Myrdal : Asian Drama, abridged by S.S. King, p. 30
9. Arnold Wesker : Chicken Soup with Barley, II, 1
10. a character in Chicken Soup with Barley
11. a character in Wesker's I'm Talking about Jerusalem
12. a character in Wesker's their very own and Golden City.

along with civic amenities, to the farm labourers in the countryside civic facilities were real luxury. When Professor Myrdal claimed that the western countries were entering an era of rapid development[13] or when Hector Abenstein saw greater social equality in post-war England[14], Wesker observed that the real condition in the rural areas in England was worse than that in the cities and towns. The rural people had to spend nights on squalid beds and to live in the countryside that smelt "like a cow with diarrhoea"[15]. Unemployment and insecurity of service were the constant companions of the labourers[16] either in a city or in the country although some documents bear evidence to the contrary[17]. Britain had been turned into a big kitchen that catered for the needs of many countries of the world[18], although Britain failed to solve unemployment problem even in 1963[19]. A chain of efficient labourers in co-ordination with a salary-earning class was, therefore, necessary to fight against the massive evils of unemployment and insecurity. This salary-earning class is, however, the product of the capitalist society and may reasonably be classified as the new middle class. This class may be small in number in comparison with the working class, but it does exert not a little influence in society. Let us see the position of this class in relation to the working class:

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13. A. Wesker : Scenes of Crowd Action, p. 120
14. Ibid, p. 236
15. op.cit. I'm Talking about Jerusalem, II, 1
16. J.B. Hardman : Britain in the Modern World, pp. 90-91
17. Sidney Pollard: The Development of British Economy, p. 347
18. W. Friedman : An Introduction to World Politics, p. 222
19. op. cit. Contemporary England, p. 561 and p. 565

> In 1939 the salary-earning class numbered only about 3,000,000 whereas the wage-earners in industry were about 10,000,000, in the 'commercial proletariat' of shop assistants and warehouse workers another 3,000,000 and the workers in personal service and miscellaneous wage-earning occupations yet another 3,000,000 - in all 16,000,000 (or with the agricultural workers 17,000,000) of wage-earners as against 3,000,000 of salary-earners[20].

The working class people, as the above scrap of evidence shows, far outnumber the salary-earning class, and yet they have no qualitiative prominence in the super-structure of the society. The irony is that while they remain in the background, the salary-earning class

> lived along the by-pass roads, they crowded more into the shopping centres, they thronged theatres and shows in the middle of the great towns much more than the wage-earners. They were above all visible in London; and their very obtrusiveness led easily to an over-impression of prevailing propensity[21].

Let us see, in this connection, what the condition of the people of the upper class inclusive of industrial bourgeois, and commercial bourgeois of the society is in Britain. They are glutted with wealth, glory and ostentation; their pomp and splendour is in evidence everywhere.

Since the Industrial Revolution there have been political, social as well as economic changes, but those hardly touch the lower stem. With the exception of some changes in the super-structure of society there is no radical change after the Second World War which, we assume, shook the foundation of British economy.[22]

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20. G.D.H. Cole and Raymond Postgate : The Common People, pp. 656-657
21. Ibid.
22. "In 1945 America lent Britain $ 3,750 million, to be repaid over fifty years at 2% interest". op. cit. Britain in the Intern world, p. 21.

The picture of the post-war Britain is not at all brilliant:

> There had been no equivalent change in the distribution of property. Industrial capital was still held mainly by a fairly limited class; rent, interest and profits still accounted for about one-third of the gross national product, as against two-thirds for wages, salaries and forces' pay; more than one-third of the total number of incomes over £ 135 were still under £ 250 a year. The great majority of those who died still had almost nothing to leave to their successors[23].

Here we have a glimpse of the miserable condition of the working people too. They have been steering the wheels of progress and prosperity, they are actually the pillars upon which rest the safety and security of the ruled, but it is an irony of history that, in return, what they receive is neither enough nor honourable. Yet the funny thing is that the working-class families, who form the majority, pay more in taxes and contributions than they receive in social service benefits[24]. The possibility of equality and equal opportunities are, however, completely denied to this class. There is the accumulation of capital on the one hand, and the deprivation of the working people of adequate opportunities on the other. With the unerring eye of a social scientist Arnold Wesker smarts and looks at such a colossal waste.

But the people who are deprived of their socio-economic rights are not slow to react. They voice their protest:

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23. Cole & Postage: The Common People, op. cit. p. 688
24. Sidney Pollard : The Development of British Economy, p. 405

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> The immediate post-war years were marked by serious industrial conflict, and the workers were looking for fundamental, social policies. They want nationalisation of mines, railways, and land, a capital levy, and an end to poverty and class distinctions[25].

The fact is that neither the Parliament nor the establishment was ready to meet their legitimate demands. The toiling people, as a result, resorted to relentless struggle for a better living. What they actually did was to have recourse to socialist movement against the political and economic doldrums[26]. Left-wing associations for the working people and of the working people were constituted. Arnold Wesker, in his teens, became a member of the Young Communist League that chiefly aimed at socialism. They did not prefer Platonic Communism that ultimately aims at intellectual aristocracy, but they advocated modern socialism that aims at socialization of all the means of production by the working people. Wesker was nurtured in such an atmosphere of socialist family, breathed among the socialists and made himself prominent with the socialists[27].

The movement of the toiling people, however, did not altogether go in vain. Some progress was made, no doubt, for the low-income group, and special protection was provided for the sick, the unemployed, the old and the widows[28]; L.C.C. block of flats

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25. T.L. Jarman : Socialism in Britain, p. 152
26. W.... Langsam : The World since 1919, p. 632
27. Ronald Hayman : The Set-up, op. cit., p. 154
28. W. Ebenstein, Today's [illegible], op. cit. p. 236

were constructed at the end of the war and the working class was a little more respectable[29], but all these were meagre palliatives. There has been limited progress, and

> poverty has not entirely disappeared ..... There is still hunger, cold, preventable disease and there is still the demoralising fear and the lowly social place that have ever been the lot of the poor. Moreover, they were made up not merely of the eccentrics or the unemployable, but of men and women passing through a phase in a normal life which might easily become a phase in the lives of many, perhaps of a majority of the population[30].

The flank of the society remains tacit to the interest of the working men who cannot but mobilise themselves through trade union movements. Consequently the trade unions are continuing their traditional policy of freedom of action in wage bargaining[31]. Thus Britain becomes the hot-bed of the two conflicting forces. But the qualitative integration in the camp of the capitalist proves stronger than the quantitative integration in the camp of the toiling masses. Socialism is, therefore, a far cry in Britain.

At the end of the fearful Second World War, the prize the working people sought was not won as well. Despite the developments in machine technology Britain has yet to tilt against the giants like want, disease, ignorance, squalor, illness and disillusion at home.

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29. A. Wesker : Chicken Soup, II, 1
30. S. Pollard : Development of British Economy op. cit. pp.604-605
31. T.W. Jarman : Socialism in Britain op. cit. p. 174

The excitement of the first 'total' war and the subsequent reaction left Britain a complete washout. The prevalent mood of disillusionment that was much analogous to that of T.S. Eliot's Wastoland, was in the air. While the British life, as a demand of history, was tending towards metropolis (owing partly to the liberation of British colonies and partly to liberal principles), British plays either were tending to use verse to decorate a romantic action, or began using old realistic social drama rarely dealing with acute social problems, or dealt with the various experiments in more imaginative styles[32]. Those dramatists most probably forgot that drama is an integral part of life and it ought to respond to the facts of contemporary life. The statement made by Raymond Williams in his article "Recent English Drama" is worth quoting here :

> What was wrong, it was widely felt and argued, was that the speech and action of the typical majority theatre were miles away from contemporary life[33].

The British people have life of unrest and fragmentary living. Therefore they will not definitely be blamed if they seek to arise with a determination more cautious, but even more dauntless.[34]

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32. A. Nicoll : British Drama, p. 334

33. Boris Ford (ed) : Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol. 7 p. 501

34. A.C. Collins : English Literature of the Twentieth Century, p. 2

During the time of Shakespeare the life depicted in the British drama was mainly of the aristocratic or of the upper class people of the society, and the Restoration theatre became almost exclusively identified with, and supported by, the middle and upper classes[35]. These people played the most important roles in art and literature. The ordinary working people, who were introduced into the plays, used to play, indeed, the inferior roles. Twentieth century drama begins to have a sociological bias and it tends to come to terms with the material conditions of modern life[36].

The twentieth century modern drama is modern in the sense that it, more or less, reflects modern life either from the psychological, biological or sociological point of view or from the viewpoint of sheer technique. But most of the modern British dramatists, who are much more age-conscious, aim at conveying their purpose using in general the central character as their mouthpiece, or tending to follow in the footsteps of Shaw who through Back to Methuselah (1923) look forward to the time when the life force is freed from the bondage of matter, where there is 'no people, only

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35. John Allen : Masters of British Drama, p. 173

36. H. Grierson and J.C. Smith: A Critical History of English Poetry, p. 401

thought'[37], or are ready to compromise with the conservative tastes of the commercial theatres[38]. Sometimes problems are posed either to invite a solution or to defy it. Sometimes their inspiring motive is to criticize, overtly or covertly, some characteristics of society or social, industrial or familial life. But all they aim at is either the sheer entertainment of the theatre-fans who constitute mostly the middle class people or gratification of their own intellectual passion for the display of dramatic art. But evidently they seldom reflect in their works the hopes and aspirations of the common man. There are occasions when the dramatic artists take refuge in the ivory tower of poetic drama, or resort to the outworn shibboleths of the past decades, or their characters are apt to use the language of Babel[39]. It will not perhaps be irrelevant here to quote what Karl Radek opines in his article "Contemporary World Literature and the task of Proletarian Art" :

> The artists of dying capitalism seek to hide themselves under the cloak of impartiality. They are sceptics; they are convinced that they believe in nothing although the very essence of their work is a faith that this decaying world will exist for ever[40].

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37. P. Hartnall (ed) : Oxford companion to the theatre, p. 288
38. G.S. Fraser : The Modern Writer and the World, p. 37
39. Vladimir : Charming evening we're having.
    Estragon : Unforgettable.
    Vladimir : And it's not over.
    Estragon : Apparently not.
    Vladimir : It's only the beginning.
    Estragon : It's awful.
    Vladimir : It's worse than being at the theatre.
    Estragon : The circus.
    Vladimir : The music hall.
    Estragon : The circus [ Samuel Beckett: Waiting for Godot, I ]
40. B.F. Dukore (ed.) : Dramatic Theory and Criticism, p. 965

Attempts in literature and art are, however, made as a means of enriching individuals or groups quite independent of the common cause of the working people. This is, to be precise, the common feature till the fifties of the twentieth century in spite of the realistic endeavours at the beginning of the twentieth century.

If the interests of the minority are cared for, those of the majority cannot be ignored for an unlimited period of time. The stages that were entering mostly for the needs of the minority had been preparing to offer scopes for the majority. The trend of a change, however, was discernible :

> Since 1955 interest has shifted from the poetic dramatists like Fry to a group of playwrights who have reacted violently against the stereotyping processes of mass civilisation, the regimentations of the welfare state, and the anxieties of the atomic age. They suspect that contemporary democracy is a facade concealing an oligarchical establishment, which they associate with an effete middle-class morality, imperialism, the use of nuclear weapons, and capital punishment. Hence they have created a drama of protest and satire, which exalts the non-conformist, the misfit, and the martyr, and sympathises at times with the frustrations and fears of the common man[41].

Slowly but steadily the ground was prepared for the common man, or precisely, the working class who, according to V.I. Lenin, are the flowers of the country, its strength and its future[42]. These common people are present in the plays of the previous ages

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41. P. Hartnol (ed.) : Oxford Companion to Literature, op.cit. p.280

42. V.I. Lenin : On Literature and Art, p. 36

no doubt, but they are not the principal characters. They are the objects rather than the subjects. The time is, however, ripe, the ground is prepared too:

> protest was in the air, and the mood of the country, especially, that of England, veered sharply from the preciosity and dilettantism which had been in vogue at the universities and elsewhere for the last few years to one of grim political consciousness[43].

All that is needed is a timely jerk by a competent person who himself should have the working-class origin[44]. It is Arnold Wesker who has to conform to all the conditions to come forward to promote the cause of the working people and to use contemporary reality as the basis of art, to emphasise the new world of the working class over the dying world of aristocrats and moneyed class. While the bourgeois society, according to Clive Bell[45], is about to sever economics from moral norms to allow the individual to pursue his own self-defined wants or propagate the ideas of the ruling class which upholds the glossy images of glamour and sex, promoting the hedonistic way of life and promising the voluptuous gratification of the lineaments of desire - Wesker is out to explore

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43. John Russel Taylor : Anger and After, pp. 35-36

44. Cf. In his poem 'Nikatam' (or the concert) Rab. Tagore (1861-1941), the first Nobel laureate (1913) of Asia for literature, was under the impression that the working class people would come to the forefront of literature.

45. in an article "Modernism & Capitalism" in Partisan Review/2, 1973, Vol. XXV No. 2 p. 217

a cultural hegemony, which according to a critic[46] may be defined as a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living.

2. Wesker's idea about the world and the people he deals with

> To live is to fight with trolls
> in the vault of the heart and brain;
> to write - that is to hold
> Judgement Day over oneself[47].

Henrik Ibsen knew that a man must fight with odds; so must the artist. Heroic or not an artist is willy-nilly to wage war against something. It is particularly true in the case of an artist who is more earthly, materialistic and independent of bourgeois aberrations. But however powerful the artist may be he is expected not to go against his own class sympathies and political prejudices for "each individual, each civilization, each age", according to [illegible] Hayman[48], "will arrive at different points of emphasis according to its own need and history".

A dramatic artist too, ought to comply with the need of history and the need of art at the same time. He should neither be a victim of silence nor be prone to desperate actions. His is the way that most probably lies midway between 'silence' and 'desperate actions'. Arnold Wesker evidently believes in the third way, that

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46. Raymond Williams : Marxism and Literature, p. 110
47. James McFarlane (ed.) : Henrik Ibsen, p. 402
48. [illegible]300 : The Arts of Man, p. 11

is the midway. He is not ready to dart out with a sword in hand either to jab or hack. He has a mightier weapon - and it is the art which Wesker like Ibsen[49] prefers to wield. He may be said to have scorned the social and literary traditions, or his writing might have been deliberately anti-intellectual, but he forced people to think for he had something new to say[50].

Art, we know, is the affirmation of definite viewpoints in life. Again the artist's viewpoint may be progressive or reactionary. When an artist deviates from truth to life inevitably combining with the propagation of amoral principles leading to the forfeiture by art of its ethical significance he becomes a reactionary artist[51], because art is always bound up with morals. Again art depending on social consciousness is inseparable from politics, religion or philosophy, and to sever art from these elements is to deprive it of its life blood. Therefore, the aesthetic function of art is to help people to cultivate a definite social and aesthetic ideal and develop their artistic capacities on the one hand, and to reflect the truth of life reproduced according to the laws of art on the other. Wesker through his works attempts to perform this task in two ways, and that is his ends.

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49. "As thinker and artist Ibsen represents the spirit of man fighting for its rights - nay, for its existence - in a mechanised world". - Eric Bentley : The Modern Theatre, p. 59

50. S. Hussain : Britain Today, p. 197

51. A. Zis in an article on "Axiological (value) Aspects of Art in the light of Interaction of Forms of social consciousness" translated by K.Hamond from the Russian in the volume Marxist-Leninist Aesthetics and Life (a collection of articles of many authors) edited by I. Sulikova and A. Zis, p. 61

Stepney in London's East End, where Wesker was born and brought up, was a place for the working people. The twentieth century, that has entered upon the nuclear age, has given these people a little. The rights of these people are either usurped or are almost denied to them. This, according to a critic[52], happens because they live in a world where two cultures stand in opposition to each : one brings to mankind the high ideals of freedom, peace and the flowering of the human personality and by its very nature is profoundly creative; the other is a false culture inextricably rooted in the philosophy of the bourgeoisie, an art which promulgates the most reactionary and inhuman ideas of the age.

There is no doubt about it that working people are occasionally given the opportunity to appear in plays. But it is a matter of pity that the appropriate position and prestige cannot be given adequately even by those playwrights who themselves descend from the same class. It is unhappy to observe that many of them maintain and strengthen the foundations of exploiting society, which stifles man's longing for freedom and raises him in the spirit of antihumanism and distrust in ideals. Credit, therefore, goes to Wesker who is passionately interested in defending the interests of the most revolutionary class, that is, the working class, in order to defend the true interests of humanity. So he is attached to that literature which is, according to a critic[53], an

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52. Yuri Barabash : Aesthetics and Poetry, p. 11

53. . Zhdanko : Socialist Realism and the Modern Literary Process, pp. 115-116

inseparable part of literature, imbued with conscious historical perspective and with this conscious aspiration to remake life, and literature that is truly meaningful.

The English plays after the Second World War did not, in general, defend the true interests of humanity, but sometimes portrayed the loneliness of life belittling people's role as a trifle to bourgeois life and culture. Wesker is the first 'successful' English dramatist[54] who takes infinite pains to bring the people of his own class to a sharp focus free from naturalism, melodramatics and barren symbolism. There are, in his plays, dirt and disease, love and loss, happiness along with misery, hope and despair, faith and disillusionment — but weaker in the line of Balzac[55] chooses natural circumstances and turns them into elements of truth, that is to recast the truth of life into the artistic truth most equivalent to it for portraying the world as it is.

The mirror, that Wesker uses for this purpose, is the plain mirror, neither concave nor convex to produce distorted figures. Consequently his mirror reflects the life-like pictures of the real people of his class. The people with whom he grows up are brought

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54. It is the time to remember that "the working class themes were introduced to the theatre sixty years ago by Maxim Gorky and his lead was soon followed in the country by Stanley Houghton, Harold Brighouse and others". — J.L. Brown and J. Harris (eds.): Contemporary Theatre, p. 35

55. Oeuvres complètes de Honoré de Balzac. Oeuvres diverses, III (1836-1843), Curio, 1910, p. 320 quoted from A. Kaiserov's article "The Birth of a new art" in the book Marxist-Leninist Aesthetics and Life, edited by I. Mulikova and A. Zis, Op. cit. p. 156

to the limelight. Moreover, he takes the task of reflecting their striving for a better lot and the desire to shake off the shame of the shabby past. For he believes like Lenin who once said that art belongs to the people and it ought to extend its deep roots into the very thick of the broad toiling masses.

The plays of Wesker may rightly be called the plays of the working-class people and for the working-class people. In a sense, his plays toll the death-knell of the exploiters, and at the same time, invoke and pave the way for the exploited. So his aim is the manifestation of human reality, human activity and human suffering in an awkward predicament.

Wesker, it is certain, never prepares himself to justify the ways of God to man as Milton attempted in his grand epic, or to show the universe as divine Providence as Dante did, or to depict man as a blind and helpless plaything of an inscrutable power as in the Shakespearian tragic heroes, or to show the characters as mere mechanisms of accidents and coincidence as in Thomas Hardy's, but he is determined to save the toiling masses from the imminent 'lunatic waste of life' :

> Living is filled with a thousand clashes and problems — from the problems of the world around us to those of our own personal relationship. God knows that it is possible to have lived and fought and still not known what it was all about-but to have lived and not fought at all, to have lived and never stirred beyond one room-this is desperately sad, this is surely a lunatic waste of life[55].

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55. A. Wesker : Fears of Fragmentation, op. cit. p. 33

True, the people he deals with in his works does not always prosper, but they find considerable importance from the ruling people. In dealing with the life of the ruled in the background of the life of the ruler Arnold Wesker does not ultimately bring in the eternal note of sadness as did Matthew Arnold in his Dover Beach, but he wages war against despair, for art to him is not an organ of surrender, but a challenge. There is no doubt about it that he presents the littleness of everyday life of the ruled, but there lies his greatness too when he manages to suggest the largeness of their everyday life[57]. Wesker may, therefore, be regarded as the bard of all the infinite variety of the working-class epoch.

Wesker as a literary artist is endeavouring to make it felt that the new working-class-the most revolutionary class-is rising up to usher in a new era. The labouring people who had so far been ignored or relegated to the background come up to assert themselves, and Wesker is ready to uphold their cause through his art. Their role may not be regarded as "a profound illumination of the contemporary dilemma" nor as "a portrayal of sordid nihilism in the post-atomic age" as Sir Ifor Evans[58] observed. Wesker diagnoses the malady and gives a clarion call to the workers and makes them veer round him[59]. He intends to plead for their cause

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57. J. Bentley : The Life of the Theatre, op. cit. p. 7

58. I. Evans : A Short History of English Literature, p. 148

59. It is the objective behind opening Centre 42, a cultural organisation directed by Wesker.

and attacks the capitalist society with the confidence of a passionate, rational socialist, with a firm determination to use his art consciously to promote ideas and devise ways for their better living.

Wesker is the last man to suggest a solution or to prescribe a curative medicine, because he is essentially an artist for the working people. He sees their great survival in the modern age. In this regard we are reminded of a story about Bertolt Brecht, one of the chief exponents of modern German drama:

> Somebody once asked him what the purpose of a good play ought to be. He answered by describing a photograph he had seen in a magazine, a double-page spread of Tokyo after the earthquake. Amid the devastation, one building remained upright. The caption consisted of two words : 'Steel stood'. That, said Brecht, was the purpose of drama - to teach us how to survive[60].

Wesker does not intend to make the working people the cannon-fodder of capitalism, but, on the contrary, he attempts to inspire them to stand erect. Playwriting, to him, is to teach them how to survive. Therefore, he begins to tell stories — and this is his art- a sort of hymn in praise of man.

### 3. His indebtedness to authors, and his distinctive qualities with a note of modernity.

It was Shakespeare who never took the trouble of inventing a story for his own play. He could, quite easily, ransack a

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60. Kenneth Tynan : Curtains, p. 461

Boccaccio, or Cinthio, or a Saxo Grammaticus, or a Holinshed for the materials of his plays. Wesker takes neither a story nor a plot from any of his predecessors. Yet he is indebted to a thousand and one authors. It is true that he hardly takes refuge in nature, nor does he make an escape in the timeless realm beyond the grave, but he finds men in slums, language or dialect in countryside, life in restaurants or struggle in military barracks — all as a journey in the realm before the grave. The immediate predecessors to whom Wesker is indebted most are not all English or European, but he remains indebted to those from either shore of the Atlantic Ocean. Behind Shakespeare we behold Plautus, Terence and Seneca, behind Shaw we behold Ibsen and Strindberg, behind Wesker we do behold Henric Ibsen, Maxim Gorky, Anton Chekhov, Clifford Odets, D.H. Lawrence, Arthur Miller, Sean O'Casey, Eugene O'Neill, Bertolt Brecht, John Osborne, and many others. Yet he is believed to have been advocating something radical with the insistence that his is the play to meet the needs of a new scientific age.

It is worth noting here that many of the above dramatists are themselves of working-class origin or deal with the people belonging to this class. They pave the way for Wesker along which he moves. But he is never their blind follower, nor does he always take finished materials from them. He may have borrowed a plume or two from them, but the artistry is absolutely his own. It is through the alchemy of art that he reflects life through his works absolutely in accordance with the exigencies of circumstances.

Wesker may have been influenced by the poetic language and the realistic pictures of Ibsen and Gorky's faith in the brotherhood of man and the hopefulness of the new generation. Wesker's The Kitchen is, we may say, an age-wise improvement of Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard (1904); he is influenced, to a great extent, by Odet's Waiting for Lefty (1935) and Awake and Sing (1935) for his devotion to social realities. To D.H. Lawrence in general and to his Sons and Lovers (1913) in particular, Wesker owes much for his TRILOGY. Modern capitalist civilization thwarts the spirit of both Lawrence and Wesker, but while Lawrence burrowed in the dark either resorting to an orgy of sex or evoking the fertility images of English culture, Wesker invents a means to present a vivid and realistic picture of the working people either of town or country to whom change was a trajectory of the culture. He is one with Arthur Miller who aimed to present man as the creature of society, and at the same time as its creator. He catches the whole atmosphere of working-class life as Sean O' Casey, and he listens to the language of the London slums as Sean O' Casey listened to that of the Dublin poor. Yet there is a striking difference between the two. Sean O' Casey gave Ireland its first true proletarian drama in the two masterpieces Juno and the Paycock, and The Plough and the Stars. But his realism, according to John Gassner, was not nourished on the soil[61] whereas his later plays deviate from his

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61. John Gassner : The Treasure of the Theatre, p. 510

earlier faith. But even a severe critic of Wesker may not find such a vulnerable point. If Wesker is directly indebted to anybody for his play The Friends it is Lazarus Laughed (1928) by Eugene O'Neill. Both the plays pronounce an affirmation of belief in humanity and the ultimate triumph of life over death. Sometimes the use of raw language and some moments of The Kitchen are reminiscent of O'Neill too. Wesker would have been greatly influenced by Brecht both from the viewpoints of technique and subject-matter. He has followed the manner of Brecht who, according to a modern critic[62], analysed the social facts or produced an active desire for the overthrow of the existing social order. Wesker takes his cue from Osborne's Look Back in Anger for his portraiture of angry persons in The Kitchen.

However infected Wesker may have been, he has some distinctive qualities of his own. To make a proper study of his drama is to make a proper study of the working-class. He tries to expose the hidden meaning rather than to perform the role of a sight-seer. His premise is 'manscape' rather than 'landscape' of man. He does not, in general, aim to hold up the inner psychic realms but to hold up social characters, prefers autopsy of society to that of individuals. There are characters in his works who are allowed to play their roles in a realistic manner, their manners may sometimes border on vulgarity when they are judged from the sophisticated angle of vision. Yet there is not a single

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62. Martin Eslin : The Theatre of Trile, p. 201

articulation or a hint that smacks of pornography or anything obscene.

While the contemporary prominent dramatists had the general tendency, after their outstanding success on the stage, to look back or to have recourse to remote past or something absurd indicating no destination but advocating "darkness and despair"[63], Wesker makes the past, present as well as the future a living element as distinct from those as possible. While such dramatists were making use of the dramatic vocabulary of a newer kind ignoring the prime necessity of their age, Wesker is, however, intent on injecting vitality into his characters making them fit to combat the dark and to invoke the light. He, who has, according to Lawrence Kitchin[64], a mastery of London or provincial working-class speech rhythms and dialect, regards to dialects and dialectics. Again, while some plead for well-made plays giving vent to bloodless dramas, Wesker shows in his plays how life may be sprightly and gay in the garden of a selfish giant of commercialism. Whether it is a flash-back or a flash-forward technique is a secondary question, the primary question, to Wesker, is to find out nobleness in the so-called ignoble strife without having any cause to mourn. Wesker is essentially a rebel. His plays, therefore,

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63. Eugene Ionesco in his article "Why do I write" in TAMBIT, Vol. 8, No. 32, 1978 writes : If my characters wander uncomprehendingly through darkness and despair, adrift in the absurd, it is because no signpost indicates which path they should follow.

64. Lawrence Kitchin : Drama in the Sixties, pp. 99-100

can only be understood in the light of what he rebels against. His plays neither give us the empty photographic replicas of everyday life, nor do they uphold emotional uplift or after-dinner entertainment. His plays convincingly become tools of social engineering and laboratories of social change. His works may, therefore, be regarded as a prelude to the final struggle with the ruling class. Whereas the trend of many of the contemporary dramas is towards contemplating clinical investigation or the creation of a convulsive theatre unleasing a new theatrical hysteria, or merely providing mental nabulum to be gobbled up and then forgotten, his plays demand much on action and sociological implication. While many of the contemporary dramatists take shelter in a glass house to escape heat and fire, Wesker plunges into the fire not to be reduced into ashes but to come out like a phoenix alive.

Wesker deals with the community or the class rather than individuals. It is needless to say that so far as the structure of his society is concerned, it is capitalistic ___ so individuals are sure to come. So come characters like Libby Tobacco, a disillusioned rootless pessimist who is tired of democracy, cities, civilization or even women. Sometimes he depicts the conflict of self-interests of individuals like Beery and Manny. But almost always his aim is to depict the social feelings or class feelings rather than individual feelings.

All art, to a great extent, is autobiographical. Wesker's art may not be an exception to the rule. If reality be the direct

materials of art, an artist is bound to draw upon from reality. But he knows that art is definitely not the torn pages of a diary nor does it carelessly pick up the titbits at random from anywhere without deliberate selection and rejection. Neither he designs his works stuffed with pseudo-cultural elements for mass consumption nor does he infuse his works with spy-mania creating super-heroes like James Bond giving a performance of courageous feats signifying nothing. He knows what to take up and use and what to reject. One may detect young Wesker in Ronnie Kahn or Harry, or Wesker — the Director of Centre 42 — in Andrew Cobham, Wesker — the pastry-cook — in Dan preparing an apple strudel, or Wesker — the conscripted man of the Navy — in Ron or Sailor in the navy; his mother in Sarah Kahn; his father in Harry Kahn; his sister in Ada Simmonds; his brother-in-law in Dave Simmonds; his aunts in Cissie and Esther Kahn; his wife in Dentie Bryant. But all these tend to give us an impression of the truth of art and beauty rather than the truth of raw facts only.

Wesker is a master artist not because he introduces autobiographical details in his plays, but because he discovers reality for himself to handle the details in a superb masterly fashion. Here the flavour of his personality is not difficult to trace. There lies his mastery where he is able to make his personal feelings impersonal by rediscovering the magic of his life, the joy and harshness of it. He aesthetically perceives the world around and the result of the influence of the environment in which his

personality has been formed from early childhood. Nature, people, the environment, the world of music, the mode of life do not leave him unaffected. Their aesthetic significance is discernible in his works. It is known that a man in a class society is a representative of a definite class and lives in a specific socio-historical environment. Here every personality is characterised by a certain age, sex, and a certain psycho-physiological and psychological nature. Every individual has a world outlook and belongs to one national group or another. This individuality and uniqueness are the sources of his art. So he makes the correct evaluations of reality in class consciousness. He also evaluates the aesthetic taste both of a social group and a separate individual, taking into account that individual taste is determined by the content of the social taste, and by the world outlook and class position of the individual. Thus reality is there in his art. He explores the soul condition so that others may react. He makes the subjective things objective, and objective materials subjective without being sentimental or idealistic. Again and again he depends on the re-creation of experience, but his craftsmanship, according to Baker himself, lies in either the organization of experience or the transformation of experience:

> In thinking about the structure of my work I have come to consider a possible theory about the composition of any work of art. On the assumption that all art is the re-creation of experience whether imaginative or actual, then the re-creative art happens under two headings, both of which are valid. One heading could be called 'the organization of experience' and, the other

> 'The transformation of experience' - transformation, that is, into poetry. And from such a theory one should then analyse a work of art to discover how much is organising and how much is transforming an experience. The more moments of transformation one can find, the greater the work of art[65].

Now a pertinent point may be raised how far Wesker is a modern artist. There are dramatists like Sophocles, Shakespeare, Goethe, Ibsen or Chekhov who may be classified as modern on the ground that their plays do still have some inherent qualities to move the twentieth century audience, and it may perhaps safely be conjectured that they will do so even in the centuries to come. Will Wesker's plays be able to do so? - is a relevant question.

Before we attempt to answer on Wesker let us examine where lies the 'modernity' of the above dramatists or what is our idea about modernism. It is generally seen that all the plays are not those that have made the above dramatists 'modern'. Only those plays that refuse to conform to the traditional norms either in form or in content, seem to be modern. Therefore modernism tends towards the rejection not only of 'old' form but also of 'old content, that is, the rejection of everything that is hackneyed and haggard, and the acceptance of everything new. The concept of modernism is, according to Ovcharenko[66], associated mainly or in

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65. Ronald Hayman : Arnold Wesker, pp. 9-10

66. A. Ovcharenko : Socialist Realism and the Modern Literary Process, Op. cit. p. 50

part with the store of devices and techniques of artistic creativity. It does not necessarily mean Dadaism or surrealism, naturalism or realism, expressionism or symbolism, avant garde or existentialism. It directs our attention to a true unity of new content and new form. It does not simply focus on individuality nor points to the increasing individualising and anthropologising tendencies. It suits the aesthetic tastes of contemporary man but which is not incompatible with the depiction of life in its revolutionary development. Thus it guarantees an unbreakable bond with the life of the people. It has obviously no connexion with anything fetish or thoughtless, but it enriches the treasure house of art with their selection of motifs. Modernism does not necessarily mean that a man should be merely a critical being, nor a hopeless being always at war with a society, but he should be in action to change his conditions, to master life, to keep pace with the course of history and finally to be the creator of his own fate. To weaker modernism means all these.

It is the struggle of the hero against fate or circumstances and the universality of appeal that make Sophocles modern for his plays transcend the bounds of a particular age and a particular society. Shakespeare's modernity lies not in conformity with classical rules but in their rejection. When contemporary dramatists failed, Shakespeare came just at the right moment to make full and fresh use of the drama of his time using the man and the time in harmonious conjunction with each other. It is Shakespeare who

transforms the world of thoughts and feelings to move still farther from the animal world into the only real future endowed with sobriety and clarity. It was Goethe who did not like to deal with God. He felt himself at home only in the human, and it was this humanity, this emancipation of art from the fetters of religion that determined Goethe's greatness and modernity.

New inference may safely be drawn that modern dramatist is he who has something novel to profess about either form or content or both. Unlike those of his contemporaries Wesker not only introduces TRILOGY, flash - forwards or compresses one or two decades into a unifying whole, but also is able to explore the possibilities of the working class people in the social, or political content. Politically these people are deemed to be the most determining factor either in abolishing or in maintaining the existence of a capitalist state which is, in fact, the organ of coercion. From the social point of view Wesker is more radical than his contemporary dramatists. His modernity consists in his ability to choose natural circumstances and turn them into elements of truth or his task lies in recasting the truth of life into artistic truth most equivalent to it for portraying the world as it is. He is modern in the sense that he depicts life and the world with perfect verisimilitude reflecting life and society of the age to which the dramatic action belongs.

It may be assumed that under capitalism there is a single cultural hegemony ---- the ideas of the ruling class. At the start

capitalism repudiated tradition and the authority of the past on the one hand, and sponsored the ideas of liberty and liberation in the shape of unrestrained individualism on the other. Thus capitalism has acted as a brake upon the dying culture and has taken the initiative in promoting change. In this world of capitalist enterprise, according to Daniel Bell[87], the nominal ethos in the spheres of production and organisation is still one of work, delayed gratification, career orientation, devotion to the enterprise.

As a consequence of this contradiction man becomes either the ruler — an embodiment of power, or the ruled — an embodiment of property. In the sphere of social production the capitalist or the ruler becomes the embodiment of power enjoying liberty, and the labour or the ruled, becomes the embodiment of property reduced to slavery.

As far as marriage is concerned the capitalist law is pleased when the couple formally register their desire to get married. What happens behind the legal curtains, where real life is enacted, how this voluntary agreement is arrived at — is no concern of the law which is actually the coercive measure of the capitalist state. As a result of that indifference on the part of the law generally a family fosters the enslavement of women.

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87. Daniel Bell's article on "Modernism and Capitalism" in Partisan Review/2 op. cit. pp. 217-218

Wesker in the above light never accepts marriage that is officially sanctioned, for official sanction means sanction of the state as a coercive organ. In a capitalist society matrimony is a contract depositing of the body and mind of persons for life. Since such contract actually means slavery, overt or covert, marriage never takes place in Wesker's works. Secondly, Wesker always sponsors monogamian family where the equality of the sexes is almost maintained. Thirdly, through his works he advocates that full freedom in marriage can never be operative till the abolition of Capitalist production and the removal of property relations. Importance is, therefore, given to mutual affection rather than sex. In this regard he is more modern than many of his contemporaries.

Wesker accepts families mostly consisting of two generations only, but there is not a single play where a marriage takes place ceremoniously. In this respect he is more Shavian than Bernard Shaw himself. Moreover, there is not a single play (except Chips with Everything which is a play where there is no female character) where a male character remains all along supreme and domineering over the female counterparts. As marriage and male chauvinism are the two essential features of a capitalist society, these are, of course, considered to be not only the relics of coercion, but also taboos to Wesker's works. Peter cannot marry Monique, Ronnie cannot marry Beatie. Harry and Harriet like Beatie and Adam live together, love together and even sleep together without thinking of marriage.

4. A dramatist with a mission

"If we search for one single epithet to apply to the modern stage, "so says Professor Nicoll", we are forced in the end to select the adjective eclectic"[68]. When one has the occasion to come across varieties of dramas such as 'impressionistic', 'expressionistic', 'domestic', 'realistic', 'naturalistic', 'surrealistic', 'existentialist', 'avant garde', 'epic', 'absurd' or 'anti-theatre' etc., one is sure to agree with Professor Nicoll. We, at once, come to realise that most of these different 'schools' tend more towards 'form' than towards 'content' proper. Form and content are the different facets of the same gem. Art is never possible without the intermingling of the two, and it is the symmetrical balance of form and content that makes an art, for subject without style, according to R.G. Collingwood[69], is barbarism, and style without subject is dilettantism.

Yet a question remains ___ which of the two is more important __ form or content? A picture is properly a picture inseparable from the frame and one may be rather disinclined to derive any pleasure out of the picture when it is without the frame. To a lover of pictures, frames may be superfluous. We definitely do not agree with him who rejects the existence of the frame. At the same time we are not at one with him who finds possibility in

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68. A. Nicoll : British Drama, op. cit. p. 267

69. R. G. Collingwood : The Principles of Art, p. 299

the discovery of new forms or techniques at the cost of the extinction of content or subject-matter. We are contented with him who deliberately ignores form for the sake of the content. While the greatness of the Elizabethan age according to Professor Tillyard[70], contained so much of new without bursting the noble form of the old order, Wesker often batters the old form with the new content. While the whole activity of drama was, as observed by John Elsom, gripped by establishment forces, monolithic and unchangeable[71], it is Wesker who effectively ventures to use drama as a weapon. Even the best known plays of Wesker, thus opines Robert Brustein[72], are characterised by social revolt.

The artist who is to put stress on form is, in general, one who aims chiefly at amusement or entertainment. He has got to tell nothing which is deep. As his chief aim is mere recreation or amusement, he may divorce content for the espousal of newer technique or form. The artist of this category may be a partner of life, but he may possibly be so with the limited liability. His zest for life or even for art may possibly be skin-deep or lip-deep. Therefore whatever he does, he does it with the significant failure of expressing himself freely, fully and forcefully. We may, in a relaxing mood, enjoy his work superficially, but we never expect anything serious from him. Such a type of artist may

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70. E.M.W. Tillyard : The Elizabethan world picture, p. 6

71. J. Elsom : Theatre Outside London, p. 164

72. Robert Brustein : The Theatre of Revolt, p. 22

intend mainly to reside on an ivory tower far away from the common run of people. Wesker is never such an artist. He is a revolutionary as regards subject-matter as well as technique. He stands on the threshold of a new drama. In this regard let us hear what J. Chiari says about him :

> He is a very active, industrious writer dedicated to the task of bringing art and enlightenment to the masses. Although ideas and ideals do not necessarily make good art, his enthusiasm is infectious and he has quite a following. Even if one might doubt the soundness of his approach to the problem of enlightening the masses and of improving their lot through art, his heart is in the right place, and one cannot but admire and be prepared to applaud his zeal. Besides that, whatever he may lack, he does not lack boldness of conception"[73].

The people Wesker deals with are, in general, average run of common men. He takes much interest in them whether they be bus drivers or miners. He realises that art should not be the monopoly for the select few but is for the majority to participate. Let us quote Wesker himself who develops his idea through an article —— 'Let Battle Commence' :

> I want to write my plays not only for the class of people who acknowledge plays to be a legitimate form of expression, but for those to whom the phrase 'form of expression' may mean nothing whatsoever. It is the bus driver, the housewife, the miner and the Teddy Boy to whom I should like to address myself"[74].

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73. J. Chiari : Landmarks of Contemporary drama, p. 118

74. Charles Marowitz, Tom Milne and O. Hale (edg. ) : The Encore Theatre, p. 96

He is supposed to have turned into a twentieth century Messiah whose duty is not only to strive for the working class but also to make drama, according to an encyclopedist, the platform of his message of brotherhood for strife-torn humanity and the quest for the fulfilment of individual lives[75]. As Wesker believed in neo-brotherhood, he endeavours, on his own account, to unfold new opportunities and possibilities in politics, communication, living and above all, in art[76]. It is, therefore, his business to try art on the working people, but not to ignore them even when they do so sufficiently respond. Harry, for example, with the assistance of some of his friends reads poems and plays on guitar to the factory-workers during their recess hours with some success, but ultimately he does not despair of continuing his attempt with art.

Wesker upholds his task for he has firm faith in socialism[77]; but to him, it is not merely an 'ism' as other professed 'isms' are. Socialism is, to him, what oxygen is to a living creature. The socialism he seeks and adores is not the Fabian Socialism as Bernard Shaw believed in or Guild Socialism as Bertrand Russell propagated or Utopian Socialism as Robert Owen, Francis Charles Fourier, Saint-Simon or William Morris believed in. To his socialism

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75. Myron Matlaw : Modern World Drama, p. 813

76. Marowitz, Milne and Hale (eds.) : The Encore Theatre, op. cit. pp. 110-111

77. A. Wesker : Chicken Soup with Barley, III, ii ("Socialism is my light ... A way of life" tells Sarah to Ronnie)

is a 'living', a 'singing', 'a dancing' and above all, it is being concerned about people and the world[78]. Nemais is a propagator of this type of socialism to which Beatie Bryant is initiated as well as baptised. Socialism and art are, to Wesker, but the two lungs of an organic whole.

Wesker believes in nothing that is stagnant and stereotyped. He believes in everything that is dynamic and progressive. To him the purpose of life is the perpetual re-enactment of the first great myth of all time: the creation of order out of chaos. If to march order out to chaos is a mission, he is a missionary; if to find out diapason under a heap of jarring atoms is the task of a prophet, he is a prophet. Whether he is a missionary or a prophet is a secondary question; he is primarily an artist who finds chaos around him, but attempts to crystallise it into an art of harmonious order ___ an art that strives to steer a course amidst cacophony towards symphony. He finds chaos in an affluent society that probably moves from distraction to distraction. But he feels the necessity of bringing order into life through drama as well as through theatre. He is put to gaol for his protest against nuclear diplomacy. His attempts for the propagation of culture for the members of the trade unions through Centre Forty Two may have proved baffling, yet he is never ready for snapping his ties with art which is his first love and perhaps the last resort. He cannot have mid-day siesta till the general malaise persists. Menace may

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78. Wesker : Roots, II, ii

be there, but he is to carry the banner of arms, or the life-instinct in the midst of Thanatos, or the death-instinct. He declares the glory of man or the resurrection of mankind. Thus Wesker with the earnestness of an artist, assimilates the intellectual ferment of his times as if by Osmosis. He does not care to capture all the phenomena presented by the Europe of sixties and seventies, but he is able to produce man's aspirations that affect him most. While many of Wesker's contemporaries are hopeless about the revival of humanity, it is Wesker who is not only hopeful about the role of humanity, but he tries to materialise it through his works as if ushering in a new era. We are of the opinion that humanism has definitely added a new dimension to his plays. We are even prepared to say that in his plays there is a cross-fertilisation of humanism, social realism and autobiographical elements[79].

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79. T.R. Monk : Britain (1945-1970), p. 384

## CHAPTER TWO

## THE ORGANIZATION OF ART

### 1. Art through the ages

Before we begin to make a comprehensive study of Wesker let us see what he himself says:

> I would like people to know me not only by my writing but by my life; to know not only my writing but the writing of my contemporaries; to know not only literature but music and painting also; not only to experience art but to know how it came about and the times in which it came about and what else happened in those times, and the currents of religion, philosophy and science which shaped him and the clues which there are for him to understand so that to-morrow's revolution will not be an ugly but a noble one[1].

Therefore, before we study the art of Wesker it is better to find out how people's art came about and how it exercised an influence on the life of the people. The study of art from time immemorial not only gives an idea of the sense of unity among the working classes, but also helps us to understand the struggle of the hostile forces. We shall never understand the true mission of literature until and unless we understand the evolutionary process of history. Before we take an account of Wesker's art we should discover the unity of continuity and of ever renewing uniqueness.

When men learnt 'locomotion on level ground' and 'adopted a more and more erect posture' they used to look at Nature with

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1. A. Wesker : Fears of fragmentation, p. 128

awe and wonder. They felt the necessity of using their hands and legs. Gradually they learnt to grasp sticks to use against their enemies and to bombard them too[2].

In course of time they were in a position to make out the utility of hand as well as that of tools. And interestingly there occurred some molecular changes in their brains that helped them to withstand the opposition from outer reality. This was achieved when they began sharpening their tools. This process of sharpening the tools helped them to assume a sense of art. This sense of art was due to an integral connection between hand and brain[3]. The more they sharpened the tools, the more they acquired the finesse of art. This sense of self-defence acted behind the sense of art. The primitive artists used to paint pictures of life-like bisons and mammoths on the walls of the caves and rocks neither as a pastime nor as an exercise of an individual nature, but most probably as a display of self-assertion against those hostile creatures.

The art of the cave-man might have been, to some extent, the reflection of a highly individualistic attitude towards life[4], but it always kept up the rhythm with the society as a whole because

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2. F. Engels : Dialectics of Nature, p. 171
3. G. Thomson : Marxism and Poetry, p. 4
4. The Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. II, 1973, p. 491

without the co-operation of others they could not produce art.

The hunting primitives mimicked the animals in dance, and portrayed its vigour in cave-paintings. But very soon they were successful in finding rhythm with Nature. Let us see, in this regard, what Caudwell observes

> In Neolithic Art, when hunting or food-gathering man becomes a crop-raising or cattle-rearing tribe, the object is not merely sought by society but changed by it. The man realises himself in the percept as social man, as the tribe changing the object according to conventions and forms rested in the means of communication. The dance becomes the formal hieratic movement of chorus and incipient tragedy. The hunting or food-gathering primitive's dance is violently naturalistic and mimicking; the food-raising or cattle-rearing dance have the formality of a religious rite and reveals the impress of the tribe's soul or Nature. It emphasises the magical and world-governing power of the gesture. The circling man obeys the circling dancer; the crop lifts with the dizzy motion. The tribe draws Nature into its bosom[5].

In this stage man hankered most after bumper crops in the field and lovely offspring at home. Life was materialistic. The nomadic trend of the tribes was on the wane. The children as well as the crops became identical with the tribes. Their hopes, desires, aspirations or even affections circled round the crops and the children as well. At this transitional stage of human development art was much more ritualistic, and rituals were the manifestations of art too. The arts and the rituals of this era were in the

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5. Ch. Caudwell: Illusion and Reality, p. 256

closest proximity with the transfiguring personification of TO AUTUMN by John Keats; here, in this poem, the harvester, the reaper, the gleaner and the cyder-presser were not only welcoming Autumn, but they were also celebrating the orgy of their hidden desires for crops and children. Here the whole proposition involves the evocation of many of the fertility images of human culture inclusive of the idea of the delivery of yielding crops from the womb of dumb Nature.

With the introduction of the art of agriculture there developed a division of labour and after that came spinning, weaving, metal-working, pottery and navigation and these were followed finally by trade, industry, art and science. Nomadic tribes gradually developed into nations and states came into existence along with law and politics; then arose religion ___ the fantastic reflection of human things in the human mind[6].

The Society, at this stage, was obviously a class society with the ruler on the one hand and the ruled on the other. There arose an ease-loving section of ruling people who were what we may call parasites or the leisured classes. They were the conservative aristocracy and 'the priestly caste' who preferred no change in the social or political structure lest they should lose the privileges which they enjoyed at the expense of the ruled. Collective ventures continued, but restrictions were maintained regarding

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6. Dialectics of Nature, op. cit. p. 177

distribution. The community right over property was probably replaced by the individual right of the ruling class. This was due mainly to the male lineage and the establishment of right of inheritance from the father instead of the female line and the right of inheritance through the mother[7]. The male domination created a cleavage in the society and the transfer of male right from female right caused a class society.

When man could only hunt and gather food in co-operation with each other during the pre-historic age, poetry which was a pleasure in pain, came to the primitive hunters and food-gatherers as naturally as the leaves to a tree. Society, as a whole, was more or less creative.

Art and literature of this period began with the desire to delineate and to create awe. The purpose behind those, to some extent, was spiritual, but the means were very much magical and the ends were very much material. With the development of agriculture and pastoral life man began to acclimatise themselves to a class society where division of labour created economic & cultural divisions between man. The more the people learnt the art of controlling and fighting hostile Nature, the more they became slaves to a section of privileged people in a class society. But time and experience taught the labouring people to fight not only against external forces of nature but also to stand in earnest against the elements among mankind, for life, to them, was the

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7. Selected Works of Marx and Engels, p. 496

struggle for existence. The rise of a Spartacus, although in a later period, was, therefore, not an accident.

However, the ruling class began to rule, and tightened its grip over the possession and preservation of property. Poetry, at this period, was rather dessocialised owing to its drawing more and more apart from the world of reality and its assertion with increasing success of the personal perception of life. As a result the great mass of men neither read this sort of poetry, nor felt the need for it, nor could understand such poetry which was believed to have moved away from concrete living. Still beside this abstract and ethereal idea there flowed a stream of art and literature that was purely based upon the material achievements on earth patronised by the working classes. These working classes with their soiled hands would ventilate their feelings and emotions, hopes and aspirations either in the field of corn or in their celebration of corn festivals in the form of dance and later on in the ballad or lyric. The more they were unable to overthrow their class enemy, the more they resorted to art, literature and later on to hieroglyphics or the art of writing. Thus the outward struggle against reality precipitates the inner psychical struggle — and this inner psychical struggle is channelised into art.

This new society was clearly divided into two groups: there were the working people who were mostly regarded as rustics, and the nobility who claimed to be much more refined in taste and manners. Yet life during this age in which class inequalities

produced a cultural cleavage could not come to a standstill. The society of the working people had to undergo a series of changes with agriculture and the beginnings of handicrafts. There was the great toiling multitude of people on the one hand, and the ease-loving aristocrats on the other. Hence the constant warfare, and the enslavement of prisoners of war. Thus 'state' as an organ of coercion came into existence.

As State became the powerful machinery in the hands of the ruling class, it was this ruling class that occupied the right of dominating the toiling masses especially with the assistance of some of the slaves and the progress of agriculture, trade and commerce. Usuries or mortgages were, as means of exploitation, very common then.

Sometimes the working class in ancient Greece would come into prominence even in politics. According to Sir Ernest Barker a leather-seller, a lamp-maker and a rope dealer became eminent politicians after Pericles' death[8]. This might have been some examples of exceptions, and secondly the ruling class had to feed upon the ruled in order to continue its rule. However, class-feeling was rampant.

While art during the age of the erection of pyramids was an art in the form of propaganda and the artist was probably a

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8. Ernest Barker : Greek Political Theory, p. 34

paid artist, the artist of the epic age was no longer so. Art, according to the contributor to the Encyclopedia Britannica, during the heroic or the epic age, became a free pursuit of creative truth and a method of interpreting reality[9]. Artists were no longer mercenaries without recognition. True, there might have been minstrels attached to the war-lords with the task of celebrating their military exploits and thereby expressing the outlook of the ruling class, but we may still believe that there was a people's poet like a Homer who has raised the language of the people to a higher level. Art, to the ancient Greeks, was, therefore, neither magic nor animism. They saw life complete and saw it whole :

> They lost all fear of the external world — they actually turned sympathetically towards this world, and their art became an expression of what they saw with friendly eyes — an idealization of nature. Man now saw beauty everywhere in living things, and the organic rhythm of life was the quality he tried to express in his art[10].

It is remarkable to note that while the primitive art was much more akin to reality, the art of this period cared much for purity, perfection and transcendentalism.

So far as art was related to life, it tended to create order out of chaos. Art was, at that stage, actually an escape

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9. (Marx & Engels) The Encyclopedia Britannica, op. cit. p. 491

10. Herbert Read : The Meaning of Art, p. 52

from chaos. Chaos stands for the want of order and the order again stands for seeking the rhythm of life. When life becomes associated with the rhythm of society, it becomes a forceful one. If there is co-operation and co-ordination in a society, life can never be what we may call chaotic. If literature be the reflection of life, it ought to mirror the real things of life —— the hopes and aspirations, the struggles and conflicts of man surrounded by hostile elements. An artist who loses sight of this aspect of life is certainly not a great artist. An artist, who lives in society and remains sensible, can never be free from society.

Yet society took such a turn that the ruling class had a supremacy over the ruled. This supremacy was a pointer to attract a good many artists in their favour. Hence the birth of panegyric art and literature meant for eulogising the careers and deeds of the so called ecclesial figures of history. The aim of this school of art and literature was to portray the prestigious tasks of the outstanding persons who would stamp their image upon their age with the complete oblivion with which environmental forces shape the personality and product of the individual[11]. Hence the birth of court-poets of the later ages.

The purpose of many of the historians, biographers or poets of the past was not only to eulogise the hero but also to create supermen instead of treating these men as men. They were perhaps forgetful of the fact that men were neither supermen nor subhuman.

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11. The Encyclopedia Britannica, op. cit. p. 490

If there be a subman like Caliban, it is only possible when he is nurtured in an atmosphere which is not at all congenial to a better means of living and culture. Again a superman like Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, being a sufferer of epilepsy, cannot stand the foul breath of the uncouth working classes; still it remains an odd thing that this superman cannot go or even remain a superman without public support. An Oedipus may have ruled out the possibility of a Sphinx, a Caius Marcius (alias Coriolanus) may have driven away the Volscians, a Macbeth may have usurped the power from Duncan the King of Scotland, — but they were all common men with common human follies and foibles. It was only the status that made a difference between the rulers and the ruled.

As a matter of fact this eulogistic art and literature commemorating the lives and careers of so-called superman went far away from social realism. So long as the environmental forces were denied, the literature of this 'genre' was quite alienated from the common people. The social structure consisted of production, the exchange of things produced, and how wealth was produced and distributed. These modes of production and exchange left the society divided into classes and this class society was based mainly upon oppression and repression. Hence a clear demarcation in the social structure and relation that resulted in alienation. Therefore, the art of chaos was on the one hand, and the materialistic way of art on the other. While the former type aimed, with an eye to the rulers' interest, at supernaturalism and metaphysics, the latter, for the interest of the ruled, cared more to know where they stood

in relationship to their neighbour, or cared to know about themselves in every way, whether exhilarating or depressing. While the doctrine of art for art's sake has been derived from the former one, the art of social realism supports the latter; the one aims at escaping from life and the other aims at embracing life, with all the erudities, graphic realities or even disillusions and discontentments. These two trends either in intertwined forms or sometimes in distinct forms have been traced and are still now traceable in art and literature.

Thus, there was the art of the people and the art of the ruling minority. While the former remained more or less unpolished, indigenous but deep-rooted, the latter was, on the whole, refined and transcendental but rootless. It is a known fact that the art and literature had been mostly controlled and regulated by those who occupied and controlled the means of production and distribution. The result is that the art and literature has come down to the present century having been distilled through the ages by the patronage of the aristocracy, the church, the princes, and the city councils of merchants[12]. This cultivation of art and literature of fine stature may be regarded as a matter of individual luxury. From the very outset of the industrial revolution and with the advancement of technological civilisation things have undergone

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12. UNESCO : The Arts and Man, p. 31

a change on the surface, but the condition of the working people remains almost the same.

If plenty on the one hand and deprivation on the other be the real picture, what is the utility of the propagation of art for art's sake? If art is meant for the idle entertainment of a few and the elimination of many ___ it is not art at all, for

> the history of art is the history of ever deeper artistic reflection of reality, extension and enrichment of the aesthetic cognition and transformation of the world by man. The development of art is inseverably bound up with the development of society[13].

Charles Baudelaire (1821-67) [the French aristocratic poet who believed staunchly that art must be absolutely autonomous, that is, individual and free from social responsibility,] once declared that art must have a social purpose[14]. If social purpose be the aim of art, it should not, by any means, serve the interest of a few, but ought to serve the interest of the millions and tens of millions of working people.

These working people now consist of peasants, agricultural labourers and industrial labourers. They are the true followers of a country, its strength & its future because they are the true reality of modern society of science, industry and labour although

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13. Rosenthal & Udin (eds.) : A Dictionary of Philosophy, p. 32
14. Plekhanov : Art and Social Life, p. 17

the real reins of power are principally controlled by the ruling class known as bankers and industrialists[15].

So long as class society exists and functions, it is the duty of the artist to determine his 'stand' as well as 'attitude' first. The function of a true and progressive artist, according to Mao Tse Tung, will be to help the working people

> to unite, to make progress, to press ahead with one heart and one mind, to discard what is backward and develop what is revolutionary and should certainly not do the opposite.16

The true and progressive artist is he who is even ready to undergo a long and even painful process of tempering in order to understand people. Artists, being the conscious members of a class society, should be conscious of 'the objective realities of class struggle'. Moreover, Mao observes —

> Writers and artists should study society, that is to say, should study the various classes in society, their mutual relations and respective conditions, their physiognomy and their psychology .... Writers and artists concentrate such everyday phenomena, typify the contradictions, and struggles within them and produce works which awaken the masses, fire them with enthusiasm and impel them to unite and struggle to transform their environment.17

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15. Raymond Aron : Progress and Disillusion, p. 9

16. Mao Tse Tung : Selected Writings, p. 304

17. Ibid. p. 283

In order 'to propel history forward' the writers and artists will not study the society only, but they ought to link themselves closely with the masses, give expression to their thoughts and feelings — and that they may do it not only masters, but like 'the partners of life'.

Arnold Wesker belonged by birth to the working class. His background was of working class and he gathered experiences as a worker in various kinds of manual jobs. He had a thorough knowledge and understanding of the working classes whom he had observed closely. Naturally he, as an artist, began with a discovery he had made about and he recreated that experience and communicated it to others. But whatever he discovered, he discovered it in terms of society. His artistic method would be presupposing a truthful, historically concrete reflection of reality taken in its revolutionary development. His method, therefore, consisted in fidelity to the truth of life, no matter how stern it may be.

2. Poetry and drama through the ages

Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie says in '<u>The Idea</u>'(1914) that poetry, which is nothing but the production of an individual mind, is the work of poets, but not of peoples or communities. Poetry, in general, has a social image, and it cannot always be separated from society. Poetry as one of the earliest aesthetic activities of the human mind may be, to some extent, the spontaneous outburts of an individual, but it should not be free from the responsibilities of a community — greater or smaller. It may have some formal devices

that may differentiate it from the day-to-day speech of the people or some mystery or magic may have been added to it, still it is sponsored either by the minority or the majority. Poetry is definitely a misnomer had it not been duly approved by a greater section of the people.

The historical study of the past leads us to form an idea about primitive poetry which, might have expressed the feelings and aspirations of a community. Poetry would have been a pleasant form, but before it became an extra-ordinary speech or a magical or mysterious form, it had certainly undergone some definite changes. Those changes were definitely made because of the evolution of society, or the evolution in production and distribution and in relations between the producers and the consumers of a class society. From its very birth poetry might have expressed the feelings of a community or an individual. But with the economic development, and through the evolution of society, and with the change of social relations among men, poetry became the organ of expression and, later on, a weapon in the hands of the aristocracy, the then ruling class. Thus epic was born. What had remained in fragments for so long was given a regular shape.

Epic began to interpret reality — but it was a reality of a different type — a reality of conflicts between an aristocracy and an another aristocracy. THE ILIAD of Homer depicts the struggle of aristocrats of different places. Here is the society of the aristocrats who being unable to make further social progress and

acceleration have involved themselves in the fermentation of feuds. Agamemnon stands more for preserving the false prestige of the family than for any greater or bolder cause or even a national cause. Whatever symbolic meaning one may impute to it, Agamemnon actually was, at the cost of destroying a city of men and enslaving women and children, bent on getting back Helen who tried to establish the rights of women on an equal basis with the men (may heroes) of those days — or she might have argued for polyandry when polygamy was prevalent.

The epic chiefly dealt with lords and feuds of the aristocrats. Conspiracy rather than inspiration, assassination rather than resuscitation were quite common to the ruling class. There was on the other hand, a longing among the ruled for self-determination. While the epic tended more to depict the saga of the conflicts between the aristocrats of different clans or tribes, it could not perhaps always remain silent about the aspirations of the people. The spectacle, the pomp & the splendour might have dazzled the eyes of the working masses, but they had to find a medium of expression other than the epics which were mostly the art forms of the aristocrats. Poets like Homer attempted to entertain their masters by the recitation of heroic doings and their arts grew in the courts of the Greek conquerors[18]. If there was

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18. C.M. Bowra : Ancient Greek Literature, p. 2

consciousness of success and hymns of praise on the one hand, there was the other picture reflected in Hesiod on the other. For Hesiod Kings were not supposed to be 'sons of Zeus' but 'devourers of the people' and his chief interest was in the daily struggle for existence[19]. Both the works of Homer and Hesiod are important from the point of view of historical study, although it is certain that it was an age of Homer rather than of Hesiod.

But it was the drama that enabled the working class to see their feelings & aspirations translated into it to a greater extent. Drama was distilled through and evolved from the ritualistic dance and song in celebrating the festival of Dionysus, the Greek nature-god of fertility, and drama could not possibly be enacted without the assembly of a great multitude of people who mostly belonged to the working community. So it may be stated that the enactment of drama in Greece was not possible till the men of money or the merchants (quite opposite to the land-owning aristocrats) were actively concerned in cultural development[20]. Greek drama had to wait in the meantime for 'the dictatorship of a merchant-prince' in a city-state where drama evolved from the improvisations of the leaders of the dithyramb, which was a new type of choral performance that took shape from the ritual of Dionysus. These defacto rulers of Greece had to strengthen their regime by patronising drama, and the enactment of drama on a

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19. Ibid. p. 13

20. George Thomson : Marxism and Poetry, p. 41

platform stage before a multitude of people was not possible without the patronage of these rulers. Thus with the erection of a stage their hopes were going to be fulfilled. The innovation of chorus strengthened their desire. As these men, who formed the chorus, were not generally belonging to the aristocrats, people's rights on histrionic art was, however, more or less accepted. In this way the common people, through the histrionic art, began to establish their rights upon the Greek stage. This chorus hastened the way not only for the opera but also for Greek drama that ultimately accepted the rights of the working people.

The chorus expressed the aspirations of the working people till the central figure became prominent. This central figure would entertain the large number of spectators and most probably imputed grandeur and magnificence to the very character. He was capable of occupying the most important role and position among others. It is quite interesting to note that the prominence of the central figure was much more analogous to the actual prominence of the political head of the state. It was quite possible that a choregus or a chorus-leader who used to pay for the chorus on the stage, might have had some status in the society only because of his possession of wealth, that is, the possession of wealth was directly a pointer to the position in the state. Thus the common members of the chorus were on the point of being faded out after making way for the hero or protagonist. Consequently the working people, who gained ground inch by inch through the drama as well as the chorus, was on the verge of losing their right at the very

emergence of the hero who, represented the wealthy aristocrats. It was an age of heroic deeds and valour particularly of individual nature. The war and the apprehension of war turned gods into men and men or military lords into gods or demi-gods at least[81]. Thus godliness resembled manliness and the attitude of the common people was materialistic rather than spiritual. Drama at that period expressed general feelings rather than individual ambition.

But soon the Greek drama took a revolutionary turn when the drama competition was introduced in 534 B.C. in order to celebrate the festival in the honour of Dionysus. This drama competition directly synchronised the advent of great Greek dramatists like Thespis, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Menander etc.; but again it indirectly extended the scope for the ventilation of the love of the people for worldly life.

It was Thespis who claimed to have introduced one character with the chorus. Aeschylus added one more; Sophocles added the third character. Aeschylus devised masks for the characters, introduced spectacular garments for them, prescribed voluminous recitations or introduced high-heeled shoes for the prominent actors. So far as the form of the Greek drama was concerned the

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81. Aeschylus "had been initiated into the mysteries of his native Eleusis, the mysteries that brought man nearer to the power of Demeter, the goddess of the Earth. In his plays the human seems very close to the godlike, the gods walk like men and we breathe air of ecstasy". — A. Nicoll : The World Drama, p. 37

eminent dramatists of Greece developed a better art form in course of time. But it is quite interesting to note that with the introduction of more characters they advocated the cause of more spectators in the open theatres. That what epic could not achieve was easily achieved by drama; it was drama that perhaps mobilised the whole of the working masses to a consciousness of feeling. While epic was a thing of the heroes and heroism, drama was commonly republican in spirit.

Although Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.) was born of noble parents, he had to fight against the Persians in the battle of Marathon. He dealt with gods, goddesses, Titans, and Furies, but he could never denounce the social responsibility.

The gods and goddesses who were much more prominent in Aeschylus's plays are in the state of being withered in Sophocle's. Here in Sophocles there is no despot like Zeus, no scrupulous god like Apollo, no blood-sucker like Clytemnestra, and no trace of Furies seeking revenge. But Sophocles (496-406 B.C.), who was duly nurtured in the lap of democracy and popular justice, represented the triumphant maturity of the heroic period of Athenian democracy.

Drama, as an art form, was chiselled in the hand of Aeschylus and it reached almost a perfection in Sophocles. But both of them were dedicatedly realistic about the new generation — the generation that supported benevolent autocracy that paved the way for absolute monarchy or later on the imperialism of Macedon with Alexander the conqueror. The voice of the common people was,

however, still ventilated either through the oracle of Delphi or prophets like Teiresias or the Chorus[22] and the people were still in a position at least to express their anger and bitterness against the king, Agamemnon, who was to take the decision of waging war which was practically the other name for the indiscriminate destruction of innocent life[23].

If there were dramatists like Aeschylus and Sophocles to conserve the privileges of the royal palace, there was a dramatist like Euripides (484-406 B.C.) who descended to the fields of corn and the cottages of the common run of people. In this regard the dramas of Euripides are of earth ___ earthy. Let us have a look at what a great drama critic says about one of his plays:

> Electra, heroic in the hands of Aeschylus and idealised in those of Sophocles, becomes an ordinary girl going to the well for water. The antique legend is dragged down to earth. Besides this, the characters are, as it were, related now to a real environment. While the peasant talks of taking his steers to the fields to sow his crop, Electra speaks of keeping the house in order so that the labour of the day's end will find comfort. Not only is the legend dragged down to earth, it is being made domestic. At the same time an implicit comment is being made. Euripides is a kind of socialist before him, and his presentation of noble qualities in this poor toiler seems designed to indicate that high thought and passion are not the exclusive property of those kings and princes who are the persons of early myth[24].

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22. Antigone, Penguin translation by EF Watling : 1100-1101

23. H.D.F. Kitto : Greek Tragedy, pp. 68-69

24. A. Nicoll : The World Drama, p. 72

All that Euripides cared most for was to use contemporary reality as the basis of art without having recourse to mere analysing of the characters, situations or circumstances as did Sophocles. It was the society and the common people that seemed important to him. It would not be perhaps irrelevant if we resort to Professor Nicoll again; according to him Euripides became

> more humanitarian, not so religious, bringing down tragedy from the heights that hitherto it had kept to the levels of ordinary human existence[25].

Drama, in the channel of tragedy, was flowering upto the time of Euripides until the advent of the comedy of Aristophanes. Aristophanes (448-380 B.C.) might be regarded as the greatest of the Attic poets, but it is the invective that made him the eyesore of all eyes. He lashed right and left ---- even the politicians, busy-bodies or philosophers. Thus he used art against the ruling class.

Later on, to meet up with the demands of the age Menander (342-292 B.C.) was born to write a delicate comedy of manners, and a drama of intrigue which might have been drawn against a background of bourgeois city-life[26]. It was Menander who made a drama of great charm when he treated stock characters --- 'the testy old man', 'the interfering slave' and so on (which were later introduced in English comedies) with a delicacy of feeling and

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25. A. Nicoll : The Theory of Drama, p. 10

26. P. Hartnol (ed.) : The Oxford Companion to the Theatre, p.458

nservation. But it is interesting to note that the common run of people, who had almost been absent in the shape of characters in igh tragedies, began to peep prominently through his comedies.

On the wane of the Athenian democracy and at the birth of the Roman empire drama continued its triumphal march till the advent of Christianity. As the structure of the Roman society was almost identical with the Greek society, the taste and zest for drama was also of the same 'Genre'. Though Greek society was generally of two tiers there was a rising middle class to which the tragedians and the comedy-writers belonged. The society of Rome was depending more upon the toiling slaves upon whom existed the patricians or the ruling class. But the population of the city of Rome and of the Roman territory increased owing to enlarged conquests or by immigration.

There arose a constant struggle between the patricians and the plebians. Both of them struggled with the aim at establishing power over wealth and property and to usurp the power of the state. At the same time there were the proletarians on the other, who consisted of those who possessed less and were exempt from military service and taxation.

The atmosphere was congenial neither for serious dramas nor for tragedies, but for the birth of genial comedies. Because of these comedies, types rather than individuals began to appear. Drama, in those days, might have been reduced to an organ of mere amusement no doubt, but it, prepared ground for the composers to

assemble and to participate.

There was a social intercourse between the gentlefolk and the slaves; even marriages were reported to happen. But as Jane Austen's Darcy and Elizabeth of "Pride and Prejudice" could not marry until their respective pride and prejudice were gone, a young gentleman in love with a slave-girl could not take her as his wife until he learnt that the girl was chaste and the long-lost child of respectable parents. This sort of whitewash was necessary in those days and slaves were not generally allowed to appear on the stage until Cicero's day.

Rome made her flowering progress in art and literature through the dramas of Plautus (254/3 - 184 B.C.) and Terence (190-159 B.C.). Plautus was well aware of poverty and hardship.

Plautus tried to present the Rome of his day with a strenuous effort towards realism though he abstained from political and personal satire, not to avoid public criticism proper, but to avoid the censure of the ruling class.

While Plautus was to balance with the heritages of both Aristophanes and Menander, Terence was to follow the trail of Menander only. His contact with aristocracy and the 'atmosphere of culture and refinement', to which he was nurtured, debarred him from contriving a contemporary setting. In Terence there is the future germ of 'art for art's sake'. Nevertheless

> the fine and famous remark of one of his characters, 'I am a human being and think of all human affairs my concern' is true of Terence himself and gives his work an abiding charm[27].

It is this note of humanity that not only makes him famous but also may inspire others like Arnold Wesker to follow his footsteps.

The works of Ennius (239-169 B.C.), Pacuvius (220-130 B.C.) and Accius (170-86 B.C.) might have been read, enacted or praised either for a fresh impulse of Hellenism, humanitarian outlook or for pathetic scenes, philosophical discussions, complicated plots and the introduction of ghosts (the very same method as adopted by Shakespeare in his 'Hamlet'), or for the 'plots of violent, melodramatic nature, flamboyant personages, majestic utterances and powerful repartee' preparing the way for later scenes. Seneca (4 B.C. - 65 A.D.) introduced the atmosphere of gloom and horror, of treachery, brutality, witchcraft, bloodshed and murder which could not always be staged, but his is the failure when his plays could not ventilate the aspirations of the age.

With the erection of the first stone theatre in Rome by Pompey in 55 B.C. and with various other developments of the stage and theatre, the outward form of drama was becoming pompous and gaudy, while the essence and the flavour were in the state of being withered. Thus drama being divorced from reality began to lose its charm, the acrobats, rope-dancers or gladiators or such popular

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27. Ibid. p. 936

amusements were on the increase. Let us quote what Professor Nicoll has observed :

> The history of the drama presents one unassailable truth : when the drama declines scenic adornment begins to flourish. Perhaps we might even say that when scenery and show become dominant poetry and passion are forced to retire[33].

Imperial Rome has given us excellent architecture, laws worth praising and last of all an idea how to build and empire which actually paved the way for feudalism but it cannot claim to have produced a Shakespeare, or an Ibsen. However Seneca's horror tragedies were sounding the trumpet and the death-knell of the Roman empire was heard in the agitations of Spartacus and his followers. The Son of God came them, with him came Christianity. Anything that smelt Roman was discarded or overthrown for it was the Roman hand that smeared the blood of Christ.

No Christian dared to be an actor, for there was every possibility of a Christian actor being excommunicated; all priests and devout persons avoided theatrical performances as if these were taboos.

Thus drama which was more or less a republican art was almost dishonoured by the ministers of the church.

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33. The World Drama, op. cit. p. 84

Dramatic performances were virtually banned by the church. Metaphysics rather than physics, supernatural rather than natural reigned supreme. As a result Europe lost the heritage of the Hellenic traditions of the past, although she did not lose the appetite for drama. Inner preparations were being made till the volcanic eruptions were discernible in the form of liturgical drama.

Nevertheless Christianity played its historical role of preparing the ground for feudalism elevating the church as the Father, the king as son and the populace as the Holy Ghost. The slave-owning society was in a state of disintegration. The new one was getting a resurgence more or less in the pyramidical structure with the king as the pivotal political head. Monarchy was in the offing, but it had to run inferior to, if not parallel with, the papal church. The slaves who had so long been regarded as commodities or parts of movable properties were, as a rule of history, given some rights or privileges to remain as serfs.

As the rituals of Dionysus gradually developed to be Greek dramas, likewise the Christian festivals fostered dramas; and as choregus or the state patronised the Greek drama and theatre, the church, in the early period reluctantly, and, in the middle course willingly, patronised drama and theatre. People wanted drama, be it religious or secular. But the church feared exclusion through secularism. So it endeavoured to make drama religious and the language was latin.

The situation did not last long. When there was the papal edict of 1210 A.D. forbidding the clergy to appear on a public stage the real opportunity came out of the hands of the priests into those of the people. Therefore,

> the breakthrough came when the vernacular replaced Latin and the plays emerged from the churches into the market-squares. Drama had proved too popular for the church to monopolise it. The plays were taken over by the people[29].

Still the church did not rest till it lost control over drama and the theatre. Hence the birth of Miracle and Mystery plays, popularly described as 'Bible-histories', since they invariably dealt with some part of the Bible story. Beside these plays Morality plays or the personified abstractions were born. These Morality plays contained 'many touches of human nature'. Thus drama divorced from church heralded a new dawn and was about to acknowledge the demands of the people.

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In the tug of war between the church and the secular organs the latter began to hold control over drama and theatre in England. The nobility or even the Monarch began to patronise the actors, though the performance or the production of a play was subject to the approval of the state.

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29. Simon Eidsworth : Theatre, p. 38

Beside the Morality plays there were the plays like Henry Medwall's 'Fulgens and Lucrece' (1497 A.D.) to which the contemporary public were not slow to respond. This was purely a secular drama where Medwall dramatised the story of Lucretia, a Roman lady, who being wooed by two very different suitors, an idle patrician and a virtuous young man of humble birth, accepts the latter one as her husband. The theme that aimed at the social relationship between the nobility and the common folk, set an example that was followed, by Shakespeare in his comedies and by Ben Jonson to the fuller possibility.

It was, however, an age of consolidation and expansion of the rising bourgeoisie and culmination on the part of the monarchy. The ruling monarch of England could not forget its set-back in 1215 A.D. during the reign of King John who was compelled to ratify the five-point Magna Carta for the historical bourgeoisie that was to establish its supremacy in the ashes of feudalism. It would not again forget the peasant revolt of 1381 A.D. under the leadership of John Ball, Jack Straw and Wat Tyler. At the death of Wat Tyler the movement ended in fiasco and the then King Richard II, in the mean time, subdued the movement with an iron hand. But the people's growing demand of equal rights for 'Adam's descendants' was in the air. Yet England was nearing the age of industry and prosperity for the bourgeoisie.

But the social relations and the relations with property in the feudal set-up were the positive hindrance to the new possibility of bourgeois society. Even the peasants refused to

remain in the old system of society which was neither healthy nor desirable to them. The Lollard Movement under the leadership of John Wyclif (1326-1384 A.D.) was a part of it. William Langland (1332-1400 A.D.) went a few steps ahead by denouncing indirectly the institution of the Pope who was the actual key-stone of the feudal arch, when he depicted a society where Christ becomes identical with Piers the Ploughman but not with the Pope. Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400), who was brought up with the feudal flavour and was appointed the Controller of the Customs, stood more for the rising merchants and tradesmen, paid lip-service to the nobility and was vehement against the church as an institution. Thus feudalism was attacked from all corners.

The Renaissance and the Reformation movements attacked mediævalism. Petrarch and Boccaccio sowed seeds of free thinking, and the universities, where Greek and Latin were intensely studied, fostered the growth of these seeds into plants and then plants into trees. There were Copernicus, Galileo, Columbus, Vasco-Da-Gama, Diaz, Magellan, Pizarro and Cortez who discovered many more horizons. The introduction of tobacco and potato into Europe from America added an impetus to, and solved some problems, of the common people of Europe.

The days of the mediæval monarch were on the wane. It was man who was bursting forth ... man that was invoked by Shakespeare in'Hamlet' :

> What a piece of work a man ! How noble in reason ! How infinite in faculty! in form, in moving, how express and admirable ! in action how like an angel ! in apprehension how like a god ! the beauty of the world ! the paragon of animals !

Truly speaking it was the Renaissance type of man that was trying to come out of the feudal shackles that fettered him in all respects. The people were full of the new consciousness, growth of intellect and self-trust, not only in politics and literature but in many other spheres of art and knowledge.

The palaces of feudal monarchs were not as safe, as the city of the Vatican. There was Martin Luther, who being the representative of the bourgeois age, questioned the supremacy of the Pope and turned down the halo from round the Roman Catholic Church that ultimately was divided. It was an age when

> it was ascertained that heaven was not constructed of a series of spheres moving over and around the earth, but that the earth was truly 'in' heaven. This is typical of the moral discovery of the time. Man found that the earth is in heaven, that God is not above nature, touching it only through rare preternatural points of contact, — rather that He is not far from every one of us, that human life is sacred, and time a fragment of eternity[51].

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60. Hamlet, II, ii, lines 316 —

51. Edward Dowden : Shakespeare, a critical study of his Mind and Art, p. 12

The rising bourgeoisie then, under the banner of Protestantism, began to voice protest on the one hand, and consolidated on the other. It was no longer Fate or Destiny that ruled over man, but his hardihood or struggle that could overcome him with success. Man had less interest in getting a passport to heaven and much interest in establishing a right over the possession of the material world. They believed more in science than in nescience, necromancy, magic or black art. Their hopes became more earthbound and pragmatic rather than remote or vacuous. The invention of the printing press touched the poor of the distant cottages not a little. The Reformation Movement taught man to stand against superstition, orthodoxy and blind belief in the Roman Catholic Church, and the age of Renaissance taught man to stand for freedom and to realise anything either in cash or in kind.

King Henry VIII of England who rightly and accurately felt the pulse of the day, dared to stand against the Pope . He held control over the church of England and the feudal lords on the one hand, and tied relations with the tycoons of trade and commerce on the other. Perhaps he smiled to see his daughter Elizabeth grew into girlhood along with the city of London that, too, was growing into a busy business centre.

Queen Elizabeth I of England being flanked by both the feudal lords and the rising merchants in her court had to balance between the two. She knew that the absolute political power was lying with the Monarch, yet she had to compromise between the

falling and the rising classes for it was essentially an age of compromise.

In the meantime 'Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex' (1562), the first remarkable English tragedy in the style of Seneca and written in Blank verse, tolled the knell of the passing day of feudalism. Thomas Sackville who was the first Earl of Dorset (1536-1608), depicted in collaboration with his fellow student Thomas Norton, the decline and fall of monarchy. It was enacted before Queen Elizabeth I in 1561. The drama truly traced the trend of the age that was not favourable for absolute monarchy. Drama, as an art form, here proves to be the choicest treasure of the rising class

Queen Elizabeth I declared through a proclamation in 1574 that the different companies of actors, under the banner of some aristocratic lords, might enact their plays anywhere in England. But the city fathers of London Corporation banned the production of plays in the city of London on the plea, laughable to us now, that a play might foster corruption among people on the one hand, and the congregation of a large number of people could bring plague to the city on the other. However stern the injunction might have been, the growing demand for dramas of the public inspired James Burbage to erect the 'Theatre' in London in 1576. The example set by Burbage was successfully and successively followed by the 'Rose', the 'Swan', the 'Fortune', the 'Blackfriars' and the 'Globe'. Dramas in England had so far been performed either in the enclosures

of inns or in the halls of the aristocratic lords, noblemen or civic dignitaries. The erection of these public playhouses not only welcomed the dramas of the University wits but also those of Shakespeare to hold up the mirror of the age. These play houses were ready to satisfy the secular demands of the public.

Eulogy and exploration — were the twofold characteristics of the age. Poets like Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) and dramatists like John Lyly (1554-1606) remained in harmony with the Queen-worship as the Queen became the emblem of national pride and prestige. Another parallel trend was to be traced in English dramas of Thomas Kyd (1557-1594) and Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593). While Kyd through 'The Spanish Tragedy' (1585-89), a revenge tragedy popularly set on the Senecan model, was defining the hostile struggle of the landed gentry of the medieval era with the rising class, Marlowe, the son of a shoemaker, rising to the rank of the enlightened bourgeoisie after having his M.A. degree, was exploring the newer horizons out of which wealth, prosperity and power might be churned. Marlowe's Tamburlaine, Faustus or Barabas paved the way for British imperialism. In order to keep pace with the speed of his age he had to introduce blank verse. But the genius of Marlowe was ended not in a tavern brawl, but in the plethora of his imagination, lack of housewifery in craftsmanship and above all in his lack of class consciousness. Then came William Shakespeare (1564-1616), son of a glover yeoman of a small town, who began his literary career in flattering the crown and to hold before the very eyes of the Elizabethans the black-and-white picture

of the evolution of the English nation extending over a period of about three hundred years through his historical plays. He was

> the friend of the Earls of Southampton and Essex, and of William Herbert, Lord Pembroke. The Queen patronised him; all the best literary society was his own. He had rescued his father from poverty, bought the best house in Stratford and much land, and was a man of wealth and comfort[34].

But when 'public and private ills weighed heavily upon him' Shakespeare could not but mutter like the Prince of Denmark:

> The time is out of joint, (Hamlet, I, v, 188)

He was loth to flatter the Queen, for he learnt that monarchs were always executioners. During that transition period he saw the people greeting Essex and rejoicing at his murder. He understood that the working class were sight-seers but not the determining factors at all them. According to a modern European critic they were

> only an object of history, not its actor. They could evoke disgust, pity or terror; but they were powerless, they were the sport of those who held power in their hands[35].

Shakespeare became aware that something was rotten in the state of England. Being thus overwhelmed Shakespeare felt that the

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34. C.A. Brooke : English Literature, p. 92

35. Jan Kott : Shakespeare our Contemporary, p. 160

world was changing. The misfortunes of his patrons made him afraid that something similar might happen to him, or that his father might lose the right of having the coat of arms that would evidently mean his fall in the world. This sense of personal insecurity not only haunted him but led him also to discover the darker sins of men around him. He found treachery, lust, sensuality, jealousy, faithlessness, ingratitude, murder and madness in the upper strata of society.

Things did not change even after the accession of King James I in 1603. London became a cosmopolitan city where playhouses co-existed with inns, taverns or brothels. People could enjoy the plays of Shakespeare who traced the growth, development and the decline and fall of the royal heroes. Shakespeare analysed the activities or incidents of historical figures, but he gave a silver lining to the dynamic trends and tendencies of his age in the making. His Macbeth stains his hand with the royal blood not to gratify his ambition proper, but to demonstrate that kings are also within the vulnerable reach of the process of history that moves and evolves. He might have been true to his age, but he performed the function of an artist who looks ahead of his time. All that is important here to note is that Shakespeare was disappointed to see 'a corruptive phase of decline' in feudalism and was equally disappointed in 'the rapidly rising force of bourgeois society'[34].

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34. Anne Paolucci in an article on "Marx, Money and Shakespeare" in MOSAIC x/3 spring, 1977, p. 141

If Shakespeare may be said to have depicted the contemporary men and manners leaving them adorned with the decor of the dominant class, it was Ben (jamin) Jonson (1572-1637) who tilted at the caprice of his age. But while Shakespeare was in keeping with the rhythm of the men and the moment, and his characters put on the royal dress or the dress of the court, and used a language with the magnificence of the court, Ben Jonson's characters put on the common dress and used the 'language such as men do use'. The fact is that Ben Jonson would have shown an image of the times, but he seldom showed the significance of man with the moment.

The attempts of Francis Beaumont (1584-1616), John Fletcher (1579-1625), George Chapman (1559-1634), John Webster (1580-1625) and many others had never gone with the tide, but all their energies were spent in swimming against it. They might have supplied the demand of the stage, but they utterly failed to supply the demand of the age.

The failure of the above dramatists was, to some extent, compensated by Thomas Dekker (1572-1632) and Thomas Heywood (1570-1641). Dekker, who was sympathetic towards the poor and the oppressed, traced through his citizen comedies like "The Shoemaker's Holiday" the rise of an artisan to the rank of the middle class. Dekker attracts our attention for his exploitation of reality in his comedies. The warmth and affection that Jonson lacked, made Dekker interesting.

The role of drama during the last half of the Elizabethan age and the first half of the Jacobean age was to withdraw belief

from the Divine Right of Kings and to prepare the way for the successful growth and steady rise of the middle classes. It may be deduced from the extant documents that the Elizabethan or the Jacobean theatres were essentially catering for the needs of the commoners or 'groundlings' and the noblemen, but the profit was pocketed by the shareholders, house-keepers or actors who belonged to the middle-class. Class-feeling was very common in the play-houses too, for the playhouses were either 'private' that meant for the noblemen, or 'public' that generally welcomed the common people. However, the circumstances were favourable for the rising middle-class to proliferate during the regime of Queen Elizabeth I and James I, and to consolidate after the accession of Charles I in 1625.

Money, merchants and merchandise; merchandise, merchants and money, would, of course, be sung to the tune of the national anthem of England. The bourgeois middle class was getting ready to duel with the crown. They dared in 1574 to make Queen Elizabeth I herself gulp a defeat when they banned the enactment of plays inside London through the organ of the London Corporation. They became strong enough to successfully wage war against the King in 1642 and by an Act of Parliament to close the London theatres and practically stop dramatic performances in England.

So far as the financial interests were supreme the rising middle class were emboldened to stand for the power of Parliament and then only they could hasten the bourgeois democratic revolution.

It was their strategy to attack the theatre since they desired to attack the crown. But they had to coalesce first and then to discover a ruthless cogwheel to overthrow the machinery that dared to stand against them. Therefore

> They cut King Charles's head off when he tried to blackmail them too much, and hooked the Protector, who represented their interests. Cromwell was, no doubt, more than anything else a stupid ruffian when they pushed forward to do the more brutal and spectacular part of their work[35].

They proved that crowns were made of clay and the measuring rod of the merchants was the most determining factor.

They were not only successful in beheading the king but in rooting out the possibility of the absolute monarchy despite the publication of "Leviathan" by Hobbes and the enthronement of Charles II in 1660. By founding the Royal Society in 1662 they were gaining ground with exploration in the fields of astronomy, experimental chemistry and medicine. It was science that enabled this class to seize and capture the ultimate power of the state.

With the return of Charles II drama as well as theatre got a quick and remarkable impetus. There were considerable advancements in scenic effects and stage machines; the old Elizabethan platform stage was being replaced by the apron stage. Female actors in place of the boy actors were introduced. With the crown came the

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35. C. Lewis : The Lion and the Fox, p. 32

influence of France. Corneille (1606-84), Moliere (1630-73), and Racine (1639-99) were largely translated, imitated or followed by the dramatists of England. The ballet came too. Grandeur rather than width of passion reigned supreme. The Elizabethan fervour was not only completely lacking in eclipse, but it was subject to timely transmutation. But the theatre was no longer a place for one and all. With the exception of the sprinkling of some commoners of the town, the theatre was 'exclusively a rendezvous for the fashionable class', although it served least for the commoner.

The young gallants and the flabby persons who were prone to be easily amused. Theatre-going became merely an amusement, and the follies and vices of bourgeois fashionable society were exposed. The days were befitting for comedies of manners or heroic tragedies commonly dealing with love and honour. The plays of this period exhibited the externals of life of the ruling class.

It was Parliament that established its supremacy by the "Bill of Rights". Since the final victory of the bourgeoisie is achieved through Parliament the successors to the British throne henceforth began to be the magnificent ciphers. The crown was, however, still at the top of the pyramidical structure of the political society but was aware that the trend was towards the

winning middle class[36]. The king became conscious that England was the grave of one epoch and the cradle of the other. Thus the bourgeoisie that was a larva around 1600 was now grown to be an image in 1689.

While this was the common picture of the political arena in the seventeenth century England, the aristocrats or sometimes the crown still exercised their influence over literary fields by patronising the poets, dramatists, essayists, novelists or men of letters. The two conflicting classes had frequent encounters that eventually influenced literature. Hence the birth of satires, invectives, indecency and sometimes the lack of decorum, or laxity of morals in literature during this period. Most of the playwrights including John Dryden (1631-1700) Sir George Etherage (1634-1691), William Wycharley (1640-1716), Thomas Shadwell (1642-1692), Sir John Vanbrugh (1664-1726), George Farquhar (1675-1707) or William Congreve (1670-1729) were not exceptions to the rule.

The scanty number of play houses during the Restoration period was responsible for the deterioration of English dramas. Dramatists, for the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the common people, could not possibly comply with the popular taste of the day. Drama is a composite art that requires proper and timely co-ordination and assimilation among a group of people — viz. the audience, the actors or actresses, the playwrights, technicians etc.

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36. G.D.H. Cole & R. Postage : The common people, p. 70

What was achieved during the Elizabethan age was not possible during the Restoration period due to the lack of range and depth. Comedies of Restoration decades, according to Bonamy Dobree, gave a brilliant picture of its time rather than a new insight into man[37]. Restoration plays were mere sparkling and superficial and they did not portray the breadth of life — or life as a whole. The drama that mostly depends upon and is sensitive to its immediate audience, failed to inculcate a happy cross-fertilisation between the man and the moment[38]. The playwrights of this period forgot that love-making, gallantry, ogling, orgies of sex or intriguing were not life, but a part of it.

London became the economic and cultural heart of England. The rich merchants and the better-off citizens became the persons of plenty, the aristocrats in the rural areas were impoverished, but a great many cultivators being dispossessed of ownership of land were becoming urban proletariats. As a result the feudal set-up was rapidly disintegrating.

Amid the disintegrating atmosphere there was a reconciling spirit that was functioning too. As the Seventeenth century was drawing towards its close and the eighteenth century was being born

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37. B. Dobree : Restoration Comedy, p. 171

38. B. Ford (ed.) : From Dryden to Johnson, vol. 4 p. 186

> the old tightly knit aristocratic society was beginning to disintegrate; many of the older families were finding themselves in financial difficulties, while at the same time successful merchant families, having made themselves affluent, were showing a desire to enter into the circle of society; and as a result marriages of convenience started to break down the former barriers[39].

Goldsmith was portraying this phase in his "She Stoops to Conquer" (1773) where Miss Hardcastle who belonged to the disintegrated rural aristocratic family, stooped to young Marlowe who belonged to the affluent society of the urban area. In Sheridan too, this reconciling spirit is not far to seek.

Having compromised with the decaying aristocracy the affluent bourgeoisie of England were either milching the colonies and the 'footholds' or were exploiting the urban proletariat or rural wage-earners. They were then ready to consolidate their power over political spheres by controlling Parliament as well as the government through the Prime Minister of their class. Sir Robert Walpole smoothed the progress of this class from seventeen forties.

The slogan of 'laissez-faire' was going to be translated into reality. When the victory and consolidation of the bourgeoisie were almost complete at home, then came reawakening. It was Adam Smith who made them conscious of the base of their prosperity upon which the superstructure existed. Smith in his "Wealth of Nations" (1776) writes

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39. British Drama, op. cit. p. 164

> that labour is the source of wealth, and that to give the labourer absolute freedom to pursue his own interest in his own way is the best means of increasing the wealth of the country; by its proof that all laws made to restrain, or to shape, or to promote commerce, were stumbling-blocks in the way of the wealth of a state, he created the Science of Political Economy, and brought the theory of free trade into practice. All the questions of labour and capital were now placed on a scientific basis, and since that time the literature of the whole of the subject has engaged great thinkers.40

The broad policy of the British bourgeoisie between 1660 and 1850 was of expansion, extension, exploitation and advancement. With the advancement of scientific studies, industrialisation and increase of population, the outlook of life took a fundamental change. Where people formerly saw the hand or God, now people began to see only a natural phenomenon or a human device[41]. The advent of the Industrial Revolution and the expansion of trade and commerce gave the British affluent class speed and robbed them of leisure[42]. But the working class could have insecurity everywhere. While haste and hurry, and profit-making were the watch-word of the former, hunger and poverty were the recurrent companions of the latter. With the establishment of the Parliamentary democracy the privileged class began to grow and multiply. The social relations also were undergoing thorough changes. There was democracy on the one hand, and exploitation on the other. There were revolutionary measures in business and science, but reforming measures in social and religious spheres. Amid this there was a faint glint of humanism.

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40. S.A. Brooke : English Literature, op. cit. p. 136

41. Ketelbey : A History of Modern Times, p. 23

42. Ibid. p. 24

With the mushrooming of factories and manufacturing industries in Britain

> men and women, and children were employed for meagre payments and excessive hours, under insanitary and deleterious conditions, until the worker, with ruined health, wretchedly fighting the starvation and oppression that continually threatened him, seemed the veritable 'wage-slave' described by his most ardent champions[43].

These working people formed the ranks of a discontented proletariat, and they became aware that they were the real producers of wealth though their masters robbed them of their rights. Their eyes were opened to the fact that they belonged to the economically underprivileged while their masters belonged to the economically privileged class. This awakening led the emancipated proletariat to resort to the

> trade union movement, which was in essence a spontaneous form of defence adopted by the working man to protect himself against the dependence and oppression to which he was exposed. He speedily realised the ancient principle that combined action is more effective than isolated effort, and collective bargaining than individual negotiation[44].

While there was an awakening on the side of the working people the bourgeois employers adopted three-fold measures — 1) the lock-out, 2) employment of able and efficient persons as managers, secretaries or officials, to tackle the problems of labour and 3) welfare measures, as the last resort, to ameliorate

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43. Ibid. p. 348

44. Ibid. p. 348

the conditions of the workers. These factory managers, secretaries or officials were regarded as buffers, at first, but gradually they began to exercise greater influence and to perform responsible tasks between the employers and the workers. Harness of Galsworthy's "strife" might have been anticipated even during this age.

But as money was with the industrial, commercial or intellectual middle classes, the stage was to welcome them with busy zeal and sincerity. The age of the aristocratic patrons of art was rapidly withering. As the dominating class was tied more to the wheel of speed, it could hardly afford leisure to witness a full-length drama in a theatre. Therefore, neither the comedies nor the tragedies could keep them in the playhouses for hours together. The stage authorities, therefore, took the trouble of banishing the gallant beaux from the stage, but introduced the nuances of lighting and brought brilliant actors and actresses to attract them; contemporary drama, at that time, replaced 'the traditional stylisation of costume'. Many other devices, such as after-pieces, pantomimes, opera farces and many such light entertainments, were tried on the stage with a view to pleasing the ruling class. Various attempts were made to please them, but life could not be injected into drama. Drama was ceasing to be the vehicle of the day. Ease-loving well-to-do audiences with their superficial tastes were equally responsive to a tragedy or a hilarious farce. They could, as observed by Professor Nicoll, listen to Lear's agony at 7-30 and laughing hilariously at

pantomime or farcical after-piece at 8[45].

The theatre, in those days, was artificial, mechanical, naturalistic or even decadent. Theatre-going was a costly affair. Still the playhouses were busy with the eminent actors or actresses, though poverty among most of the artists, actors, actresses or playwrights was not uncommon.

Some sort of equilibrium was being maintained in and around the factories or on stages till the Americans declared independence in 1776. The first French Revolution of 1789 in France caused a mixed sensation: it caused a severe jolt in the minds of the bourgeoisie and was a matter of rejoicing and inspiration for those who were liberals or emancipated proletariats. Thus while the eighteenth century was coming to a close the working class was preparing to raise their heads.

The above political upsurges either on the continent or abroad could not be repeated in Britain. Not because of the dearth of a Voltaire, or a Rousseau or a Washington but mainly because of the British Parliamentary democracy that showed that the state was a human contrivance but not a Divine institution and that the will of the majority instead of the will of the minority ought to prevail. The spirit of revolution, however, did not go in vain especially in drama. It was "The Road to Ruin" (1792) by Holcroft (1744-1809) through which revolutionary ideas were inculcated[46].

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45. A. Nicoll : British Drama, op. cit. p. 175

46. Ibid. p. 189

There were powerful poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley or Byron in the first half of the nineteenth century. However powerful or revolutionary they might have been in the realm of lyric, they could not be successful on the stage owing perhaps to their lack of knowledge of the theatrical environment. They not only turned away from reality in order to take shelter in a shady wood of imagination, almost in the fashion of Keats's Nightingale, but were devoted to the 'cult of individualism and an isolation from society'[47]. As almost all the romantic poets physically or psychically shunned London, they were away from the histrionic activities of the city. That is why people could expect no successful drama from them, for drama, as Yeats observed, is essentially of the city[48]. But two points deserve mention here. Many of the romantic poets were exponents of humanism and expressed their sincere desire to use the language of the common people.

Let us, however, look at the social problem of the day. There were the optimistic predictions by Godwin, and again a challenge is thrown open by Robert Malthus. Yet conditions of the common people did not improve.

> During the early part of the nineteenth century the social problem was becoming increasingly prominent. The price of wheat was high, wages were low and there was in addition a heavy taxation[49].

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47. I. Evans : A Short History of English Drama, p. 144

48. D.J. Bradbrook : Ibsen the Norwegian, p. 154

49. A. Compton-Rickett : A History of English Literature, p. 402

Thus as the condition of the working people was going from bad to worse, the grounds of unrest were being prepared and protests were being made. Society was clearly divided between the profit-making bourgeoisie and the wage-earning working people. Attempts in limited spheres were made to diminish the differences between the two camps. Robert Owen (1771-1858) not only bought in 1800 the great mills at New Lanark upholding the principle of co-operation but propagated the virtue of human co-operation and fellowship. He might get passive support from a group of partners including Jeremy Bentham, but his welfare methods could not be welcomed by the governing class. As a result he had to quit Britain.

The situation reached such a state that neither the welfare methods of Owen nor any such patch-work could pacify the demands of the working people all over Britain. Unrest could be traced in cotton and textile industries too. Consequently the Luddite Movement began in 1811 and went on till February next year[50]. Under the leadership of one Ned Ludd the framework knitters (stockingers) of Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cheshire began to smash machinery since they found their livelihood at stake because of the Napoleonic war on the continent that blocked the sale of English finished goods. It was a question of life and death to them. But as ill luck would have it Ned Ludd was not a saviour and his famine-stricken working followers did not have enough power to lay seize on Parliament. Thus the first working people's

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50. Cole & Postage : The Common People, op. cit. p. 188

movement in Britain fell flat. At last they learnt, at the cost of heavy penalties and casualties, that the time was not yet ripe for them to wage war against the Governing class.

The period of incubation over, the working class further learnt that on the grave of the Luddite Movement lay the cradle of their success. But being greatly influenced by Owen's principles of co-operation they

> turned away from political agitation and threw themselves feverishly into the growing Trade Union and co-operative movement. The defeat of the Trade Unions in 1834, and the enactment of the new Poor Law in the same year, directed their attention back to politics, and caused the rapid growth of the Chartist agitation[81].

The working-class people became so much wiser and more scrupulous that they did not take the risk of waging war against the capitalist class through violence, but they preferred to create pressure through a Charter of Demands consisting of six points, such as — a) Manhood Suffrage; b) vote by ballot; c) Annual Parliaments Annually Elected; d) Abolition of property Qualification for M.P.'s, ) Payment of Members; and f) Equal Electoral Districts. But this Charter of Demands, that at present seems to be less harmful than the Treaty of Versailles, hurled a storm at the Governing class. All the six points were rejected outright though the Chartist Movement lasted from 1836 to 1848. During these long

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81. G.D.H. Cole : A Short History of the British Working-class Movement, p. 98

thirteen years Queen Victoria succeeded to the throne, and, too many novels of Dickens, and Thackeray's 'Vanity Fair' were in circulation, Carlyle's 'Heroes and Hero worship' was published, and Browning's and Tennyson's poems were being circulated. There were, in fact, many 'gladiators of the pen', but there were hardly any who were ready to 'wrestle in the dust and heat of the arena'. Thus by the indifference and connivance of the intellectuals the movement of the working class was eventually subdued. The movement, however, died down, but the claims of the working class could no longer be neglected.

The advance of science, the expansion of commerce and industry and the improvements of 'the traffic arteries' resulted in an increase of population too in towns. The more man held control over the physical universe the more the bourgeoisie became restless.

> Practically the whole country was money-mad ... and it then first became clear that joint stock companies however imperfectly managed, were certain to become a permanent and influential feature of finance[58].

The business tycoons ran helter skelter for profit, and the share-holders hankered more after order, discipline and stability in industry. Both of them hoped to become 'gentlemen' through money and education while there were the working people who were earning their bread by the sweat of their brow. Thus the first

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58. Humphrey House : The Dickens world, p. 138

half of the nineteenth century was becoming more a dramatic period rather than a period for dramatists.

The cleavage was, however, almost complete between the two classes — the class of 'gentlemen' and the bread-earning class. Similarly the separation between the stage world and the world of the auditorium was apparent. Some sort of security was going to be maintained in both camps; the result was polarization. The social life and the drama of this period could not have a continuous process of reciprocal sanctioning and challenging in spite of the adoption of realism and spectacularism on the stage. It was, therefore, mainly an age of talented performers but not talented dramatists. Meanwhile

> The danger in the nineteenth-century theatre was, above all, that it was unrelated to the life of the time. The changes in the structure of society had so modified the human personality itself that a new interpretation was essential[33].

But this new interpretation seemed to be a far-fetched matter in a society where some people ran after profits and shares and many had to droop and pine for mere subsistence. If this be the common picture, who would expect otherwise. Therefore, art and literature was more or less neglected. Even

> the state certainly looked with bleak unconcern upon the art, which should be a central one in any healthy national life. Neither the court, nor the Queen had

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33. Ifor Evans : A Short History of English Literature, p. 133

> the talent to encourage drama, and so commercialism, which was infecting England in many other ways, dominated the drama[54].

While the working people were incurring distress due to low rates of wages and the manufacturing agents were deriving tax-free profits, the managements of the theatre were making comfortable and convenient arrangements for the middle class audiences. Cushioned stalls and carpeted floors were provided: 'dress circle' and 'family circle' were invented for these audiences. While the contemporary novelists were revealing the festering disease of society to heal, the theatre managements attempted to keep the audience in a sweet reverie of contentment. The aim of both the managements of the theatre and the manufacturing agents was profit.

The stage at that time lacked genius. The dramatists who wrote plays for the stage neither had the sense of history nor could provide flesh and blood to the skeleton of drama that lacked nutrition for a long time. Some of the dramatists, during the second half of the nineteenth century, looked either to France or to Scandinavia. But the French 'well-made plays' of Eugene Scribe and Victorian Sardou were less influential than Ibsen's. Therefore faithful attempts were made to introduce the Ibsen 'Yeast' into English theatrical bread. But the fact is that very many of them would have ruined the issues which they were

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54. Ibid. p. 133

reluctant to elaborate. Jones and Pinero, among others, belonged to this group.

Beside this 'foreign' influence, there was an attempt which might be purely native in character. T.W. Robertson's (1829-71) 'teacup-and-saucer' theatre deserves mention in this regard. He had the spirit of reconciliation and challenge at the same time. He not only attempted to bring life into the theatre but tried to make the working people prominent. His 'Caste' (1867) remains a milestone of drama based on realism.

There was yet another trend that may be traced; this trend was to inherit the past, or to be precise, to follow in the footsteps of Congreve. They preferred to follow the wittiesm of the past. So all they did was to reflect faithfully the bourgeois epoch of the Restoration. Oscar Wilde was the chief exponent.

In the first half of the twentieth century the theatre was an industry pre-eminently dominated by the middle class and served the interest of that class. During this time most of the plays either testified to a vague desire for renovation or remained satisfied with a compromise[55]. Until the advent of Shaw drama, being less an art form, provided amusement only for those ready to enjoy a convivial evening. Consequently commercialism reigned supreme. As a reaction to that, repertory play houses and the amateur companies finally welcomed the new talented dramatists.

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55. Legouis and Cazamian : A History of English Literature, p.1344

But these dramatists hardly served the interests of the working people.

The state, however, remained as unchangeable as before, although society was fraught with the possibilities of some change. England had been turned into a frequent resort for the shareholders of the joint-stock companies with the strict limited liabilities, but at the same time enjoying contractual freedom, protection of their rights and full scope for their unfettered exercise. The philosophy of those was very much analogous to that of Arthur Young who once wrote :

> every one but an idiot knows that the lower classes must be kept poor, or they will never be industrious[56].

But they forgot that

> societies, like individuals, have their moral crises and their spiritual revolutions[57].

And their hankering after profit made them quite oblivious of the fact that the certainties of one era may become the problems of the next. Ruskin's famous outburst — "there is no wealth but life" — did not reach their ears. Even Mr. Keynes was too disgusted to declare that modern capitalism is absolutely irreligious.

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56. G.M. Trevelyan : Religion and Rise of Capitalism. p. 270

57. Ibid. p. 277

The principle of co-operation, that was staunchly followed and propagated by Robert Owen, was turned down. There was, however, accumulation of wealth on the one hand, and starvation of the people on the other. Inequalities from the one camp might have caused unity on the other. Obviously

> values were in the melting-pot. Religious belief had been shaken by science. It is no single revolution, or reversal. Life singles as excitingly in patriotism as 'in socialism'[53].

Scotland, Wales and Ireland were active for national revivals. Even women were wide awake to assert their rights. There was an awakening of the working people too.

The English dramatists of the twentieth century began to show 'a keen, eager, and informed interest in current dramatic movements' outside their national boundaries. Thus playwrights such as Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, and Ernst Toller came not only to influence them but also to help them explore fundamental dramatic attitudes. As a consequence the English dramatists had been engaged in a continual series of discoveries or they began to arouse immediate excitement. The English dramatists, who were much more conscious of the spirit of the age, became so bold as to hold the mirror in a faithful way fearlessly up to the age. These new dramatists began to depict the ordinary people or the working people side by side with the aristocratic or the upper

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53. G.W. Knight : The Golden Labyrinth, p. 298

class in the society. But as the decadence of that class was apparent, the new dramatists began to sing the importance of the poor working class who worked in the factories, mines, in the fields, in the firmyards etc. Therefore, all they did was to discard romanticism, sentimentalism and the classical sobriety of introducing fine style and polished language; it was to be expected that they should introduce realism ____ hard and unstinted realism.

During this period Sir Arthur Pinero (1855-1934) and Henry Arthur Jones (1851-1929) prepared the ground for Bernard Shaw and John Galsworthy, and their outlook, of course, took a timely change. However,

> The change of outlook that came with the twentieth century was due to the growth of a restless desire to probe and question. Bernard Shaw, foremost among the heralds of change, attacked with vigour the 'old superstition' of religion and the 'new superstition' of science, not because he was antagonistic to other religions or science, as such, but because, in his view, every dogma is a superstition until it has been personally examined and consciously accepted by the individual believer. Question ! Examine ! Test ! — these were the watchwords of his creed. He let slip no opportunity to challenge the Voice of Authority and the Reign of the Imposter[39].

With Bernard Shaw the English drama saw many remarkable changes in the technique, style, matter and many other things. This was

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39. A.C. Ward : Twentieth Century Literature, pp. 5-6

possible due mainly to his study of socialism, economics or even Marx's 'Capital'. By blood he belonged to the working class although by nature he belonged to the minority group of intellectuals. Therefore, he could not be free from inner conflict.

> He loved humanity. He thought mankind very weak and foolish and in need of a leadership which might even be ruthless to individuals and classes ... Men must follow reason, and control their emotions. At times he propounded different panaceas for humanity's ills, now socialism, now eugenics, now dictatorship. Like anybody else he was inconsistent. But as he was primarily an artist it is not his particular ideas but the free play of his spirit that matters[60].

Shaw has exercised a great influence on the English stage. The theme of his plays, was committed to the presentation of the lower middle class or the working class but gradually it surrendered to all kinds of romantic emotions though he himself was once the 'castigator of romance' and his Life Force often justified impulse and discarded reason. But apart from all this it was the dual task of proposer and opposer that made him less important after his death.

The dramas of John Galsworthy (1867-1933) bear the mark of the age and society in which he existed. Descended from the aristocracy, he held up the mirror to the people of his contemporary society so that they might see who they were and what they were doing. Social problems he tackled with dexterity, and so far as he pointed out the problems of the society he was on the

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60. A.S. Collins : English Literature of the 20th Century, pp. 265-67

right track. He was at his best when he did have a profoundly humanitarian outlook upon life. But he was at his worst when his sympathy or the partisan spirit consumed his working-class characters who became, in his hands, the victims of avoidable waste instead of deriving power from him to stand and fight.

J.M. Synge (1871-1909) was, however, portraying the Irish peasants struggling for existence on the western coast and on the Aran islands. His pen was powerful no doubt, for he was able to endow his characters with life, and he spared no pains in depicting their genuine emotions. He made the poetic language of the Celts lively, and portrayed the Celtic working-class characters in a superb way. But all these qualities almost looked blurred when we behold him depicting the inevitability of the working man's defeat.

To Shaw 'the ultimate desire of the Life Force was to establish the city of God on earth', to Galsworthy the gods would be much more reluctant to step down even for the sake of justice, to Synge gods would be either hostile or merely gruesome but to Harley Granville-Barker (1877-1946) they would come down for a compromise. He was subtle in stagecraft, he could create impression for impression's sake, but he failed to inculcate a direct relationship with his audience when they were out of the auditorium. True he could cope with realism and naturalism, but he was too weak a personality to face the strain of life of the majority.

In the meantime however, the Boer war had already shattered the self-complacency of the British ruling class. Signs of the impending storm, of a changing society, of disintegration and rebuilding were very much apparent. And there

> Before the storm broke in 1914 tremors shook the industrial and political surface of Britain. A national rail strike in 1911 and followed by a great coal strike in 1912; the reign of George V had opened the sharp political strife, and in 1914 the German war broke across the threat of civil war in Ireland ... The unlifting strain of the battleline brought with them disillusionment, doubt and bitterness.[61]

With the First World War there was an all-round change in Britain. Values changed, new ideas were being fostered, terms began to come to the juxtaposition of society. The rise of the working class in Soviet Russia was responsible for a consensus among all the working people of the world.

The preparation was evident in the dangerous General Strike of 1926 and the mounting unemployment that shook Britain a great deal and subsequently exposed the rottenness as well as the bankruptcy of the potentiality of the Capitalist Society. That '<u>Lady Chatterley's Lover</u>' (1928) was banned was not because it was alleged to have dealt mainly with 'sex-scenes' or obscenity but because it bodily told in an archetypal way the utter

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61. <u>Ibid</u>. pp. 3-4

helplessness of the Capitalists that being weak from within were compelled to leave the property as well as the 'eugenics' in the custody of the working class. That Lord Chatterley could not beget a child of his own is not a single individual case of impotency, but it implies the sterility of the Capitalists as a class. The underlying economic circumstances of the epoch shaped D.H. Lawrence's thinking. However his novel was not a single instance. He was doing for England what had already been done by Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) through 'The Cherry Orchard' (1904) in the Tsar's feudal Russia.

The bourgeoisie, the then revolutionary class, was able to establish their own government and rule in England in 1649, but in the first half of the twentieth century the working class came into prominence. The long-cherished hope of the working class was almost translated into reality when they were able to set up the Labour Government in coalition with the Liberals in 1929-31. But in 1931 when European banks and great industrial concerns began to collapse here and there, Britain too had to face a serious financial crisis. The result was — 'the interests of capitalism' swept the Labour Government out on the one hand, and brought on the other, 'the entire working-class movement into disrepute'. It was taken into consideration that what was achieved by the working class in eastern Europe in 1917 could not be attained in western Europe. Thus the possibility of a government

of the working class, by the working class and, of course, for the working class had almost vanished into space. Secondly, these people had to sumit another shock. Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935 and the Non-Intervention Committee deigned to intervene in the affairs of the International Brigade that fought in Spain against the naked invasion by France. The net result was that France ultimately fortified his stronghold in Spain having received steady provision from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy whereas the International Brigade gradually lost its international lustre owing to the dearth of proper patronage.

Nevertheless there were well-organised arrangements against the Fascists and Nazis when the Second World War was in full swing. It was quite natural that man-power was given much more importance. The result was that the working people did have the opportunity to consolidate and integrate themselves during that period. From among them there were some members who could make 'a real advance in their standard of living' so as to shift from 'the class of proletarian wage-earners to black-coated salary earners'. The Second World War has been claimed to have opened, after the abatement of the devastating storm, a new vista seeking either to harness the world with the more cautious but dauntless spirit of international feeling and brotherhood or to tend towards a tension of total annihilation. The total impact either of the great economic crisis of 1931 or the Second World War was however that the working class became more conscious of their own imper-

tance.

In England, Naturalism, that was 'the prevailing dramatic technique' of the inter-war period (1918-1939) lost its lustre when myth, allegory and 'a new idiom in poetic drama' invaded the theatre along with bolder experiments in the 1930 s. However prolific the English drama might have been, 'the anti-naturalistic movement reached its climax in T.S. Eliot's 'Murder in the Cathedral' (1935). Since then verse was used in plays. During this period Christopher Isherwood and W.H. Auden

> used conversational forms of verse to express a highly topical criticism of bourgeois family life, imperialism, and fascism, in episodic plots which were influenced by German expressionism and the narrative technique of Bertolt Brecht[62].

It goes without saying that verse drama revived because of its form of poetic language and an indulgence of emotion. The people being weary of war and depression were bent on having a relief and escape from the world overtoomed with anxiety and a general restlessness. It was T.S. Eliot who made pretense at explaining the ways of God to man, but actually he justified the ways and means of the ruler to the ruled in the name of God. However, almost all the authors of verse dramas were either infected with frustration or with some complex or both, though in Eliot and Fry the dominating themes were ruthlessness and loss of direction[63]. These are the causes due to which the verse

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62. Oxford Companion to the Theatre, op. cit. pp. 288-289

63. R. Williams : Drama From Ibsen to Eliot, p. 304

drama that reached its zenith during the years before the Second World War touched the nadir during the early and middle nineteen fifties. Great drama, in keeping with the tone of the age, was not possible mainly due to the lack of patronage of the great actors such as John Gielgud, Laurence Olivier, Ralph Richardson, Donald Wolfit, and Robert Donat and their preference mainly for the performance of Shakespearian plays till The Arts Council of Britain paved the way for new dramas with a new wave of feeling.

With the establishment of a company at the Royal Court Theatre under George Devine's courageous direction the English stage caught the imagination of a generation. Since then English drama expressed new voices. But there were Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco who were in favour of the proposition that

> all human life and endeavour is essentially absurd, and therefore terrifying, and that language as a means of communication is equally absurd[64].

While Beckett and Ionesco were intent on turning 'truth' and 'reality' upside down, the dramatists of the late fifties emulated a new sound of hopefulness amid despair and disillusion. The former ones behold the devastating deluge to the full extent of total annihilation whereas the latter ones can sing the glory of life. While the former dramatists did proceed with the complete annulment of form and content, the latter dramatists cared

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64. Oxford Companion to the Theatre, op. cit. p. 472

to provide 'the sudden upsurge of a new realism' arousing interest in the depiction of the lower middle class or the working class proper. If the former preferred to depict life as a walking shadow full of sound and fury signifying nothing, the latter saw in the simple joys and raptures of working class life a paradise regained.

The English dramatists of the middle and late fifties began defying the anti-naturalistic prospects and followed the paths of realism. Like the hermit in Nietzsche's "Also Sprach Zarathrustra" they made up songs to sing and to laugh, weep and growl at the same time, but like the hermit they neither praised God nor said good-bye to the world. Many of them had recourse to realism. But most of them were oblivious of the idea that realism should be tinged with a definite 'vision' of life. A great dramatic artist should not only aim at building a moment's monument, but he ought to propagate a zest for life also.

The English theatre, at this period, was commensurate with the age, although British radio broadcasting and television programmes were catering for the daily needs of the millions. There were, therefore, people who thronged to the theatre not for the play, acting or stagecraft but to see their hopes and aspirations translated upon the stage. These people were mostly the working people. They, like the primitive hunters, knew that there was formidable enemy. While the primitive hunting people did know how to pierce that external enemy through and through with the help of

weapon, these working people of the modern times do not know the way out exactly. The ancient hunters could purge their emotions of fear and anxiety when they were able to kill the enemy and to imitate the whole action through dance or ritual, whereas the modern working people can have no such purgation of emotions so long as the enemy still exists in a class society. Thus while the former could have peace of mind, the latter can have no such tranquillity.

Under such circumstances the working people have enough cause to grieve, and hence the need of a Jimmy Porter. John Osborne's Jimmy Porter (in "Look Back in Anger") revolted against the elements of the establishment though in a weak anarchic effort. But the people of this period wanted more and this need for 'more' ultimately prepared the ground for Arnold Wesker. Once bourgeois England was, according to John Maynard Keynes, in a financial position to afford a Shakespeare who flourished in the atmosphere of buoyancy, exhilaration and the freedom of economic egress to flout the governing class[65]; the war-tossed England, produced Wesker, another dramatist, who is fit to promote the cause of the working class from the abyss of disorganisation, restlessness and frustration and to indicate its place and to play its role in modern society completely conniving at the spiteful remark of a

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65. V A Brooks : Literary Criticism, p. 462

certain contemporary dramatist[66]. And Wesker was immensely successful in achieving his goal when he used prose as a medium of expression. Upto this time he was not distinctively different from the contemporary dramatists, but he became really significant when he resorted to the very dialect or language used by the working people. Thus by using 'the plain unvarnished speech of reality' he fulfilled not only the prophesy of Ibsen[67] but also honoured the desire of William Wordsworth who told that the language of people should be the language of poetry. His prose drama is neither an adulteration or a challenge, but, on the other hand, justifies the cause of the working people. His prose, like the prose used by the Irish characters of Synge and O'Casey, is less divested to poetic candour. That Wesker preferred prose as a medium to verse for his dramas does not necessarily mean that poetry escapes his plays. It is far from that. The end of most of

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66. "Any young writer who imagines that by shouting about his working class origins, he is going to gain sympathy from that class is living in a fool's paradise" — John Whiting: The Art of the Dramatist, pp. 95-96

67. "Ibsen's prophesy that the medium of poetry would soon be abandoned is fulfilled in the fact that all the best plays of the century are in prose". — The Year's Work in English Studies, Vol. XLII 1963 p. 173 edited by Beatrice White and T.S. Dorsch. Published for the English Association by John Murray, London. 1964.

poetry, right down from the heroic age to the modern period, is the communication of human experience or the communication of individual experience. Poetry, as an art form, has, almost always, served the interest and catered for the needs of the individual, whereas drama, as an art form, from its very outset, has served the interests of a group at least for a certain period of time. Yeats's resorts to drama for he has professed to have been the representative of the many and he resorts to poetry and poetical language because he wants to make a study of personality in terms of a classless society with all human magnitude.

## CHAPTER THREE

## REALITY, PHILOSOPHY AND ART IN WESKER

### 1. Wesker, a committed dramatist or a propagandist?

Drama and theatre are not only old but they are also the manifestation of human civilisation. Dance, music, dialogue and many other elements made them lively and living. But they were ritualistic or religious from the very inception. However ritualistic or religious the drama might have been in the primitive stage, it always had a social function. With the help of the theatre it made enormous efforts to unite people in a shared experience. Drama and theatre catered for the needs of a clan or a community to share a common experience. As the interests and the aspirations of these people were in general common, the theatre, however primitive, became the common platform for them. Consequently the audience, according to William W. Melnitz, were

> a part of theatre as are the play, actors, singers, musicians, dancers and a place in which to foregather and share the performance. Theatre and society are firmly wedded. 1

But was this social intercourse possible owing to the magic of acting, decor, spectacle or a plot that was well-spun?

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1. UNESCO : The Arts and Man, p. 133

Or was it possible because of ritualistic or religious implication? Aristotle found six constituent parts in a tragedy : plot, character, thought, diction, song and spectacle. But according to this great Greek critic, the plot which is 'the arrangement of the incidents' is the principal part of a tragedy. When Greece was spectacularly magnificent owing to the expansion of trade and commerce Aristotle felt the necessity of telling tales first. He felt that the Greek upper class people were on the move and these materially prosperous people required stories for pleasure. Order in drama was required as order in the society was felt :

> The final step in the evolution of Greek drama was taken at the hand of the sixth century. The Athenian tyrants had brought these Dionysiac mysteries to town, built a theatre for them, and reorganized them. Then the tyranny was overthrown. The merchant class was now strong enough to rule in its own right and introduced a democratic constitution. A few years later the dramatic festival was reconstructed on a grander scale than before ... we can say definitely that Athenian drama was a product of the democratic revolution.2

Hence the importance of plot in a tragedy. Aristotle, who was but a creature of his age, was mostly bound by his age.

As he preferred order to man, he put 'plot' before 'character' and 'thought' in the third place. When he preferred 'plot' he had been limited by time, but when he placed 'thought' he went beyond his time and became 'modern' at the same time.

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2. George Thomson : Marxism and Poetry, pp. 42-43

A play without plot like "Waiting for Godot" is possible, a play without proper characterization like "Look Back in Anger" is possible, but a play without thought or commitment is quite incomprehensible. Be it "Prometheus Bound" or "Oedipus Rex", "Doctor Faustus" or "Hamlet", "Arms and the Man" or "Justice", "The Cherry Orchard" or "Mother Courage" there is definitely a premise --- may a thought or commitment. Whether the drama is religious or secular, nationalistic or cosmopolitan, tragical or comical, melodramatic or farcical, sociological or psychological, revolutionary or reactionary, it ought to foster a comment explicit or implicit or an explanation on life and the world around it through the consistency of plot, character and dialogue. Whether a play is classical or romantic, existentialist or naturalistic, it should have a touch more with reality than with anything. Whether a play is depressing or impressive, it should have constant confrontation with modernity. The play ought to create and at the same time reflect the society of an age. In compliance with such organic process of a play, a playwright is expected to make some commitment. A modern playwright, however much he may try to remain neutral, cannot possibly remain so nor can he maintain individualism although he may suffer from anxiety, confusion and despair. He is expected to appear on the arena before the multitudes or is sometimes willy-nilly compelled to

> intervene directly in the lives of the people and prick their conscience by holding a mirror to the turmoil.3

Arnold Wesker was probably the most whole-heartedly committed playwright of all the major creative playwrights of his age. An artist may be really a creative one who depends entirely on the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. This may be true in the case of Valmiki, the great epic-poet of India or Caedmon, the ancient English poet. They might have been endowed with some qualities which would have a distant relationship with any conscious or rational thought. But a thorough reading of their poetry tells us a different tale. As creative artists they were conscious or even rational to a great extent. Committed or not committed in the modern sense they wrote with a purpose as did the author of "Everyman", the best of the morality plays. Perhaps the sole aim of the author of "Everyman" was to show victory of virtue and the vanquish of vice ... the triumph of good over evil. The above authors might not have expected to be socio-economically conscious as modern authors are, but they definitely felt the urge of writing something not absolutely for the sake of art, but for the sake of society. Wesker has a broad and strong affinity with them all, although he differs from them in some respects. While those authors were largely non-political or a-political, Wesker is mostly political. For politics, at present,

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3. F. Lumley : New Trends in Twentieth Century Drama, pp.369-370

is, according to a critic, not only a universal human activity, but a primary concern of all intelligent and creative people[4]. And the duty of Arnold Wesker is to make the public more aware of the past, present or future political events which had included or may include popular unrest, general strikes, mass violence, or even civil war.

Political or non-political all the authors are expected to have some commitment, although it may be either of an individual nature or of a sociological nature. An author may convey a picture of the world as he sees it with the eye of an individual. Another author, who thinks himself a member of society, may raise some social questions. Both the authors face reality although their reactions are different. One may react with calmness, another with rashness and the third one may choose again a third way. An author may or may not have an ideology to combat. Yet he may come into conflict with reality. What then is a writer supposed to do? Does he divorce his allegiance from his ideology? Another question may arise. Is it proper for an artist to reject his creed altogether when that very creed is regarded as narrow or when it does not really serve to correspond to the real complexities of the world? Still a problem prevails there. Should we take it for granted that the views expressed through the mouths of

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4. QUEST - International theatre Review, vol. 3, no. 31, p. 5 of John Calder in his essay "Political Theatre in Britain Today".

characters of a play or plays be necessarily the views of the author himself?

Whatever significance there might have been in the term 'commitment' previously, it has become a popular as well as a familiar word after the fifties.

> The cry for commitment was coming from a freshly articulate branch of the English Left : the post-Hungary and post-Suez regroupings that have since become known as the New Left. This movement was associated with the names of Mr. Raymond Williams and Mr. Richard Hoggart in literary criticism and sociology, with Mr. Lindsay Anderson in film making, with Mr. John Osborne and Mr. Arnold Wesker in the drama.5

These English leftists seemed to have been guided by a philosophy — a philosophy that does not, in general, make a socratic search for truth but makes the world aware of the new consciousness of the new world of the working people. Their commitment was more sociological than moral or religious. It should never be assumed that commitment is a plot of the leftists to turn innocent authors and baptise them into the latest political campaigns. They believe that the writers are not free lance writers to sponsor absolute individual liberty. The liberty of the writers, according to these new leftists, is not the liberty within a laissez faire economy that may merely abandon art to the chances of unrestricted competition so as to practise all the wiles of salesmanship —

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5. John Hunter : The Writer and Commitment, pp. 10-11

mass appeal, sex appeal, adulteration and the sacrifice of quality to cheapness to make art one more commodity on the free market[6]. Wesker, who has got a definite political commitment, was far from making art a commodity; yet he has world-wide popularity. And his popularity is in full agreement with the demand of the age. Wesker did not only show sufficient creative flexibility to achieve new milestones on the road to the fulfilment of the desired goals, but felt the need to communicate the principal tenet of the changes and tendencies of the moment that might lead the people to the end of the road. What is important in him is that he sees disorder in the verisimilitude of order. But he never posits any 'negative attitude' nor justifies 'blank pessimism'[7].

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6. Hinnett and Brooks : Literary Criticism, p. 473

7. "The strength of our political theatre lies in its negative attitude. ... At the same time blank pessimism is not only justified, but probably the best warning system we could have, surrounded as we are by dangers, political, economic, ecological and military, living under a sword of Damocles that will fall one day". ... John Calder in his article "Political Theatre in Britain Today" in QUEEN international theatre review, vol. 8, no. 31, op. cit. p. 11.

Art, however, has no general didactic function to play but neither should it aim at rootless beauty. Again a committed artist, however intelligent he may be, may not be expected to be the member of a particular political party or a religious organisation. He may or may not be affiliated to any particular organisation — social, religious or political. T.S. Eliot, we know, was a royalist in politics, Anglo-Catholic in religion and a classicist in literature. But this was a confession rather than a commitment.

There may be an autobiographical importance in Eliot's confession; but if we are to seek his commitment it is to be sought in his works rather than in his remarks. Wesker, too, may have some innocent confessions, but if we probe deep into his works we definitely find him pledging himself to a particular view of life although we find him using his pen like a flag-pole and the stage like a platform[8].

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8. An interview between Wesker and Prof. Christopher Bigsby (British Council Library, Calcutta, cassette tape No. E 2004 Printing and Publishing Deptt. The British Council, Literature Study Aids, London.)

"C.B. You don't think it's perhaps because there is a kind of iconographic similarity between a stage and a platform? Did you feel you actually had something to say and that the theatre with its stage, its platform, seemed a place from which you could declaim?

A.W. No. I must confess it didn't seem like that at all to me. You, as someone who writes about theatre, can come to that conclusion if you wish, but certainly I didn't think in terms of 'stage equals platform'.

But there is hardly any consistency between his flat statement to Prof. Christopher Higgby and his professed ideology through his plays. This flat statement loses much of its significance if divorced from the personality of Dekker. His personality and temperament should be acknowledged before we make a comprehensive study of his philosophy and art. Again we cannot have a definite idea about his philosophy and art if we do not consider him as a product of the contemporaneous and preceding cultures. We, in this regard, must acknowledge the fact that the social and cultural achievements of the ages have certainly exercised a decisive formative influence on him. The fundamental problems of existence must have teased him who would have tried to understand his own age and other times in terms of the ethical, religious, political, legal and economic conceptions of the past and the present. New concepts suggested by science, art, literature, politics, morals and other phases of contemporary culture have presumably enriched his conceptions. Dekker's works are, therefore, the works of a man keenly alive to every human interest. Perhaps in no other contemporary author is the thought of the age more faithfully mirrored. The development of the sciences in relation to every human interest is even noted by him with keen interest, but he never shares the doubts entertained by many of his contemporaries as to the compatibility of change with progress; and he often attempts to reconcile the two in his works introducing into them modern sentiments and ideals based on democratic

socialism not incompatible with liberalism. This liberalism is equally opposed to reactionary tendencies, coercion of all sorts and all anti-human activities.

After the discovery of fire the earth has undergone many changes in the spheres of religion, politics, law, economics, science, art, literature or even morals. These indubitable changes have touched almost all. But can we say with certainty that progress for all has been derived from these changes? Definitely not, because we know that change is one thing, and progress is another. When change is scientific, progress is ethical: change is indubitable, whereas progress is a matter of controversy[9]. A little knowledge of history tells us that while changes in the superstructure of a society affected all and sundry, progress was, right down from the barbaric age, meant for a select few generally identified as the upper class or the ruling class. In such a state the other class or the ruled are generally deprived of any progress. We know that this deprivation is based on a philosophy — a philosophy of exploitation. Since this philosophy is not based on universal welfare it is sure to confront another philosophy which is also serious and systematic in thought and essence.

So far as there is exploitation in a society a philosophy of humanism cannot be ruled out. In order to exist, thrive and

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9. B. Russell : Unpopular Essays, p. 15

retain its own culture the working class or the ruled should be in need of such a philosophy of humanism. It is Sarah Kahn who knows quite well that the working people have no way out except by resorting to such a reasonable philosophy; and without such a philosophy they cannot exist. They, she believes, cannot live like either dinosaurs or pigs. They require a dance of life instead of a dance of death. That is why she warns Ronnie, her son :

> People come and people go, wars destroy, accidents kill and plagues starve — it's all nothing then ! Philosophy? You want philosophy? Nothing means anything ! There ! Philosophy ! I know ! So? Nothing ! Despair — die then ! Will that be achievement? To die? You don't want to do that, Ronnie. So what if it all means nothing? When you know that you can start again. Please, Ronnie, don't let me finish this life thinking I lived for nothing. We got through, didn't we? We got scars but we got through. You hear me Ronnie? You've got to care, you've got to care or you'll die. 10

It is not the will-power or the bull-dog tenacity only that invigorates Sarah. She finds a haven elsewhere. She roots her firm belief upon some philosophy — not a bookish philosophy heaped up with the crust of dust, but a living one and a lively one that allows for light and love. She has not only a conviction about that, but she also remains committed to it and it is as important to her as breathing is to a living body. She wants socialism but not for its own sake. It is a means to her, but

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10. Wesker : Chicken Soup With Barley, III, ii.

not the end. She must have it because she wants the glory of the working people, freedom and brotherhood; freedom from the slavery of an exploiting society; brotherhood of unstinted stature. She considers herself committed to peace, progress and prosperity. Her commitment is, to some extent, akin to Blake's when he says:

> Pity would be no more
> If we did not make somebody Poor
> And Mercy no more could be
> If all were as happy as we.[11]

Happiness will really be there in a society where there is freedom for all. There is a difference between universal freedom and the liberal policies. While freedom is the outcome of a continuous struggle against adverse circumstances the liberal policies are the recurrent product of commerce. Athens of Pericles resorted to liberal policies because she lived by trading with other countries. Liberal ideas revive in Britain in the twentieth century because she depends on trading with other countries. Even Red China drifts from her dogmatic approach when she does a lot of trade with the capitalist countries. While liberal policies are not at all independent of any attachment to money making, universal freedom is the result of social consciousness in an exploited society. To the advocates of the former the world is the embodiment of some ideal principle or a thought process as Hegel propagated pointing to an ideal goal in art,

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11. W. Blake : Songs of Experience, The human Abstract, Stanza I

philosophy and religion[12]. They see the artistic creativity not as a reflection of life, but as a form of self-expression for the artist, as a means of penetrating the subconscious depths of man's mind diverging art from reality. But the latter depicts the sphere of social consciousness in an exceptionally broad and diverse way[13]. While to idealist aestheticians like Freud there is a gulf between art and reality the aestheticians pleading for social consciousness do not see any difference between art and reality. The idealist aestheticians interpret art as a separate aesthetic reality, and the surrealists or the abstractionists demonstrate that art can exist without reflecting life. But we know that great artists reproduce reality in a way that is true to life and they achieve this through a wide variety of forms. Our proposition may find support in Tolstoy's war and Peace and Charlie Chaplin's films. The outlook of Tolstoy or Chaplin is far away from the Absurd world outlook. The world of the Absurdists is alien to man and man is also alienated within the world. The Absurdists do not see this alienation as the inhuman reality of a society based on exploitation, but reality as such. Again the attention is focussed not on man living within an actual alienated world, but man as such. Thus alienation is traced back not to the nature of societies based on exploitation, but it is

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12. G.T. White Patrick : Introduction to Philosophy, p. 282

13. A. Liś : Foundations of Marxist Aesthetics, p. 32

seen to lie in eternal and unchanging aspects of human nature. Writers like Eugene Ionesco[14], propagate that man lives in a futile, absurd, inhumane world that is alien to him, that man is isolated and helpless. They leave their readers no room for hope, nor do they really mean to any cause. In their works we find reflections of inhuman reality presented in distorted form. We also find a picture of dehumanisation of life under capitalism in their works. But they do not depict the forces capable of transforming the world in keeping with the humanist principles. They propagate self centred individualism or amativism which is the philosophy of the capitalist society. While they glory in the absolute freedom of the dominating class they consciously or unconsciously pave the way for the deprivation of freedom of the other. While they sing the glory of a few, an artist who has a definite commitment to socialism, sings the glory of the people who live absolutely on labour but not on exploitation. While the latter kind of artist is ready to divulge the whole truth, the former kind of artist presents but part of it. Brecht incorporates working-class elements in his plays, and aims at communicating more directly with the working-class. Moreover, he wrote in such a manner as though the future generations were getting inspired by his plays.

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14. Ibid. p. 36 Ionesco writes there : It is not my particular society which appears ludicrous to me. It is man.

These working people hankered after plays that might deal with the current interests. But the theatres were either commercial, aiming at amusement, or displayed illuminating stage technique. True, the high rents of theatres and the high costs of production after the Second World War were very much responsible. There were dramatists like Samuel Beckett or Harold Pinter who were responsible for discovering a new line. They began to show 'the cosmic absurdity of modern man' and his fears and loneliness. Their attempts no doubt were translated into a world-wide and long-standing movement, but the working people could have little hope and scope in it. Therefore for obvious reasons these people were much delighted by John Littlewood's theatre workshop that endeavoured to bring proletarian culture back to the theatre[15]. Theatre, they began to learn, was not definitely a place for entertainment only, it was a place of recreation and 'incredation' or 'dedicatedly realistic of the new generation'. They were not reluctant to fight for their rights, but what they needed most was a sophisticated weapon to fight with. Wesker's Sarah Kahn was a representative person who might show them the way — the way towards socialism — their yearned-for abode of love, freedom and happiness. She wanted to prove that it was not a mere grandeloquent slogan but 'a way of life'. It was her light to oust the shred of darkness. That fire was to Prometheus, socialism was to

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15. Oxford companion to the Theatre, p. 269

Sarah. She must keep it intact in spite of the foolishness of the practitioners of socialism. Let us see what Sarah Kahn says about the reactionary forces in a world of reality where Ronnie, her son, stands disillusioned :

> Ronnie : You wanted everybody to be happy but you wanted them to be happy your way ... the family you always wanted has disintegrated.
>
> Sarah : When you were a baby and there was unemployment and everybody was thinking so — all the world was a communist. But it's different now. Now the people have forgotten. I sometimes think they're not worth fighting for because they forget so easily. You give them a few shillings in the bank and they can buy a television so they think it's all over ... Is that what you want? A world where people don't think any more? Is that what you want me to be satisfied with — a television set?
>
> Ronnie : My thoughts keep going pop, like bubbles.
>
> Sarah : But all my life I've fought. With your father and the rotten system that couldn't help him. All my life I worked with a party that meant glory and freedom and brotherhood. You want me to give it up now? ... If the electrician who comes to mend my fuse blows it instead, so I should stop having electricity? 16.

The unvanquished Sarah tries to prove that she is neither a Sisyphus who pushes the boulder in vain nor an innovator of mere slogans. She works according to what she believes to be true. There were more persons too like Beatie Bryant or Andrew Cobham

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16. CHICKEN SOUP op. cit. III, 11.

whose convictions were analogous to those of Sarah. Wesker's writings not only bear the mark of true talent but are also permeated by a sincere sense of pain and revulsion at the disillusionment of the capitalist world. Wesker, like Kafka succeeded in depicting in his imaginary world certain aspects of the terrible and forbidding reality. But while Kafka had neither knowledge of, nor faith in, the possibility of overcoming that disillusionment, Wesker finds the way out. There is also a sharp contrast between the philosophy of Albert Camus and that of Wesker. Camus in his theoretical work The Myth of Sisyphus depicts the futility of human existence. He depicts man who knows that he is going to die because his life being terrible and aimless consists in anticipation of death. Camus substantiates the absurd nature of man's existence by pointing out the disharmony between the irrational world and human thought, but Wesker finds it impossible to accept Camus' point of view, because Wesker's aim is to find out harmony in cacophony. Wesker's art sharply differs from that of the avant-garde artists. While the latter's works contain a negative reflection of modern bourgeois reality expressing the reactionary ideas, the former's works never become the vehicle of the decadent trends of bourgeois art. It may be asked whether Wesker pays more attention to his own views as if making his characters the direct spokesmen of them and pays less attention to his works of art. However committed an author may be, the first and foremost requirement is that he should be an artist. His views may be glued to the work of art, but there ought to be a good marriage between

commitment and art, and not an uneasy cohabitation. Wesker had not only a genuine insight in dovetailing these two, but he rationalised his art by giving it a purpose rather than portraying the devastatingly dark picture of the world. Sarah Kahn might have a rigid dogmatic faith in a particular form of society, but she could never bear the iniquities of the capitalist society in which she, along with others, had not only to exist but also to droop and pine. It was she who protested against the brutality and injustice of a society that fostered commercialism. Be it Sarah or Dentie or Ogrey, none of them succumbed to defeat and ultimate despair. Wesker was not determined to portray the biting, sarcastic, merciless realism or to depict the blind, filthy, horrible life of the bourgeois people only, but to bring back a music to the English stage — a music that heralds 'the march of the advancing proletarian battalions'. And the interesting thing is that there are many characters in his plays who might have raised their sword and shield defending their cause. Wesker, too, defends himself from Ionesco and the exponents of the Absurd world outlook, from Kafka and the exponent of anti-historical art, from Albert Camus and the existentialist philosophers, from the avant-garde artists who with elitist notions put stress more on form than on content taken from real life, from the naturalists who regard art not as the creative reproduction of reality but as a mechanical repetition of real phenomena of life nullifying its social significance. While art, to most of the above

artists, is a medium of some negative aspects of the exploiting society, to Wesker, it is the creative reproduction of reality.

It is Wesker's commitment to depict the dazzling glow of these advancing proletarian battalions under the modern persuasive repressions. He induces and initiates them to a good cause — a cause of preventing exploiting humanity in all spheres of life — and to raise their banner high above petty commercialism, for he, according to John Mander, sees in socialism the ethical standard[17]. All that he is talking about is Jerusalem which, to him, is not a geographical place but the other name of socialism for which Sarah continued fighting.

Wesker professed to be a Left-wing dramatist. He had a definite commitment of his own and he was the apostle of the working people. But this is not the absolute criterion in considering a work of art. Art is not so cheap. A pamphlet that lacks art remains a pamphlet only, whereas a pamphlet like Burke's "Conciliation With the Colonies" (1775) which is rich in rhetorical effect and brilliant in its marshalling of material, may be regarded as a work of art. Edmund Burke's works might have revealed intense zeal and some sort of pugnacity with a noble and impassioned plea for the liberty of the then American colonies. But however extensive the propaganda might have been, it becomes remarkable only because it conforms to the laws of art. Whatever his method might have been, his means were none the less artistic.

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17. J.R. Taylor : Look Back in Anger, a selection of Critical essays p. 143

He may appear to be a talkative propagandist, but it is art out of the froth of propaganda that makes him a great man of literature. He was a propagandist in the sense that he was interested in topical problems, but he was, first and foremost, an artist, for he wanted an end of misery, tyranny and oppression. Likewise Wesker has taken a keen interest in the problems of the working people of his day, and he infuses hope and strength with their misery so as to induce them to take an active part, to quote Nikolai Shamota, in the transformation of the world[18].

But in spite of his commitment to the left-wing idealism Wesker is never a propagandist in the true sense of the term. He stands for the cause of the working man, but he is not a shame-faced propagandist. He is rather

> a left-wing moralist who has used the drama to say things about contemporary society, yet he is not at all a naive propagandist.19

He is neither a blatant propagandist nor a loud proclaimer of his opinions. What he really does is to present the questions or problems of the working people. With his Trilogy he

> takes us through some of the problems of English social and political life from 1936 to the late 1950's and showed with fine emotional precision, some of the basic changes in mood among English left-wing idealists.20

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18. H. Osborne : The Art of Appreciation, p. 215

19. David Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature, vol. IV, p. 1130

20. Ibid.

He presents these problems with absolute impartiality. He seems to favour neither Harry, nor Monty Platt, nor any other. He who believes that drama is true to life, makes large use of dialectic variations in [illegible] according to necessity. Characters like the Bryants and the Beales with marked provincial, or regional traits are made to speak in their provincial dialects. It would be more baffling and artificial had he been using the chiselled as well as chastened literary language of the town in [illegible]. Such uses of provincial dialects not only contributed to the realism of the drama but also secured a racy natural vigour in the language. In this way he got

> the authentic quality of English working-class speech into drama in a way that had not been done before.21

There is hardly the gaudiness and inanity in the language of his plays. Being engaged in a controversy with others on a question of the language of poetry Wordsworth reiterated that his purpose had been "to imitate, and as far as possible, to adopt the very language of men". His attitude towards the language was quite different from and opposite to that of Thomas Gray who said that the language of the age is never the language of poetry[22]. So far as the simplicity of his language is concerned Weaker is more Wordsworthian than a follower of Gray. Weaker deals with the real

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21. Ibid.

22. W.K. Wimsatt & Cleanth Brooks : Literary Criticism. op. cit. p. 343

language of the working people, but his language is far away from being garrulous, incongruous or dull. Yet he differs from Wordsworth. While Wordsworth was not satisfied till the language was 'spontaneous' endowed with 'powerful feelings', Wesker's language helps develop a sense of responsibility in relation to contemporary society which art is called upon to enhance. In order to express the life of his time with its needs and aspirations helping to shape the moral and social climate of tomorrow Wesker defines his artistic and the social creed.

Whether the language is dialectal or not Wesker enables his plays to carry either a debate or a conflict in order to make those plays better understood. We admit that a play that proceeds by dialogue cannot possibly proceed without debate and conflict. He perhaps knows quite well that

> without debate the drama is propaganda; without conflict mere fantasising.[23]

There may be a rebel in an artist who wishes to transform the world. But the rebel should not be roused through mere propaganda, he should find an objective correlative. The happiness or misery ought to be made so objective that it might be seen by the eyes or felt by the heart. This is the way an artist can be impersonal. He, in general, may not wish to communicate his emotions direct to

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23. Robert Brustein : The Theatre of Revolt, p. 13

the reader or audience, but he may embody them, according to T.S. Eliot[24], in 'a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events' which may re-communicate them to the reader or the audience.

A play, as the common experience is, is not the inculcation of morals, the direction of politics or a scourge of rebellion, and the playwright, of course, is neither an instigator nor a preacher. If he is so, he is a lesser kind of artist. He ought to be a catalyst, he is expected to hide himself behind the ambush of art while the set of objects or the chain of events balance with the norms of reality.

Mehta who is interested and alive to everything like history, anthropology, philosophy etc. will not pose as an unchiselled propagandist. He may not be regarded as an extra-ordinary thinker who has definite pronouncements about politics, art and society. But as an artist he feels it necessary to record with sympathy the aspirations or even the failures of the people he deals with. It is worth noting that he combines the visions with reality in a superb way maintaining his impersonality as an artist. We should better begin by citing the following illustrations :

> Bonnie : Then where do we look for our new vision?
>
> Dave : Don't mean at me about visions. Don't you know they don't work? You child you —— visions don't work.

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24. T.S. Eliot : Selected Essays, p. 145

Ronnie : They do work ! And even if they don't work then for God's sake let's try and behave as though they do — or else nothing will work.

Dave : Then nothing will work.25

Again —

Ada : I'm tired, Mother ... Six years in and out of offices, auditing books and working with young girls who are morons — lipsticked, giggling morons. And Dave's experience is the same — fighting with men who he says did not know what the war was about. 26

Or again ——

Ada : What audacity tells you you can harbour a billion people in a theory? What great, big, stupendous, egotistical audacity, tell me?

Ronnie : When, when !

Harry : But it is an industrial age, you silly girl. Let's face facts ——

Ada : Don't let us kid ourselves.

Harry : Don't let us kid ourselves — it's a challenge of our time. 27

There is definitely a tone of despair in both Dave and Ada. And Wesker remains far from being dogmatic or offering clear-cut solutions or prescribing curative drugs for their despair.

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25. Wesker : I'm Talking About Jerusalem, III, ii

26. Wesker : Chicken Soup, op. cit. II, i

27. Ibid.

But the fret and fume, the darkness and despair are not all we have here. There is another side too.

Sarah : She is a cow ! not a bit of warmth, not a bit ! what's the good of being a socialist if you're not warm.

Mystic : But Maggie has never liked Harry.

Sarah : not a bit of warmth. Everything cold and calculated. People like that can't teach love and brotherhood.

Prince : Love comes later, Sarah.

Sarah : Love comes now. You have to start with love. How can you talk about socialism otherwise? [28]

Wesker is no prophet. He may make the people start with love that leaks bitterness, but he ignores and deplores the narrowness of mind. Ignorance is as bad as darkness. So his plays consist of the attempts to rail at all sorts of darkness. Ignorance and narrowness are therefore replaced by love and light. Beatie Bryant would not allow her near and dear ones to remain in the dark either about physiology or about literature or anything else. Working people too, have every right to know everything :

Beatie : What's the hell's idigestion doin' a'tween his shoulder blades?

Mrs Bryant : 'Does some people get it so bad it go right through their stomach to the back.

Beatie : You don't get indigestion in the back Mother, what you on ab ut? [29]

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28. Ibid., I, ii

29. Wesker : Roots, II, ii

Or again —

Beatie : Ever heard of Chaucer, Jimmy?

Jimmy : No.

Beatie : Do you know the M.P. for this constituency?

Jimmy : What you drivin' at gal — don't give me no riddles.

Beatie : Do you know how the British Trade Union Movement started? And do you believe in strike action?

Jimmy : No to both these[30]. (ROCKS.)

But Beatie who had earlier been initiated by Ronnie was determined to bring socialism thus to a country. She was bent on doing that not through speeches but by inculcating the need for it — by living, by singing or by dancing even. She did not return to smoky London in search of Ronnie, her fiance, but began waiting for the rise of her people. She vowed to struggle while ignorance remained; she would sigh for the loss of her personal world of yesterday but did not hesitate to yearn for the world that might be born the next day. This is the way that Wesker suggests something else, more than telling a mere tale. This is how he translates the concrete life of a certain age into terms of all time, instead of being ephemeral and disappointing. He determines to be politically concerned, theatrically bold and artistically disciplined. Thus he is able like Brecht to combine

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30. Ibid. I

commitment with poetry, aesthetic discipline with dialectical rigour[31].

2. Wesker's art and reality.

On the stage, writes G.S. Fraser, one must have reality, and one must have joy[32]. It is very difficult for an artist to conform to both reality and joy. A thing in itself may be real that may not presumably deal with joy. Again a thing that is joyful may not be real in the truest sense of the term. A song or a melody that gives us joy may often sink when the spell is over. Yet it may not have any real form of its own. A beautiful landscape, a bouquet of flowers, a bunch of fruits, a nude figure or a Venus or a magnificent ballet may be regarded as works of art, and they are expected to render pleasure and joy although they may not have allegiance to reality. The essence of these works of art lies, in fact, in the beauty of their form. Now what kind of beauty is referred to here? Should we conform to the Hegelian concept that defines beauty as a kind of disclosure of spirit? Art, religion, and philosophy are, therefore, for Hegel the highest stages in the development of spirit. Should we report to the recent subjectivistic metaphysical theory of Benedetto Croce, who says that beauty is wholly mental, not belonging to physical objects[33]. According to Croce aesthetic activity is a spiritual

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31. Marowitz, Milne and Hale (eds.) : The Encore Reader, p. 138

32. G.S. Fraser : The Modern Writer and His World, p. 141

33. G.T. White Patrick : Introduction to Philosophy, op.cit.p.461

act that may convert impressions into intuitions. But neither the concept of Hegel nor that of Croce is adequate because their concepts are far from being objective. They consider a thing if it is pretty or beautiful, but they do not consider a thing if it is true or good. Personal beauty and personal adornment seem to take more of their thought and attention than their moral endeavour, or the logical consistency of discourse. They may not acknowledge that Beauty in art is something that cannot be separated from Truth, but Shakespeare acknowledged it[34]. They produce a pleasant impression or present what we may call beauty. But a mere thing of beauty which may be a joy for ever may fail to produce a sense of reality on the stage if it lacks a content that gives necessary consistency to it.

Beauty without truth is perhaps unimaginable. In this regard we are remined of Keats' famous lines —

> Beauty is Truth, truth beauty; — that is all
> Ye know on earth and, all ye need to know.35

Here Keats does not probably mean a challenging paradox, but boldly affirms a fundamental truth. Keats always insists that if we feel the reality of any experience with intensity, it always causes the disagreeable elements to evaporate and what remains is

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34. Shakespeare : The Complete Works, p. 1049
"O how much more doth beauty beauteous seem
By that sweet ornament which truth doth give!" (Sonnet No. 54)

35. H. Allershaw (ed) : Keats, poetry and prose, p. 111

the quintessence of beauty. Thus, according to Keats, Truth may be transformed into a thing of Beauty if we can feel it intensely.

Truth, says I. A. Richards[36], is equivalent to internal necessity or rightness. That, according to him, is true or internally necessary which completes or accords with the rest of the experience. Elsewhere Richards and C.K. Ogden[37] (cf. The Meaning of Meaning) remark that beauty is attributed to objects which produce sensaesthesia. So beauty, according to them, is sensaesthesia or general bodily perception.

Thus we apparently find no difference between the propositions of Keats and Richards. To both of them truth as applied to a work of art would mean only the "internal necessity" or "rightness" of the work of art; that is, whereas scientific truth has to do with correspondence to the nature of reality, artistic "truth" is a matter of inner coherence. While Keats sees the probability of the reality of an experience in terms of truth being transformed into a thing of beauty, Richards, of course with Ogden, puts stress on bodily perception of beauty; that is, enjoyment rather than transformation is given more importance. In a piece of sculpture Keats found the eternity of Art and Beauty as contrasted with the transitoriness of human life. As an artist Keats was aware that pang of insatiable longing and unfulfilled desires are the things of reality in a modern society. Keats believed that life's truth is bound up with art's truth. Truth

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36. Literary Criticism, op. cit. p. 685

37. Christopher Caudwell : Further Studies in a Dying Culture, p. 79

is not of two kinds. Truth is always one. Artistic truth is truth drawn from life itself expressed through artistic means. In this regard Keats is more modern than Richards or Ogden. When every art form is a reflection of reality, but not reality itself (as we find in naturalistic art) we see Truth identical with Beauty as Keats enunciated. This art form has a creative potentiality exerting a powerful influence on man's lives, with a contribution to the transformation of that life for the creation of a new one. In a bourgeois society where cash is the motto and money becomes the god, a true artist like a great scientist runs after Truth till Beauty, the end of life, is achieved[38].

There may be artists, so observes Tolstoy, who are determined to depict life as it really is[39]. The essence of art consists in the truthful, exact, presentation of reality. Keeping this idea in view one, who wishes to be an artist, can incessantly produce objects of so-called art[40]. These types of works of art may generally be regarded as insignificant and temporal for the lack of verve and vigour. Series of incidents happen or are going to happen. Should an artist narrate all these or include them in his work of art? Definitely not. For an artist is not necessarily a photographer although it is expected that he should

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38. Ibid. p. 102

39. Tolstoy : What is Art. p. 49

40. Ibid.

not lose contact with everyday life. A true artist is like a 'paramhamsa' — a great swan that sucks milk out of water. He selects some incidents and characters out of the current of life and gives them shape in a comprehensive way. An artist who has a good sense of reality takes, at first, the incidents or characters or both as his materials and then gives a form of his own after having investigated the inner significance of these incidents or characters. These incidents and characters may be the specimens of reality, may the facts about the outer world, or facts about the author's own feelings. But these ought to undergo an acid test in the laboratory of the artist before their presentation on the stage.

Therefore, reality is not what we see with our naked eyes. It is that which is actually an artist's re-creation. Reality does not consist in depicting the sewages or the gutters only of a town nor in allowing anybody to walk nude on the stage nor having recourse to a revelry of sexual perversions. These are of trivial significance to Wesker who never introduces cheap forms of entertainments. He does not insist on creating a pleasant and edifying picture of life at the cost of working-class interests. He does not feel it derogatory to build much of his work on the use of working-class material[41].

Playwrights like John Osborne, Shelagh Delaney or Arnold Wesker are often styled by some critics as 'kitchen-sink'

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41. A.P. Scott : Current Literary Terms, p. 188

dramatists for their daring use of 'kitchen-sink' or the 'attic tank' in their plays. But there are no grounds to sneer at those who focus their attention on the working-class man, their aspirations and their place in modern industrial society if they put stress on cooking and eating which have almost become a dramatic image in their plays. They never resort to surrealism or existentialism representing a purely nihilistic phase nor do they attempt to import 'the willed tendency of art to approximate reality' nor do they resort to fantasy which is generally of a personal and private nature. But, on the contrary, they have recourse to realism which, according to Lawrence Kitchin, is a corrective to fantasy[42]. They may not hold like Soren Kierkegaard that eternity is more important than time, that man is an egoist and must 'experience despair' in order to gain humility and that the interminable paradoxes of life are the inevitable result of man's reflections[43]. They, on the other hand, choose to concentrate on the day-to-day problems and the perennial interests of the ordinary working-class people who live within a complex industrial society. Therefore, the realism they follow is more akin to that of Gorky or Turgenev than that of Flaubert, Zola or Tolstoy. They trenchantly explore the realities of their age as did Maxim Gorky. Yet they never attempt to produce the frothy rush of the surface

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42. L. Kitchin : Drama in the Sixties, p. 97

43. Thomas Kiernan : Who's who in the History of Philosophy, p.100

of life nor do they care to suggest a forced pride in poverty.

When Wordsworth described in his poem "The Lost Love" the deserted Lucy unpraised and unadored, he invoked for his art the pathos expected by all tender-hearted persons in connection with such a subject. He did not embody a sentiment but produced an image of

> A violet by a mossy stone
> Half hidden from the eye !
> —— Fair as a star, when only one
> Is shining in the sky. 44

But he forgot to smuggle a sad message —— "But she is in her grave, and oh, / The difference to me ! " The reality about Lucy was so far incomplete and inchoate until the last line. The Lucy we get in the early stanzas is the Lucy of an advertisement, but the passionate and humanistic relationship with the poet makes her not only real but immortal. Here lies the mastery of art. Life is a perpetual process. It never ceases even at the cessation of the interaction between carbon and oxygen —— two essential components of a human body. Every day may die, every moment even, but life is definitely not a 'maya' or illusion as long as life is capable of creating a rhythm of its own. Every night is born in the matrix of the dying day and the ears of corn come out of the shell of seed.

Seed is a reality but it itself may not serve one's purpose until it yields a plant. Disease is a reality, but it is

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44. W. Wordsworth : The Lost Love, Stanza II

to be overcome by virtue of the wealth of life — there lies art. It is the aim of art to restore harmony or order there, where anything discordant prevails. There is order in man but discordance in human relations or in the environment. If man is a reality, he must try his level best to restore harmony. It is through art by which he can do so. But an artist should be on guard lest he should choose the wrong way. The way he must tread should be a way of reality. This reality does not necessarily mean to imitate the surfaces of life in their visible and audible aspects, such as a room with proper walls, doors, windows or furniture. He ought to make sure what type of reality he is going to adopt and adapt. Is he to define reality as an object which he observes or as the result of his observation? — is a relevant question. If he prefers the former the result would be, according to Anatoly Lunacharsky, a kind of 'naive realism' on the basis of static conventions[48], or if he chooses the latter one he may readily become a patron of impressionism which is far from realism. But both are imperfect as well as inadequate until the objective reality has been processed and coloured by an artist's subjective temperament through order or harmony possibly between individual and society.

In fact, an artist need not take it for granted that form is of absolute importance and that it is independent of content. He is expected to consider literature and art not as

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48. A. Lunacharsky : On Literature and Art, p. 296

diaries of life only but as criticisms of it, for literature and art convey, indeed, the contemporary social truth and we may feel in them the heartbeats of the future. To Wesker the contemporary social truth is to expose that the days in the kitchen, the embodiment of capitalist society, (cf. The Kitchen) which have come to a full circle are numbered and then he is to herald the dawn of a new era — to depict man not only as he is today, but also as he must and shall be tomorrow. Therefore, it is not his be-all and end-all to point out the warts, tumours and rudimentary organs of a type character in order to create a sense of problability. To depict reality in this way is not what he likes best. He does not like to invent human characters in order to fit them for reality, but he knows quite well that the real characters, who are either of docile nature or of rebellious nature, do exist in society. He has two methods to follow — either to portray the prototype of individuals who are free from environmental forces or to depict the specimens of characters from the point of view of their class. He, it is obvious, prefers the second method, and following in the footsteps of Gorky he collects specimens of characters from society so as to interweave into the design features characteristic of an individual's class[46]. Wesker does not extract ideas from this air but creates them on earth — which should spring from the soil. Thus Wesker, who does not like to

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46. M. Gorky : On Literature, p. 170

trace only the disintegrating and defeating tendencies of his age. Finds ways like an 'engineer of human souls' to depict the typical characters in the perspective of the exact environment, and demands the furtherance of socialist society condemning bourgeois realism as condemned Stalin[47]. Like an engineer Wesker speeds up the process of development of the modern drama to bring it to a level of excellence, eventually to rival the absurdist efflorescence in art. This is the way he condemns bourgeois realism and becomes a follower of socialist realism without being a so-called propagandist.

The world of labour, Wesker feels, has felt the necessity of revolution and it is the task of his art to help him who has risen in revolt. Peter cannot remain satisfied in the surroundings of a kitchen along with his mates; but while the mates remain the children of inertia, he energetically takes the role of a pioneer in bringing the collapse of the kitchen. Monty, Dave, Hymie and others in the prime of youth were not only able to make the resisting policeman surrender in an anti-fascist clash (cf. Chicken Soup ) but also transformed them into 'comrade policemen'. Martin, the son of Beany, courts arrest for he harbours the idea of bringing about radical changes in society. They may be believed to have played their timely roles. Again on the other hand, Wesker likes to depict the warts, tumours and the rudimentary

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47. J.H. Steinberg (ed.) : Cassel's Encyclopedia of Literature, vol. I, p. 478

organs of his contemporary society; that is why he portrays the decaying feudal lord like Stan Hamm, or the compromising industrialist like Ted Harrington, or the sadistic R.A.F. officers at MAAFI who are deemed to be removed from normal life. But Wesker does not take much interest in the elaboration of the trivial and the commonplace, but imputes motives and impulses to his characters in order to make them realistic. His chief concern is with the concrete facts of life although he does not maintain a photographic reality only. Photographic reality gives us the essence of observation with regard to the phenomena of real life. It may have mastery of expression but it is not bound up with mastery of generalization and creative representation without which art loses its natural flavour.

Wesker's art is not necessarily immune from morality. What kind of morality do we mean? The idea of morality is changing from age to age. Human slavery or other forms of slavery were not immoral in the past. The tyranny of capital over labour is not regarded by all as immoral even today. Thus the idea of morality changes not only in different ages but also to different persons. What is moral to a person may be immoral to others. Antigone in Sophocles' drama refused to obey the order of the King, because she did not see eye to eye with him. Jesus Christ stood out against custom and tradition and proclaimed a better way. So did Martin Luther and many other social reformers. All of them stood against the sanction of law and authority, yet we cannot find anything immoral with their actions or sayings. On the other hand

we are inclined to believe that what moved them to stand against the set morals was the sense of obligation or duty that, in the form of public approval, moved them impetuously to protest against the authority. Thus we see that right actions are those which conduce to social welfare or the greatest attainment of desire for the largest number of people in this and succeeding generations. The actions, teachings or sayings of the revels, social reformers, statesmen registar what people really desire when they want to clarify their wants. What they did was to mobilise the energies in order to translate people's desires and wants into reality making an organic connection between individual and society. Becker's morality follows the same line for his morality is based on the organisation of interests, the satisfaction of which becomes the criterion of the good life.

We may state that his purpose is not so cheap as to point out an arbitrary scheme of poetic justice in exhibiting 'virtue rewarded', nor is he ready to devise the happy ending, but more than that. The purpose of the moralist is to teach; that of the artist is to show. Drama and sculpture, for John Ruskin (vide "Aratra Pentelici"), are to teach what is noble in past history, and lovely in existing human and organic life[48]. Becker's art, too, that deals with reality has to conjure up both nobleness and

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48. R.A. Scott-James : The Making of Literature, p. 291

loveliness — the two essential ingredients of life — of the past along with the procreation of these for the future. This may, however, be kept in mind that

> art grows out of life; it is fed by life; it re-acts upon life. This being so, it cannot disregard its responsibilities to life.49

Art, one may think, is not necessarily an accurate presentation of life nor does it come forth to prove anything. It is, on the whole, a creation while life is spontaneous or intuitive. Whatever differences there may be between life and art, there is an integral relationship between them. Life without rationality is purely intuitive and therefore banal. Social life, therefore, should have agreement with some relevant responsibilities either moral or social.

Likewise art which is an intellectual evaluation of life should have responsibilities. Life that is true to intuition only is bad life; similarly art that is true to sights and sounds only is a bad art. Therefore, art without some sort of responsibilities is unbelievable as well as undesirable. The art of "Paradise Lost" Book IV is inferior to that of "Paradise Lost" Book I. Book I upholds a magnificent picture of Satan who is deemed to be the embodiment of emancipation for the downtrodden against the tyranny of the powerful autocrat. A true artist is he who not

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49. W.H. Hudson : An Introduction to the Study of Literature, p. 170

only sees the world as it is haunted by the shadow of disease and death, but also is the precursor of an 'incense-breathing Morning'. He is not expected to see life as a complete failure to ruminate over the sweet days as did Omar Khayyam, but he ought to hail life as an achievement ... or preferably as an attempt towards achievement.

Wesker is not content to portray the sufferings and the discontent of the working people, he can foresee a golden city that awaits them. He, according to Clifford Leech[50], does not try only to give us the atmosphere of actuality, filling his plays with simple details of ordinary life (such details as the food people eat, the plain and hesitant words they utter), but endeavours to give them a new zest for life, to cultivate a habit for classical music, art and literature. For him the world is not always old, shabby and sick as it is for Samuel Beckett or Harold Pinter, but it is full of meanings obviously he feels an urge to look intently at what is around and within[51].

Wesker looked at the world not with a brain only, but with a heart. The fact is that he sees life that moved and must move on again. All that is more important in his plays is that he finds relations between the productive world of yesterday and that of tomorrow, and again discovers a significant meaning in the interaction between the two, that is, a real story about the

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50. J.R. Brown and B. Harris (eds.) : Contemporary Theatre. pp. 11-12

51. Ibid. pp. 16-17

real people dealing more with content than with mere style. Credit goes to wesker who makes the working people completely at home in his drama and gives them the magnificent and significant stature hitherto reserved either for aristocracy or for the middle classes.

3. His art with relation to history

"All great art", observes Arnold Wesker in his essay 'Let Battle Commence', "is a product of its own time"[58]. All art great or small generally bears the stamp of the age and at the same time the artist behind it gives to the age the form and pressure of his genius. The fourteenth century that was essentially an age of unrest and transition, produced Chaucer and Wyclif. It is worth noticing that the English readers saw Edmund Spenser's "The Faerie Queene" at the end of the sixteenth century, Dryden's "The Hind and the Panther" at the end of the seventeenth century, the poems of Burns and Cowper at the end of the eighteenth century, romantic and revenge plays of Shakespeare and Webster in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the comedies of manners of Congreve or Sheridan in the seventeenth centuries. Even the films of today paint a chronicle of the time.

Sometimes it is observed that the noted works of art, which are produced in an age, are imitated in another age. But

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58. The Wesker Reader, op. cit. p. 98

we wonder that the epics of the stature of "The Ramayana", "The Mahabharata", "The Iliad" and "The Odyssey", or epics of art like "Aeneid" "Jerusalem Delivered", "The Divine Comedy" or "Paradise Lost" are no longer produced. Even the ballads like "Beowulf" or "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" are not produced today. We know that the works of art of the above type are gone for ever like the mammoths of the bygone days. These works of art were produced and dwindled probably with the pageants of the past.

But these works of art induce us to ask some relevant questions like — why did the authors produce these works of art and what were the causes behind the production of these works? Art creates and, at the same time, reflects the society of an age. It is not only the living fresco but also records the footprints of an age, and the artists do trace and impress as they 'see new generation arriving and the old fading away'[53]. An artist who is not an isolated creature is expected to see the unravelling of the past and the genesis of the future. He is, in general, fed by his time but he ought to feed the time by way of art. One who performs the former and avoids the latter is a lesser kind of artist. Chaucer began his Canterbury tales with the introduction of the Knight, the then representative of the feudal system of

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53. UNESCO : Art and Man op. cit. p. 151

society, but he could not refrain from telling the tale of the wife of Bath, the type of woman of the rising bourgeoisie. Shakespeare assembled a thousand and one kings, princes and peers, but he never forget to tell us that kingdoms are either clay or might be lost even for a horse.

Art is one of the many channels in which the energy of an age discharges itself. Whatever the temperament of an artist may be, whether he ventures to intermix the treatment of high political affairs with familiar pictures of daily life, or sets against a background of verisimilitude and reality, he is expected to breathe life into his work of art. If he is to do that he will have to depict, in their true colours, politics and society, manners and customs, culture and learning and philosophy and religion, in terms of a continuous process of transformation in connection with contemporaneous movements and cross-currents in other regions of life and thought[54]. For art, like society, is, according to d'Arcy Hayman, ever changing, ever evolving and ever new[55]. Art never remains at the point where it had been before, rather it sallies forth like a winding brook down a valley of civilisation.

Consequently art has a close juxtaposition with history that does not, in fact, depict or analyse the regal rise of decline and fall only, but cares to explore the facts in order to

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54. W.H. Hudson : An Introduction to the Study of Literature, op. cit. pp. 37-38

55. UNESCO : Arts and Man, op. cit. p. 11

expedite the causes concerning the human life and activities. Art has much similarity, in general, with history that, too, has a beginning, middle and an end. Art like history never repeats itself, but chooses its many way from the days of the pyramid to those of modern abstract art. Art prefers to espouse the labouring people who being slaves to the ruling class had in the past to manifest it either through architecture, or on murals. Whether art is the mark or the emblem of a single man or a group, it, until recently, had fulfilled the demands of a minority in its manifest form. This minority or the ruling class who exercised a great influence over the system of production, exercised not a little influence in making the artists their slaves. But it is the industrialisation and the mobilisation of the majority that provided ample scope for the artist to respond to the call of the age. The call of the age does not necessarily imply the extreme individualism of the era of bourgeois decay that cuts off the artist from all sources of true inspiration[56], nor does it mean that he ought to regulate his clock some more years behind the time, nor does it indicate that he should maintain the status quo thus thwarting the wheel of progress.

Art may be the creation of the age, but it should, in turn, give something to the age. An artist should not seek to escape into the past, nor to record the present faithfully but

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56. G.V. Plekhanov : Art and Social Life, p. 61

to engender the seminal elements in his work of art or reflect the discoveries he has made about his environment. Moreover the true artist

> understands not that he is unique among men, but that contained in his vision of life is the quintessence of all that the human condition has been through; not that he is a man of our time, but that he is a man at the end of a long line of all time; not that he uses twentieth-century eyes, but that he uses twenty centuries of man's accumulated sensibilities and experience.[57]

Wesker was brought up in an atmosphere where the workers were the people that mattered. They were either absorbed in phlegmatic contentment or delighted in making a row with others. They were as if locked inside prison bars or were thrown into the dungeons of an unhealthy atmosphere without being aware of their historic importance. Life to them was stale and depressing and they were in constant confrontation with a crisis although they did not have scope to understand the nature of that crisis. Wesker picks them up and sets them in his plays and makes them understand not only the nature of crisis but points to their vital role in it. It is due to Wesker that the working people have found their worth since the middle of the twentieth century[58]. They are made to feel that they are the determining forces, that they are the

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57. Wesker : Fears of Fragmentation, p. 98

58. Lawrence Kitchin in an article on Wesker observes ... "He responsibly dramatised history from the depression to 1956 in terms of an East End Jewish family like his own". ... Contemporary Dramatists : edited by James Vinson, 1973. p. 804

dominating elements destined not to stand and stare but to participate, create and enjoy. They are also made to feel that they have entered the social arena where they would be asked to play the major historical roles.

Shakespeare, to a great extent, was aware of a period of incubation of bourgeois culture. His characters like Macbeth and Hamlet, who were intensely animated, brought a stimulating breath of reality in defying the authority of their immediate superior monarch. Still there was nothing outstanding in their spasmodic struggle which was, in fact, a struggle between the ruling classes. Macbeth and Hamlet were determined to fight against those whom they regarded almost as their fathers — or at least second to their fathers. Milton's Satan stood against God not as a ruled against the ruler but as a ruler against the paramount autocrat. Prometheus stood against the injustice of Jupiter no doubt, but he stood as a god against another tyrant god. Roberts of Galsworthy's "Strife" was made to stand against Anthony, the chairman of a factory, not properly as an advocate of oppressed against the oppressor, but as a personal enemy of Anthony. But Peter, the German cook, in The Kitchen, stands against Kramago, the proprietor of the Kitchen, as a ruled against the ruler or as a victorious vanguard against the decaying ruler.

But what is interesting to note is that Macbeth, Hamlet, Prometheus, Satan and Roberts all had to embrace either death or ultimate defeat, whereas Peter, who has to sustain a few

sanguinary injuries along with some slight admonition only, proves to be a match for Marango. No disciplinary measure is executed against him. Dave Simmonds, too, smashes the mansion of the master-servant relationship in I'm Talking About Jerusalem where Colonel Dewhurst could think of sacking him from a new appointment only ... nothing more than that. Neither Marango nor Colonel Dewhurst could think of capital punishment or some rigorous punishment as in the case of bound Prometheus or Satan.

Macbeth and Hamlet tried to justify their sacrilegious murders equally in an unjust way, Satan or Prometheus stood against an inveterate enemy absolutely from personal viewpoints, whereas Peter and Dave stand against the opponent class of rulers. What was carefully and dexterously averted in the case of Roberts was given the historical issue in the case of Peter and Dave. While Shakespeare, Milton or Aeschylus stood for a few, Wesker upholds the cause of the ruled. Thus Wesker remains true to history as well as art, while his predecessors did allow their audience to peep through a hole and to behold the activities of the minority rulers, Wesker feels it necessary, as felt John Allen, to bring the stage to the people, by making a procession of them, than bringing the people to the stage, for, to him, the protagonist was not a Prince but the people[59].

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59. John Allen : Masters of British Drama, pp. 27-28

4. His art with relation to Journalism

That a bomb blasts a town is a news item worth publishing in a widely circulated daily, but a picture that depicts a building instead standing erect among the ruins, is a work of art. While the former merely satisfies our curiosity, the latter forms an experience — an experience of beauty or order amid chaos. While the former gives a sense of awe and wonder the latter is often associated with pleasure. The one narrates a fact only, while the other invites one to react strongly to something. Again the fact as fact may remain like a fog without having a clear form or shape, whereas the other gives the idea of a definite form. The former is, however, topical while the latter has some permanent value. The former has too much reality and is less artistic whereas the latter is reality and art combined, believed to be more organic. The latter tends to express the artist's own reaction to the world which is utterly lacking in the former. While the former conveys a message only and remains within the boundaries of journalism, the latter necessarily remains within the jurisdiction of art. The news is still-born and is commonplace as long as it does not give a proper rhythm, but the picture that gives undying reality becomes a work of art. Rabindranath Tagore once observed :

> A great picture is always speaking, but news from a newspaper, even of some tragic happening, is still-born.60

While a news item is merely reportage, the picture is, on the other hand, creative and energising. The news of a journalist is still-born as he interprets the facts for the moment whereas an artist represents facts not for the moment only but for moments to come.

The credit of Wesker lies not in reporting the incidents or happenings, but in giving an undying reality. The social life and the characters of the Kahns, the Simmonds or many others as delineated in Chicken Soup With Barley and I'm Talking About Jerusalem, may, at first glance, appear to have not risen above the level of journalistic reportage or dramatised documentary[61]. But if we delve into the documentation we shall surely feel the existence of a serious art. The two plays may seem to be a dramatised documentary as long as they delineate the characters and the situations in which they are portrayed for the twenty years from 1936 to 1956. What is interesting here to note is that these two plays are not limited by a certain period of time. That is why the plays are not what we may call journalistic or documentary as his The Nottingham Captain is. The plays rise

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60. Rabindranath Tagore : The Religion of an Artist, p. 24

61. J. Chiari : Landmarks of Contemporary Drama, pp. 115-116

above mere narration of facts or incidents and all that they do is to give a complete picture of working people of a metropolitan city both in their domestic and heroic dimensions.

True that Wesker has drawn his pictures from what he has observed or studied in real life, as the anti-Fascist demonstrations in the street of London in 1936 and the struggle of the Republican Army in Spain, or the Hungarian uprising in 1956. But instead of making a faithful copy of observed facts he makes an artistic picture of timelessness. He arranges, alters and sifts with the skill of an artist, in order to make them more credible and probable than the titbits of a journal. Wesker neither 'countrifies' nor 'cockneifies' these people within a particular time and space, but he reveals the hidden meaning of their lives. May he aptly uses his art to illustrate, to comment on or to illuminate the facts, preferably in a continuing process. We, in his plays, do not get the facts or reports only, but taste the discovery he has made about life.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## WESKER, SOCIETY AND REALITY

### 1. Wesker's art in relation to society, man and reality

Regarding Arnold Wesker's Chicken Soup With Barley Tom Milne observes in his article 'Art in Angel Lane' :

> Arnold Wesker came too close to life, dealt with actual problems, felt strongly about them, and wanted to impel the audience to do something about it.1

This observation of Tom Milne is applicable not only to the play mentioned above but to many of Wesker's plays, especially to his earlier ones. It is good that Mr. Milne has gone deeper into the essence of Wesker's play, but when he, in agreement with the opinions of others, observes the following in the same article —

> the business of the theatre is to construct a protective shield of fantasy between the audience and the crude realities of life, not to open the audience's eyes to life itself.2

We then detect a motive in his criticism although we have regard for the integrity of his critique. When he felt the necessity of 'a protective shield of fantasy' instead, he was willy-nilly on

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1. Marowitz, Milne and Hale (edt. ) : The Encore Reader, p. 81

2. Ibid.

the side of those who propagate art for art's sake. He was of the opinion that the sole aim of art is to depict the passion, the tenderness or grace in terms of the Beautiful, the True or the Good which are the general standards of criticism of the idealists only. The business of a certain dramatic artist, as Tom Milne may advocate, may be to please the public or to entertain the audience by dint of fairy-tale adventures as in "Midsummer Night's Dream", or a dance of death as in "The Spanish Tragedy", or the dissolute court-life of the Restoration period or 'the drawing room dramas' of Noel Coward that quite ignore the deeper significance of life by avoiding "the crude realities of life". Thus Milne felt the necessity of rose-tinted glasses for the spectator of a drama in the watertight compartment of an auditorium which never smells the scum of life of the working people. In this way he supports those who need art for the few not for the majority. The art of Tagore, however, is far from art for the few. While Tom Milne advocates emotion under the influence of the powerful illusion of reality, Tagore puts stress on emotion and intellectual awareness at the same time.

The aim of an artist may be to give an impression of 'a treasury of costumes and customs' or of a person engulfed in an agony of despair, or to portray the behaviour of a parvenu who is successful in the field of commerce or industry, but

Wesker is not such an artist. He like Balzac[3], believes that society itself should become the work of art and he is determined to prescribe the broad picture of social reality. Let us consider what Wesker says in 1967 :

> Art is there to be pursued only if you care to know where you stand in relationship to your neighbour or if you care to know about yourself in every secret, exhilarating or depressing corner of your being.4

Wesker here perhaps tries to explain the role of art that owes a great deal to the working people in the general system of a two-tier society, and that type of society obviously fosters the capitalists which cannot be conceivable without the existence of the proletariat. Since social relations, according to Marx, are closely bound up with productive forces, the aggregate of these productive forces constitute the economic structure of society, the real basis on which a juridical and political superstructure arises, and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. Thus class consciousness becomes the effect when the cause is elsewhere. This cause is, however, traced finely by

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3. Georg Lukacs : Writer and other Critics, p. 37 (Balzac says : "To be productive one needs only to study. French society should be the historian, I only its amanuensis". )

4. Wesker : Diary of Fragmentation, p. 101

J. L. Jones, the General Secretary of Transport and General Workers Union in Britain, who believes that class consciousness is bound to prevail in Britain where five per cent of the population owns seventy five per cent of the wealth, and where this small minority of property owners are depending on unearned income[5]. Art, particularly the art of Wesker, therefore, has the responsibility to explain the social relations between the capitalists and the proletariat or the working class.

We are, however, of the same opinion as Tom Milne who says that Wesker comes too close to life. But that does not mean that Wesker is too realistic. We know for certain that he is not what we may call a photographer of social incidents and situations, and photography, however successful it may be, is, according to Maxim Gorky, generally deprived of socio-educational significance and it hardly contributes to the extension and deepening of our knowledge of mankind and life[6]. "There is", writes Wesker, "no such thing as realistic art"[7], for art is, as we know, the presentation of the real in its mental aspect. The author forms a picture of the real in his mind or in his imagination before he starts writing. His mastery of expression is closely bound up with his creative representation. Art is not the depiction of the physical, spatial, tangible phenomena but is concerned with the

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5. THE WORD, the international pictorial magazine, p. 38 ("Are the British Still Class Conscious?")

6. Wolfgang Bernard Fleischmann (General ed. ) : Encyclopedia of World Literature in the 20th Century, vol. 3, p. 300

7. Years of Transformation, op. cit. p. 98

reproduction of actions. Realistic art is an impossibility, since the only reality of a rose is the rose itself and not the most meticulous copy of it although all art deals with reality. Realistic art does not merely sponsor the copies of actuality or the records of historical events. But it may, according to Ronald Peacock, recognise the closeness of truth and reality[8]. Realism here implies, besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances. Compelled to go against his own class sympathies and political prejudices. Balzac saw the necessity of the downfall of his favourite nobles and described them as people deserving no better fate seeing the real men of the future. He gave in his Comédie Humaine a most wonderfully realistic history of French society describing chronicle fashion, almost year by year from 1816 to 1848 the ever-increasing pressure of the rising bourgeoisie upon the society of nobles. Zeeker, too, like Balzac, narrates the people from 1830 onwards. In this regard he is the historian of the society of his time. In the Aristotelian[9] sense he is more a poet than a historian.

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8. Ronald Peacock : The Art of Drama, p. 188

9. Aristotle says: "Historian and poets do not differ in the fact that the latter writes in verse, the former in prose. The difference lies rather in the fact that the one reports what actually happened, the other what could happen. Thus poetry is more philosophical than history, for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular". — Georg Lukacs : Essays and critics and other Essays, op. cit. p. 45

Reality, however, does not necessarily mean that certain incidents take place in a society, or certain people are subservient to a stream of life that lacks proper interaction of cause and effect. Certain people who are scattered here and there, do not smack of reality because they are easily recognizable. No situation, incident or person or group of persons can be considered as real till they are set in a social background or till the interaction between them is properly displayed. Mere narration of a social document yielding the outlines of social history is not a definite instance of reality. That is why the social pictures depicted in The Prologue to the 'Canterbury Tales' may offer an almost complete survey of social types rather than offering social reality. Chaucer gave the picture of the new bourgeoisie of fourteenth century England as Addison, Fielding, and Smollett depicted the then bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century; Jane Austen, the country gentry and country parsons early in the nineteenth century and Trollope, Thackeray and Dickens, the Victorian world[10].

The main aim of Chaucer, Addison, Fielding, Smollett, Jane Austen, Trollope, Thackeray or Dickens, it is evident, was to make their works of art simply a mirror of life, a reproduction, and, obviously, a social document[11]. We get from them the picture of the well-to-do rising class who constituted the minority

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10. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren : Theory of Literature, p. 103

11. Ibid. pp. 103-104

of the total population. They confined their attention to their own class whereas the working people, who were the majority, were beyond the precincts of their depiction or elaboration. We cannot blame them while we see them maintaining fidelity and allegiance to the minority who them ruled and great influence in society. Again it is evident that they desisted from depicting a faithful picture of the working people. It was however not possible for them to do otherwise as all the literary artists mentioned above were recruited largely from the middle classes. From the fourteenth century to the twentieth century most of the practitioners of literature, with a few exceptions such as Burns, Carlyle, and D. H. Lawrence belonged to the middle classes. Therefore, it was quite natural and probable for them to serve the interests of the ruling class. This middle class tried to maintain not only a certain stability but also its separate existence either from the bourgeoisie or from the labouring people although its actual composition was not and could not, according to Christopher Caudwell, be stable from the historical point of view[12]. Still it is odd that this class considered itself immune from and superior to the labouring class.

If society be compared to a stream that flows on, we are to believe in the existence of its currents and cross-currents. There is the constant friction of two opposite forces which ultimately results in a vital force. Such is the case with society.

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12. C. Caudwell : Illusion and Reality : pp. 104-105

In society there is always a tendency towards moving while the other organs of the same society may like to maintain the status quo. In a society there are two opposite forces which are engaged in a head-on collision till equilibrium is restored, and it is obvious that the equilibrium can never be restored in a society which is engaged in an intermittent and uncompromising conflict, till the elimination of private property and classes. It is the winning side that prefers not only to keep control over the defeated side but also to drive the wheel of progress in its own favour with a tendency to deprive the other, although Professor Raymond Aron's estimate regarding the modern capitalist societies is quite different[13].

While the above discussion gives the comprehensive idea of the geography of a society, let us be aware of the sociology. The winning psychology gives birth to individualism or individual effort while the losing psychology gives rise to collectivism or collective effort. As long as there is individual effort there is pessimism and discord, but as long as there are collective efforts there is optimism and harmony. This trend is not, however, subject

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13. "Modern industrial societies are both egalitarian in aspiration and hierarchical in organization. They recognise the right of each individual to an equal dignity to happiness to citizenship and as a consequence, to an equitable share of the assets produced by society". — Raymond Aron : Progress and Disillusion — in Dialectics of Modern Society, p. 20

to change so far as the above order remains the same, or so long as the circumference of a society remains unchanged. Characters and incidents of a work of art should be judged from this angle because they are the outcome of the resultant force of reality. But an artist should be aware of his own duty. He may either be on the winning side or on the losing side. But whatever side he belongs to he cannot be a great artist if he ignores the anxieties and aspirations of his age, and, at the same time, fails to make a contemporary pot-pourri. An artist is expected not to be intimately preoccupied with death, decay and despair only, but to perceive the chaos and conflict in which the predominating thought is caught. He is at liberty to bring his characters to the verge of despair or even death, but he is not necessarily a painter or darkness; on the other hand, he is expected to replace the darkness of his generation. He will not simply have us believe that his characters get lost while they run only after the will-o'-the-wisp. He is not to express the individual's loss or gain, happiness or misery, love or jealousy, hate or anger without having recourse to social perspective. If it is so he is an artist of less importance. If the society and the implications of the great forces in it are thrown into the garbage heap of a museum, art, however stupendous or ostentatious it may be, cannot be lasting. A true artist, as Karl Radek observes in his article 'Contemporary World Literature and the Task of Proletariat Art', is he who does not set out to portray the world in order to

satisfy curiosity, or in order merely to hold the mirror up to humanity; he, on the other hand, is one who sets out to be a participant in the great struggle for the new Renaissance of mankind, or, to speak more exactly, not for the rebirth, but for the birth of mankind[14].

This note of new Renaissance is discernible in the plays of Wesker. The kitchen of Marango is the ensemble of new mankind, the basement of the Kahn's house in the East End of London in the thirties is the breeding place as well as the sponsorial place for such mankind, and the countryside in Norfolk becomes the strolling ground of those kind of people. These people who outnumbered the ruling minority represented by Marango, Healey, Colonel Newhurst etc. are, by and large, the pioneers of their society although at the same time they are the sons and daughters of the soil. They are not Fancy's children or dream children, but are strictly the products of their society, their family and, above all, their social environment. It is the society that strives to make them into social beings, to ennoble their instincts so that they become social instincts, so that society receives the greatest possible benefit from them. Again it is society that brings constant influence to bear on them, so that, instead of becoming criminal, or violating the general rules they act, as observes A. Lunacharsky, according to these rules and behave befittingly[15].

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14. Dukore (ed. ) : Dramatic Theory and Criticism, p. 965

15. A. Lunacharsky : On Literature and Art, pp. 88-89

The inmates of Marango's Kitchen, the dwellers of the East End slums of London, the Norfolk labourers, the conscripts of the NAAFI, may all belong to different social groups, their outlooks may be different, but their aim, be it active or dormant, is almost the same. Consciously or unconsciously they aim at creating something new readying themselves for battle hilarious in their victories but courageous in bearing any temporary defeats. Here lies the mastery of the art of Wesker. For art, to him, is not essentially the production of pleasing objects, but it, in a parallel direction with the view of Tolstoy, is a means of union among men, joining them together in the same feelings, and indispensable for the life and progress towards well-being of individuals and of humanity[16].

The art of Wesker is not, on the whole, to depict the crude realities of life. He stresses the change of the paradigm. That is why he finds 'diamond' in Peter, in Beatie Bryant, in Sarah Kahn and many others who were commonly considered 'carbon' in a society. They are not ready to accept the very frame of the society in which they are nurtured and tortured as well. They are not willing to remain in the social set-up where the majority is being exploited by the minority. People like Harry or Mr. Bryant, however sincere they may be, are constantly in fear of being sacked from their jobs without any reason; conscripts like Smiley

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16. Tolstoy : What is art and Essays on Art. p. 183

are ruthlessly and sadistically treated by the superior NAAFI officers. If there is defeat on the one side, there is uprising on the other. The decaying feudal or capitalist periphery is meticulously depicted in his plays, and there is the compromising attitude of the industrialists too to heighten the conflict and contrast as well. Wesker does not deal with politics as a means of building up his own career nor to please anybody or any organisation to bring his professional success, but to him politics is a greater cause to heighten the struggle for existence, to add a new charm to the life of those who fight for a cause. He does not look at politics from the viewpoint of an empiricist, but he looks at it as means towards the end of universal humanism. It is a worldview that affords to establish a philosophy of the exploited in a society of exploitation. This philosophy is in favour of reasonable distribution of wealth among all. He becomes the upholder of the cause of the people either of towns or of countryside.

Wesker seems to re-live the urban life in his plays by portraying mostly the insecurities of the young and the old in flats in congested areas, yet he does not forget to throw light on the problems and grievances of the rural people who are often denied or deprived of their civic amenities. There is a wide difference, as depicted in his plays, between the life in urban areas and that of rural areas. While the rural people seldom care to know about the M.P.'s of their constituencies, or about their national poets, it is the city-dwellers who are ready to

court arrest or stand against poverty, injustice and social disorders. Truly speaking the life depicted in urban areas was as far away from that of the rural areas. But in some respects there is a close-knit relationship between the people of the two places — all of them are equally exploited working people having no administrative control over existing forms of production and administration. Therefore Wesker is bent on concentrating his attention on their social relations rather than on their individuality. In this regard he feels like Christopher Caudwell, the necessity of a tragic struggle in between the exploiter and the exploited in a world in which mind is dependent upon environment and in which thought and will, however private and personal they may be, readily become social[17].

Wesker, finds carbon in kitchen, slums, low-cost flats, NAAFI training camps or in the country side, and transforms these into diamonds. The people he creates are tossed in the currents and cross-currents but they never get lost. May be they are labouring apparently in vain like Sisyphus pushing the boulder upward only for it to roll down again. But one appreciable thing they always do — they never give way nor, give up. He sees those that are regarded as common, but he creates those who remain uncommon. He sees society not as a static symbol but as a changing reality; that is why he sees it complete and sees it whole. To

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17. T. R. Henn : The Harvest of Tragedy, p. 255

Wesker society is neither a microcosm nor a macrocosm, but a analogy in which the working people, who had previously been neutrons, may form the protons in course of time. He sees potentiality in the working people — the grimy and increasingly oppressed people of the industrial era — and begins to portray those people who, according to Ronald Peacock, are becoming articulate, militant, and revolutionary against the hypocrisy and decadent conventions of the materialistic bourgeoisie[18].

There is some universal quality about his art which will not age. True that he never endeavours to use a protective shield of fantasy in order to produce a drama before a self-satisfied audience, but on the contrary, he, who takes social effect into account, transforms the demands of the struggle of the broad masses into art. The scenes and the situations he creates are something nascent or gruesome, but they depict the true picture of a society in disarray, where Harry cannot paint a robust horse on the wall without horror, Peter cannot dream in the kitchen, Ronnie cannot marry Beatie Bryant and so on and so forth. All that Wesker attempts to do is not to conceal the inner core of society using the film of fantasy, but to make a rapport between the audience and the crude realities of life. He does not come to eulogise the person or the thing that he dislikes, but he tries to make the audience aware of the wounds where

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18. Ronald Peacock : The Art of Drama, op. cit. p. 210

everything seems to be perfect. His art is to reveal rather than to conceal; to make, sing and think but not to lull one to sleep nor to provide a hi-fi Mlop-hot entertainment for a couple of hours.

2. Society and individual in a class society

Once Henrik Ibsen is believed to have said to a German: "He who would know me fully must know Norway[19]. Perhaps he was under the impression that without the adequate knowledge of contemporary Norway, his dramas might not be properly intelligible to others or especially to those who belonged to other countries. Although he was essentially a poet Ibsen began struggling for existence with plays and he was known as a dramatist of the middle class people who were playing a prominent part in his time. Middle class mentality, middle class sentiment, middle class culture, middle class language or broadly speaking, everything pertaining to middle class life were dealt with in his plays right down from "Love's Comedy" (1862) to "John Gabriel Borkman" (1896). Ibsen spent the most important part of his life in the countries of Europe which were more or less influenced by the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848. These revolutions, by and large, paved the way for the supremacy of the bourgeoisie, but in spite of that, common

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19. M.C. Bradbrook : Ibsen The Norwegian, p. 1

people were gradually gaining prominence though they could not yet expect to blur the other existing classes of people, viz. the middle class people, the aristocrats and the bourgeoisie.

But did Ibsen, who tasted embittered poverty for many years, much correspond with or recognize the common people of Norway so far as his dramas are concerned? The answer would possibly be in the negative. Most of his principal characters belonged to the middle class and he, as an artist, was concerned more with their social or psychological problems than with the root cause of these problems. One, who takes interest in Ibsen, is expected to know the middle class of Norway in order to know him well; still the vast Norwegian region populated by the working people remains mostly unexplored in his plays. His was, no doubt, a powerful pen that engrossed the middle class writers of Europe. But Ibsen, who was an apothecary's apprentice in his early life, either failed to diagnose the disease or deliberately ignored it, probably because he had to manage on a stipend, off and on, from the Norwegian Government represented by his social superiors. Therefore, he mostly remained as the spokesman of the middle classes who might claim to be the real beneficiaries of the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848; and Ibsen concentrated his utmost attention on the avowed objectives of the Great French Revolution, such as — Liberty, Equality and Fraternity — in a strictly limited way, or advocated liberty and equality for women like Nora, Rebekka or Hedda. It is useless to try to find in his

plays the relations in which men stand to each other in the process of production. There is, again, no comforting assurance that the down-trodden multitudes are prepared inevitably to win or at least to fight for their cause. Ibsen who himself was compelled to work for a bare subsistence, possibly saw sacrifice of humanity and waste of life, yet he is believed to have shut his eyes to reality. True, Ibsen has painted his characters with subtle nuances or sometimes portrayed them as social units but he could not claim to be the true representative of Norway of his time. Rather he could pose, so says Daniel Haakonsen, to be the representative of the middle class[80].

Neither Ibsen nor his English successors did portray adequately the way the forces of production had begun to outstrip the existing social, legal and political institutions. Sir A. W. Pinero, Henry A. Jones, George Bernard Shaw, John Galsworthy and many other English dramatists dealt with social problems mostly treading in the footsteps of Ibsen, their predecessor. Sometimes some of them, who ardently declared themselves as socialists, denied the separate entity of the working class people who clearly differed from the ruling class people in taste and temper as well as status. Pinero, the son of a solicitor, attempted to deal with real situations but he failed,

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80. James Mc. Parlane (ed.) : Henrik Ibsen, p. 436

like an apprentice craftsman, owing to a lack of skill and depth of knowledge about the structure of a society that was divided into classes. However theatrically effective he might be, Jones, who was the son of a farmer, dedicated his art to the service of the middle class too. It was Shaw who, like an expert peddler, made a brisk sale of his fine dolls who had well-built spines but no flesh and blood proper. He could allow a mercenary soldier to enter a lady's chamber to be wooed, could make a village-maid a saint, or a flower-girl a lady without assigning any social reason. He professed to be realistic and anti-romantic but remained a juggler to build up a castle without perspiration; he simply neither did justice to nor paid honour to the working people. Galsworthy, too, committed a blunder. While he pretended to shed tears for the working people, his heart actually bled for the ruling people to which he, by birth and heritage, belonged. T. S. Eliot, perhaps the most intelligent dramatist of the present century, either made a pilgrimage to the past or had recourse to the myths of the past because he visualized the devaluation of values everywhere around him; a royalist like him possibly did not like class annihilation but class collaboration.

Samuel Beckett had real talent. But he objected to the realistic drama on ground that realism was, in parallel with the view of W. I. Oliver, an irritating, if not inferior, form of art that enslaves the artist in a photographic relationship to life[81].

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81. Bogard and Oliver (eds.) : Modern Drama, p. V

This clever dramatist stepped down to make the working people either lumpen lunatics or ennamed beasts. Moreover he made the working people mere tools for the master race at the cost of waiting for Godot who never cared to come to their rescue but kept these talkative characters on tenterhooks. Thus he is believed to have stabbed humanity for the sake of sheer dramatic suspense.

John Osborne's "Look Back in Anger", that startled the English audience in 1956, was able to catch the imagination of a generation and it seemed to depict an authentic picture of a post-war society[22]. However, it is Jimmy Porter who finds society cruel and unjust; he rails at Alison, his wife, more angrily, but he never discovers that his misery is due to the class structure of society. To Jimmy Porter anger is more a fashion than an effect. That he remains dissatisfied is rather for the existence of the political state which is definitely a coercive organ, and the state has become, from time immemorial, the tool of the dominant class or the ruling class. But Osborne does not care to show that Jimmy Porter is bound to suffer in a society since that society is more and more split up into two contending classes. However, it is significant that Osborne, through Jimmy's rejection of Alison and his final acceptance, symbolically shows that working people are not yet in a position to disentangle themselves from the snares of the ruling class, or the upper class has nowhere to go but to resort to a compromise with the working

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22. Ifor Evans : A History of English Literature, p. 146

people. Here, not only a happy cross-fertilisation between the man and the moment is prescribed, but an easy human solution, in terms of the peaceful unification of two classes, is also hinted at.

But there is no similar happy or general cross-fertilisation in Arnold Wesker's plays. On the other hand he depicts the industrial as well as the modern capitalist state that has taken roots from the ruins of the feudal state and that state still retains and cherishes class antagonism. The only difference is that this class division to-day is not as apparent as it was during the days of the past. But the new conditions of oppression or new forms of struggle are not difficult to trace. Wesker has not divided people into proletariat, 'Salariat' or the profit-mongers but into exploiters and the exploited.

In almost all his plays this clear division is discernible. Wesker in his plays meticulously depicts how individual workers wage war against the ruling class and how they direct their attacks against them too. He sometimes shows the incoherent and inactive working people scattered over towns and country sides and they, in course of time, tend to form more compact and active bodies as a consequence of greater strength among themselves. Their victories are, as we are aware, few and far between compared with their defeats, but they are not easily amenable to compromise. The real fruit of their struggles may lie not in the immediate result, but in the ever enlightening union of the workers. Moreover, the working people in his plays are able to drag, in some places,

the ruling section into the arena either to come to a settlement or to obtain moral support from them. Consequently in many cases the more the working people become conscious of their own rights, the more they are able to gain ground in their favour. Furthermore he does not hesitate to show that the ruling class see it is impossible, particularly in an industrial area, to impose the conditions of existence upon society without borrowing the brains and hands of the working class. One thing is, however, clear in Hunter's plays ... that the ruling class or the dominant propertied class cannot thrive or even exist, however sophisticated their machineries of exploitation may be, without the existence of the labouring people.

Since the interest of the propertied class is always different from that of the working people, it is important to notice that the former, out of greed or the right of sheer possession, claim themselves as the rightful superiors or even masters over the latter. They have been successful although they succeeded at the cost of contemptuous indifference. In Hunter's plays too there is this claim on the part of the ruling minority. Let us take, for example, the case of Smiler, a conscript in the NAAFI, and the R. A. F. officers who are supposed to be the coercive representatives of the ruling class. These officers who demanded honour, loyalty and obedience (in lieu of equality, fraternity and liberty) from the conscripts were not in a convincing position to endure the natural inborn smile of Smiler. Their

master-servant attitude did not win for them even professional honour but contempt and indifference only. Colonel Denhurst, a countryside prototype, who wanted to remain satisfied with the class-base social structure, was shocked to learn that society had gone far when those who were "down" might want to be equal with those who had been "up" for a long time. He had to remain satisfied with throwing Dave Simmonds out of his job only. Mr. Harrage, who was much more prudent than either the R. A. F. officers or Colonel Denhurst, took reality for granted; that is why he could not punish Peter, the German cook, who stopped his kitchen from functioning. He knew for certain that time was no longer ripe for him to punish Peters if he had to rule absolutely over the kitchen. Moreover, he felt that Peter might be a slave to the natural order of a slave society, but he himself could not possibly violate the moral order at a time when humanity was gaining ground. Alfred Harrington and Reginald Maitland had substantial knowledge about the class structure of society. In order to maintain this structure they might explore and adore newer possibilities, and whenever they found such in Andrew Jackson they readily tried to lure him by conferring a knighthood upon him. This knighthood is one of the devices of the ruling class to initiate the opposite but befitting elements into their own way of life on the one hand, and to allow the strong opposition to subside on the other. Here lies the weakness of the ruling class which cannot thrive without importing elements from the rival

classe. Again they had for so long been successful when they were able to initiate and exploit these elements positively in their own favour. But Wesker's art lies in circumscribing this tradition. That is why Sir Andrew Cobham could not remain satisfied with his patchwork of constructing golden cities among slums; the trainees who rebelled against the R.A.F. officers, temporarily admitted defeat, but they did not surrender for all time.

Still one thing is worth mentioning here. Wesker, as a dramatic artist, always maintains an aloofness and remains impartial. The Capital and the Labour ... the two contending classes ... are portrayed by him in an equally interesting way although it is not difficult for us to realise to whom his sympathy goes. But this sympathy for a particular group or class does not, in fact, spoil his art. If one wishes to prove Shakespeare a royalist because he has portrayed Henry V as an ideal monarch, one may do so. But that proof does not belittle Shakespeare's art. If Wesker has delineated a group of class-conscious people in his plays, it does not definitely dim his credit as an artist. That Peter muses on the burden of the longdrawn out slavery in the fashionable name of a 'job' in the kitchen and that he becomes the cause of the collapse of the collossal edifice (that is, the kitchen) sponsored by Marango is not leading us to the inference that Wesker is against the highly sophisticated industrial society. All that he shows is that all the "Peters", in a class society, are at liberty to go and find a job anywhere they like or they

can even enjoy themselves to the extent of voluptuous pleasure (as Hans stated) but they are sure to discover that they are but slaves to the society of "Marangoes" and all the world is a kitchen to them as all the world was a hell to Doctor Faustus in Bondage. And it is interesting to note that whenever Wesker depicts the characters like Marango, Harrington, Whitland or Healey, he leaves them without their immediate successors, whereas the working people have, as his plays reveal, considerable numbers of descendants to their credit to carry the banner of struggle while the class society exists; and during this period of struggle, persons like Sarah, Wynie, Monty, Prince or even Ada, the girl, and Ronnie, the boy, subordinate their behaviour to the interests of the entire class. Thus he not only reflects the psychology and the sociology of both the classes but traces the dialectical movement through the contradictions of reality.

Still if we do make an impartial study of the dramas of Wesker we will have the impression that he has become successful in recognising the two conflicting elements in society — the Haves and the Have-nots. He meticulously depicts the conflict between these two different elements in society and vivifies the conflict, but ultimately he does not want to keep these contending classes poles apart full of hatred and malice for each other. That is not his idea at all. He cannot conceive of confusing the

means with the ends. He never advocates the existence of a class society although he is shocked to have to accept it as a fact, but he prefers to establish truly human relations — the real ends — among men from both camps, and he sees that the honour of the working class is upheld.

## CHAPTER FIVE (A)

## WESKER'S NARRATIVE ART

It is known that dramatic art is a composite art that depends, for its success, on the actors, actresses, stage directors, dramatists and many other elements. But it should be borne in mind that the main role is played by the dramatist himself. As he has pen and ink or sometimes typewirter at his disposal, and as he lives in a society he is at liberty to write either a play with a loose plot or a well-made play. However it is constructed, a drama should above all be astable. Wesker's dramas are astable, but he regards it as unimportant for a play to be well made, although his works always have a definite plan unlike the plays of Eugene Ionesco[1]. That does not mean that Wesker has little use for a plot. Chaucer and Shakespeare never invented stories of their own but managed to take their outlines from a familiar material[2] out of which they could normally conjure up their plot or the ordering of the incidents. But Wesker invented not only plots (except in The Merchant) but stories also. While Chaucer of Shakespeare had to ransack a familiar material of the upper

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1. "I neither know what my destination is nor whether I s hall find one. I write without a plan. The ending comes about by itself: a realisation of failure, as in my last play 'The Man With a Luggage' ". ___ Eugene Ionesco in his article "Why do I Write?" in GAMBIT, vol. 8, p. 64

2. M. Anderson : Anger and Detachment, p. 4

classes for their plots, Wesker has often recourse to the working class and it is that society to which he remains mostly indebted for his stories. The art of telling stories or the ordering of incidents is, of course, his own. Wesker like a commentator knows that "every play has some narrative and some plot. It must have narrative, for it must be based on a sequence of events occurring in time; and it must have plot of a kind, for it must have a plan — a formal structure"[3].

We see that before making a plot an author is bound to make a plan. But what type of plan he should make or what will be his criterion? Like all major artists Wesker is of the opinion that art is the selection of the essential and subtraction of the inessential. Now there is a pertinent question — what is essential and what is inessential? Different authors will be of different opinions regarding this controversial issue. As Wesker is the representative of a particular class and as he is an upholder of a definite cause his stand is towards "a dialectical leap from the profound inwardness of subjectivity to the objectivity of social and historical reality"[4]. This 'dialectical leap' determines the presentation, the structure and the coherence of his works.

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3. Ormerod Greenwood : The Playwright, p. 5

4. Georg Lukacs : The Meaning of Contemporary Realism, p. 55

Wesker began writing plays in 1956, but his dramatic career precisely begins from 1958 when he wrote The Kitchen (the fuller version was however published in 1961). His career then may reasonably be divided into several periods. 1958 to 1960 is the initial period or the period of optimism when the working people of his plays directly or indirectly are engaged in a class struggle. 1961 to 1968 may be called the second period or the period of protest when the principal characters are not in a position to identify themselves with the spirit of their age, and from 1969 to 1978 is called the third phase or the period of class collaboration when the dramatist is oblivious of the points of attack.

The Kitchen, Chicken Soup With Barley (originally entitled 'When the Wind Blows'), Roots, I'm Talking About Jerusalem and Chips With Everything belong to the initial period; Menace (original TV Play) and The Nottingham Captain (a short documentary with lyrics specially designed for Centre 42 festivals) belong to the second period, and all the other plays viz. Their Very Own And Golden City (originally entitled 'Congress'), The Four Seasons (finished in Cuba), The Friends, The Old Ones, The Wedding Feast (1974), The Journalists (1975) and The Merchant (1976) a new version of Shakespeare's play, set in 1936 A.D.) belong to the third phase.

It may be noted that all the earlier plays excepting Chips With Everything were divided either into three acts or three parts. The Kitchen is divided into three parts with an

Interlude between two parts; there is neither sub-division nor scene-division. There are as many as thirty characters in this play — eleven women and nineteen men. Chicken Soup With Barley (1957) with its two sequels Roots (1958) and I'm Talking About Jerusalem (1958) was later on compiled as a 'Trilogy'. Chicken Soup With Barley has been divided into three acts with two scenes in each act, whereas Roots has been simply divided into three acts having two scene divisions in the Second Act only. I'm Talking About Jerusalem has been divided into three acts; while Act Two and Act Three each has two scenes, and Act One is deprived of any scene-division. In the 'Trilogy' there are twenty-seven characters in all, among whom nine are women and eighteen are either men or boys. There are four female characters and six male characters in Chicken Soup; out of these four female characters only three and a new one, and out of the six male characters two and seven more appear in I'm Talking About Jerusalem, whereas there are four female characters and five male characters in Roots; no character of this play appears either in the Chicken Soup With Barley or in the I'm Talking About Jerusalem. Chips With Everything has two acts; while the First Act is divided into nine scenes only, the Second Act consists of twelve scenes. In this play there are nineteen characters in all, but all are male characters. This is the only play of Wesker that lacks feminine flavour.

Menace (1961), Wesker's first television play, consists of sixteen shots only; eleven shots out of sixteen are indoor shots whereas the other five are outdoor shots. There are eight characters, three are women whereas five are either men or boys. Nottingham Captain (1962) has no act or scene divisions. All that is important here is the documentation of an incident but not the characters.

Their Very Own And Golden City (1963) has two acts; there are twelve scenes in the First Act and six scenes in the Second Act; the last scene, that is, scene six is again divided into twelve sub-scenes. The total number of characters in this play is seventeen, fifteen are men and two are women. The Four Seasons (1964) is divided into two parts (instead of acts) followed by an Epilogue much in the style of Bernard Shaw's 'Saint Joan'. Part One and Part Two each is sub-divided into two sections, namely, Winter and Spring or Summer and Autumn. It is a peculiar device of using seasons as substitute for scenes. This is of course Wesker's innovation. However, the Epilogue has nothing to do with the action of the play. There are only two characters, one is female and the other male.

The Friends (1967) is a Two-Act Play with three scenes in Act One and four scenes in Act Two. The total number of characters of this play is seven; out of seven characters there are three women and four men. Unity of time is also maintained with the artists Liberty though not with stringent rigidity.

The Old Ones (1970) consists of two acts. While the First Act consists of fifteen scenes, the second Act comprises only nine

scenes. There are thirteen characters only, five are women and eight are men.

The Journalists is a play of two Acts. Act One is divided into two parts, — Part One and Part Two: Act Two is divided into two parts, — Part Three and Part Four. There are one hundred fifty four scenes in all, forty two scenes in Act One Part One, thirty two scenes in Part Two, thirty six scenes in Act Two Part Three and forty four scenes in Part Four. So far as time is concerned Wesker covers a week of five days, but this week may be extended upto five weeks, that is, Tuesday from the first week, Wednesday from the second week and so on. The construction of this play reminds us of Brecht. The total effect of the play is however built up through the juxtaposition and 'montage' of contrasting episodes. Though this play is meant for the stage, it smacks of a screen play or a scenario. It was first published in Polish by "Dialog" in March 1974, but it was published in England in 1975.

The Merchant is a play having two Acts only with thirteen scenes. The First Act has seven scenes, and the Second six scenes.

This is the only one of Wesker's plays that skips about in the past. The action takes place in the year 1565 A.D. Except for The Nottingham Captain, which is a documentary, Wesker generally skims over the twentieth century. The Merchant clearly deviates from that rule.

This play originally with three scenes was first published in The Jewish Quarterly, vol. 24, No. 1-2 (87-88) Spring-Summer, 1976 and later on it, with two more, was published in Adam, an international review, 1977 nos. 401-403.

The action of the play takes place either in Venice or in Belmont. Six scenes out of the seven scenes of the First Act take place in Venice, the second scene of Act One takes place in Belmont. Belmont becomes the place of occurrence of scenes one, four and six of the Second Act, and Venice becomes the scene of scenes two, three and five of the Second Act.

There are in all fifteen characters — six female and nine male in this play. For this particular play Wesker is indebted not only to his friends but to the following authors or scholars of repute :-

1. Dr. D. S. Chambers : The Imperial Age of Venice.
2. Dr. Cecil Roth : History of the Jews.
3. Miss Adler, a German translator.

1. 'The Kitchen'

While ancient epic, was recited the modern novel is being silently read, drama proper should essentially be designed for representation by actors or actresses who not only impersonate the characters but also make the point or situation alive by means of distributing the narrative and the dialogue. While the purpose of the epic and the novel is to relate and report, the drama imitates

by action and speech. The aim of Wesker's play is not to bring forth some still pictures so as to relate and report but to re-create a momentum through action. Here lies his peculiarity that he succeeds not only in creating an illusion of reality through his dramatic art, but also procreating an integral force among the audience. Consequently his plays appeal to the intellect and emotion. Wesker does not present utopian doctrine, but what he presents is 'warm present' or 'lively present', and he represents the present like a spark. His art is not mainly to reveal or unwind anything in the course of time, but to unfold the plot with the speed of a moving wheel. He sets scene after scene, act after act, and helps in accelerating the action till the play reaches a climax, but he himself remains aloof.

When we watch any sport — be it a game of cricket or a boxing-match — our enjoyment of a player's performance is increased by understanding what he is trying to do and how he does it. In the same manner a meticulous study of a playwright's intentions, methods and technical skill can enhance our response to a play.

Wesker's handling of construction, dialogue, scene-painting and evocation of atmosphere all play their essential parts in contributing to the total effect of The Kitchen. The play, according to a critic, is a brilliant and effective piece about a day in the kitchen of a restaurant, which in turn is a view of humanity

and the world[5]. However, let us see what Wesker himself says about this play :

> This is a play about a large kitchen in a restaurant called Trivoli. All kitchens, especially during service, go insane. There is the rush, there are the petty quarrels, grumbles, false pride, and snobbery. Kitchen-staff instinctively hate dining-room staff, and all of them hate the customer. He is the personal enemy. The world might have been a stage for Shakespeare, but to me it is a kitchen, where people come and go and cannot stay long enough to understand each other, and friendships, loves and enmities are forgotten as quickly as they are made.[6]

'Art is concealment' —— this proposition will be more understandable when we look in detail at Wesker's statement and the inner theme of The Kitchen. He could have startled the audience in an easy and cheap way as many artists, who stay away from real life-situations, do. But there is no such attempt on the part of Wesker to startle the audience or the readers, for he, who is a representative artist of the working class, knows quite well that the life of the working people in the society, has little room for surprises. But even the common incidents that are of normal occurrence, may startle a thinking mind. Out of these normal occurrences arises the conflict which makes the soul of Wesker's drama. But a true artist that Wesker is, he is in the habit of

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5. Robin May : A Companion To The Theatre, p. 66

6. Wesker : The Kitchen, Introduction, p. 5

taking care to see that his dramatic art does not degenerate into mere photography nor 'a slight melodrama' as Matlaw observed[7]. What he achieves is beauty in the plot.

The plot of The Kitchen is planned as a single curve rising gradually from the lighting of the ovens by Magi in Part One till it reaches its peak in the first encounter of Peter with Marango in Part Two. Then it slopes down till the last encounter between them. Marango ultimately reaches the edge of collapse when Peter has stopped his world. There is no episode, no sub-plot either to help or hinder the single-line curve of the plot which is packed full of interest, though all extraneous details are ruthlessly cut.[8]

From the very beginning attempts are being made so as to make the conflict between Peter and Marango a pointed one. Suffice it to say that the conflict is never a personal contest. Here is the conflict between Capitalists and Labour, that is, the grave-diggers of the Capitalists. In this regard it has a close resemblance to Clifford Odets' Waiting for Lefty, a one act tour de force with revolutionary implications[9]. Nowhere is the unnecessary manipulating hand of the dramatist in evidence. One sequence of incidents is presented just as it might normally be expected to

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7. M. Matlaw : Modern World Drama, p. 813

8. "It is the lightest and best-made of all Wesker's plays". — J.R. Taylor : Anger and After, p. 162

9. Cassell's Encyclopedia of Literature, vol. II, p. 1943

happen in a head-on contest between the ruling and the working classes and it is definitely not a 'dirty business of modern life' as observed by an eminent critic[10].

There is hardly an incident which seems to be unnecessary. One accident takes place; Hans burns his face in Part One and Marange maintains his outstanding taciturnity. Another unhappy incident occurs when Minnie, the mother of seven children, takes contraceptive pills like other poor working women of the kitchen. The last but the most important accident touches the self-immolating Peter who apparently goes berserk but deliberately breaks the gas lead in order to stop the kitchen of which Marange is the only god. Peter has to suffer some injuries, his hands are smeared with blood and some smears have reached his face too. The ground has been prepared from the very outset for such an eventuality. So when he sustains his injuries, these occur as something very much expected.

The open clash between Peter and Gaston in Part One of the play gives a brief graphic presentation of a picture from real life. They are the victims of bourgeois society, though Gaston is mostly unaware of it. The clash may, therefore, be considered as the replica of a revolutionary upheaval and civil war in a country where revolutionaries try to put an end to capitalism.

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10. "The Kitchen is meant to stand in our minds for the whole dirty business of modern life". — J. R. Taylor : ANGRY AND AFTER, Op. cit. pp. 160-161

The characters who are presumably typical, are sufficiently individualised. The kitchen in which they live has the semblance of a lavatory or sewer[11]. Yet many of them defend the proprietor's property as though it is their own. Despite their sweating service for eight hours a day they are not in a position to offer food to a starving tramp, nor do they get sympathy from Marango when some of their colleagues get burnt or become victims of terrible heat owing to missing gas-burners. In fact the plot achieves a brilliant effectiveness by means of contrast. Peter's conscious humanitarian attitude clashes with the stolid indifference of Marango and his minions. In the midst of masculine contrast some feminine touches are, however, given. Winnie runs away in utter shame and excrutiating pain, and Cinthia flirts with Max and Chef. When finally Violet irritates Peter's temper by calling him 'bloody German bastard' the actual conflict thickens. The explosive elements were already heaped up, only a spark was required. It is Violet who not only plays the role of a flint, but also makes Peter violate all the norms and manners formulated by the establishment. Violet is not his real enemy, not even Marango; if there be any enemy it is Marango's kitchen, the very symbol of the establishment.

Where plot is the skeleton, suspense is the nervous system. If suspense be the secret of creating dramatic interest, Wesker

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11. "Bertha : The lavatory is your country". __ Part One

succeeds marvellously in creating it among the spectators and readers as well. And this device has been successfully used by Wesker with the arrangement of characters, incidents and situations. While the play almost begins with the clash between colleagues, it ends with an implication of humanity. Into this frustrated class society Peter neither spits fire and venom against anyone nor does he resort to any intellectual exercise with anybody, for he is well aware that none is capable of even dreaming while the kitchen (that is, the set-up of the very class society) exists. He is to point out to Marango that man is not simply an animal that cooks his victuals but a complete human being with a stomach, heart, brain or even dreams of positive order. Moreover, he may point out that neither high wages, which are given by Marango, nor political freedom, which is never interfered with by Marango, are enough to satisfy fundamental human needs. It is human dignity which is rather found wanting in the kitchen. And it is the denial of the human dignity that makes decent human relationships impossible[12]. He, therefore, knows quite well that if he is to blame anything or anybody, it is neither Monique nor Violet nor even Marango, but it is the very social structure that hinders the growth and prosperity of the working class.

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12. K.S. Woodroofe in his article on "Mr. Wesker's kitchen" in The Hibbert Journal vol. 62, No. 246 Spring 1964, p. 181

Wesker with dexterous art manages to push Peter towards a point of victory enabling the plot to take a decisive turn in his favour. One may feel that Peter is being pushed to his doom when one sees him moving off with bandaged wounds without uttering a single word. It is, however, not his defeat, but his real triumph. Here the defeat of the old Harange has becomethe victory of the young Peter. Harange's last speech, which is the deathpang of the capitalist society, bears witness to that. In fact, it is Harange who beholds his doom and ceases to raise his active hand against the evil of the hour. The catastrophe thus reaches a more poignant conclusion. Thus the movement of the plot necessarily follows the course of an expeditionist who rises higher and higher and halts only when the peak yawns before him.

The play, however, runs for the customary length of time and is divided into Two Parts with an Interlude. John Russel Brown observes:

> Wesker wrote in this way for the stage because he wished to show life as he found it outside the theatre. 13

Wesker did not present life as he saw it but as he wanted to see it, for the perhaps knew him Priestly how to bring 'life to the Theatre and the Theatre to life'[14].

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13. J. R. Brown : Theatre Language, p. 159

14. J. B. Priestly : The Art of the Dramatist, 1957, p. 14

That Ronald Hayman[15] calls The Kitchen one of Wesker's best plays deserves mention. In it Wesker lets the stage be occupied to the end by a single complete action, which takes place in one day and in one spot. In this play the ideal of time-unity is probably reached in the almost complete correlation of stage-time with actual time. The central part or Interlude where the characters are resting as well as dallying with dreams may contain some weak passages, but above all there is an action single and complete although Wesker was influenced to some extent by John Dexter[16], an eminent stage director. However, let us see what Hayman observes :

> The play as a whole succeeds brilliantly in crystallising what it has to say into its theatrical form. Above all, the image of the kitchen comes richly alive. The work of the harrassed cooks and hurrying waitresses grows into a theatrical metapher that stands for all work. The low sound of gas in the Ovens, the sheer physical pressure of the labour involved in preparing meals for such a big busy restaurant, the extra strain created by tensions between the national and racial groups, the babel of different languages, the hierarchy of the kitchen with the owner at the top, the cooks able to lord it over the waitresses and the kitchen porters at the very bottom, except for the tramp who wanders in to beg for food — all this builds up into a complex image of man as a working animal. 17

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15. R. Hayman : Arnold Wesker, p. 15

16. R. Hayman : The Set-up, p. 239

17. R. Hayman : Arnold Wesker, op. cit. pp. 15-16

Wesker shows how men are reduced to working animals in a class society. Through the depiction of one day's brilliant, but orchestrated and detailed activities in the kitchen, within the confinement of two acts and an interlude, Wesker attempts to present 'a microcosm of the larger world'[18]. The fineness of the story rests not only in agitating the audience with alarm, horror, painful expectation, sympathies or antipathies, but also in the movement of conflicting forces towards the terrible and final issue — the ultimate victory of the working class in a congregated place like the kitchen, which is, in fact, the replica of a highly developed industrialised society.

2. 'Chicken Soup With Barley'

Chicken Soup With Barley is the first play of Wesker's Trilogy — the other two are Roots and I'm Talking About Jerusalem. Let us quote what Raymond Cowell observes :

> These three plays trace the development of a group of people centring on the Kahn family, from pre-war poverty to post-war affluence, the unifying theme being the relation between Socialism and this changing society. 19

Wesker here follows the conventional rules of putting the first play of his Trilogy into three acts — each act being supported by

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18. Mc Graw Hill : Encyclopedia of World Drama, vol. 4, p. 393

19. R. Cowell : Twelve Modern Dramatists, p. 103

two scenes. Wesker, the follower of neo-classical rules of precision in The Kitchen, becomes every inch a Shakespearian romantic in Chicken Soup With Barley so far as the violation of the unities of time and place is concerned. The play begins in an evening at the basement of the Kahns' house in the East End of London on 4th October 1936 (Act One), shifts to an L. C.C. block of flats in Hackney on June 1946 (Act Two, Scene One) and remains there till October 1947 (Act Two, Scene two) and starts functioning again on November 1956 in the same L. C. C. flat (Act Three, scene one) till it returns on December 1956 at the Kahns' room in one evening. It is worth noting that all the scenes occur in the evening, except for one scene (Act Two, Scene One) which takes place in the afternoon. It is, however, noteworthy that Act One and Act Two exclusively take place in October and in November-December, that is, during winter. Act Two, Scene two also takes place in October though scene one of this act occurs in June. Chicken Soup spans twenty long years and more (from October 1936 to December 1956) in the lives of the Kahns to whom evening and winter come often but afternoon and June rarely visit them. However, let us see what J. R. Brown says :

> compared with The Kitchen, it is conventional, with three Acts, a single line of action and a series of built-up climaxes and curtain lines. So

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20. J. R. Brown : Theatre Language, op. cit. p. 189

The action of Chicken Soup may be compared to the course of a river that has three clear stages from its origin in the mountains to the confluence via the plain land. Likewise the action of the play begins under the cloud of fascism endeavouring to come under the sunshine of socialism, reaches the middle course when welfare measures from government level were being translated into reality, and then comes to the end when hope amidst disillusionment of the working people was in the air.

Let us now trace the cause of disillusionment in the following way.

> Chicken Soup with Barley covers a period of twenty years and opens and closes with events that mark the boundaries of an epoch in the fortunes of the Communist party in England.21

During these long twenty years many more epochmaking incidents took place in different parts of the world. From 1937 onwards the Spanish question was a vital one as the Spanish Republican Government was illegally attacked by General Franco and it was defeated because of the inadequacy of both moral and military aids.

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21. Michael Anderson in his article "Arnold Wesker, the last humanist?" in New Theatre Magazine, p. 11

> France's supporters were the narrow class of rich men whom Chamberlain's (the then Prime Minister of England) supporters knew and liked : his opponents were the Socialists and trade unionists whom they hated. The war in Spain was the same class war as was being fought at home. 22

Therefore, one who was politically conscious could foresee the result. So there was the defeat of the Spanish Republican Government which resulted in a bitter disillusionment among British socialists.[23] The people of the world have experienced a second global war which started in 1939 and ended in 1945. After the Second World War the sovereign states of the world assembled themselves in two opposite camps, the U. S. A. being the leader of one camp and the U.S.S.R. being the leader of the other. But there were more shocks to come. Soviet troops arrived in Budapest in Hungary on 28th October 1956 and quelled the Hungarian revolt[24]. There was a shameless attack on the Suez Canal area on 30th October 1956 by Israel who got active support and military assistance from Britain and France. This is the socio-political perspective under which the action of Chicken Soup begins and ends.

Chicken Soup is a saga of the Kahn family and it might have been a documentary of all the working people of England

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22. G.D.H. Cole and Raymond Postage : The German People, p. 604

23. G.D.H. Cole : A Short History of the British Working-class Movement, pp. 448-50

24. "Ronnie's belief in the party is finally undermined when the Hungarian revolt is put down". — Mc Graw Hill : Encyclopedia of World Drama, vol. 4, op. cit. p. 303

between 1936 and 1956. Sarah Kahn, Jewish and of European origin, lives in a house in the East End of London with her husband Harry, also a European Jew. They have a daughter, Ada, aged fourteen and a son named Ronnie, who is about five. Wesker deliberately defies the unity of time when Ronnie later on appears as a young man of twenty five. He, again, violates the unity of place as the action takes place in more than one place.

The time-scheme is long twenty years. Wesker took lessons at the London School of Film Technique. That is why

> the play moves across the years as quickly as the film, and off-stage, outside the set, a complex activity of filmic proportions is always in process : political meetings, mob violence, strikes, trade union debates, marriage, setting up home, starting a business, a world war, and life in a kitchen. 25

Whether off-stage or on-stage the play is always action-packed. The mastery of Chicken Soup lies not in the material but in the treatment of the material: the whole play evolves round the Kahn family. What constitutes the greatness of the play is the inter-weaving, with an extreme subtlety, of the different threads of episodes into one harmonious design. Therefore, we are of the opinion that Wesker is profusely endowed with creative ability.

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25. J. R. Brown : Theatre Language, op. cit. p. 159

3. 'Roots'

Now for the first time in Wesker entere the country-side leaving the metropolis behind. Far away from the urban area where civic amenities are available, he turns to Norfolk where there is no water laid on, nor electricity everywhere, nor gas — but the flickering glimmer of Tilly lamps and simmering flames of Prime stoves. It is an ethnic play reflecting the manners and morals peculiar to the Norfolk people. This is also a play of the working people far from the madding crowd though they are not away from the tumult of a class society.

> This is a play about Norfolk people: it could be a play about any country people. 26

Wesker, in this play, tells of the Bryant family restricted by poverty and suspension of service under bourgeois agronomy, and shows his acute study of realistic colloquial speech. He introduced the language or dialect of Norfolk in this play not to give local habitation and a name only, but to emphasise a greater thing. He not only explores here vigour, vitality, forcefulness and usefulness of this dialect in order to enrich the English language, but attempts to find its intrinsic value and the value of freshness and invigoration to combat the tyranny of the Received Standard or

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26. The Wesker Trilogy, p. 83

literary Standard of English language, which sometimes needs reinforcement from native colloquial speech[27]. While the dramatic language of England was losing its lustre, Wesker through the dialectal use was, however, opening up new vistas. Roots is somewhat an attempt to explore the resourcefulness of the dialectal roots of the English language. Yet all that matters most here is dialectics rather than dialect[28].

However, Wesker had for a long period been engaged in portraying the working people of the metropolis, but here he comes to depict the ways and means of the farm labourers who, in fact, constitute the other wing of the organic society. Wesker shows that the working people, whether they belong to the urban areas or rural areas, are the integral parts of a society. The Norfolk people should not be content with what they have but should strive for what they should have. Obviously Roots was, according to a critic, "the play for the time and of the time"[29].

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27. Logan Pearsall Smith writes in an article in 1925 : "Since our language seems to be growing year by year more foreign, abstract and colourless in character, it stands in greater need than ever of this vigorous and native reinforcement which we could obtain from dialect in particular and popular speech in general. This reinforcement could be enlisted and fruitfully employed by all of us, were we not paralysed by that superstitious feeling of awe and respect for Standard English (i.e., Received Standard) which is now spread by the diffusion of education". — from Eric Partridge's 'Usage and Abusage', Penguin Paperback, 1978, p. 305

28. John Mander : The Writer and Commitment, pp. 197-198

29. K. J. Worth : Revolutions in Modern English Drama, p. 80

Roots is a Three-Act play with two scenes in the Second Act and without having any scene divisions in the First and Third Acts. It has a systematically worked-out plot which is at once simple, excellent and grand; it is grand on account of its very simplicity. Its principal plot is to illustrate the apparent misfortune of Beatie Bryant who has to pass through her personal ignorance as well as the working people's general ignorance. Here is the story of a working-class Norfolk girl Beatie Bryant who is in love with Ronnie of London. It is Ronnie who

> tries to educate her and fills her with his own ideas, which she relays in a garbled form to her appalled peasant family. Ronnie, despite his idealistic talk of creating a new human being in her, suddenly drops her; but the play ends more hopefully than Wesker's others, for the shock jolts Beatie into finding a voice of her own.[30]

What ashes are to a phoenix bird, Ronnie is to Beatie. No doubt she learns a lot from Ronnie but she never teaches him anything. Neither she nor Wesker was "intent upon educating the audience too" as J. L. Styan observed[31]. Yet Beatie definitely has a purpose — but that purpose is to make bridges, bridges between ignorance and enlightenment.

Two sets — one in the Beales' house and another at Mr and Mrs Bryant's cottage — are used in this play. There is a gap of two days between Act One and Act Two, but there is an

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30. B. Gascoigne : Twentieth Century Drama, p. 199

31. J. L. Styan : The Dark Comedy, pp. 166-167

interval of two weeks between Act Two and the last Act, so far as the stage direction is concerned. The play then obviously covers sixteen days; but the conversation between Jenny and Beatie tells us otherwise[32]. Nevertheless Wesker has fulfilled all the conditions that Aristotle would have laid down for a good play. In place of a college or a concatenation of elements, Wesker substituted a logic of action. And if plot is, according to a commentator[33], essentially a logic of actions, like a chemical reaction, one event leading to another in a causal sequence pointing toward some outcome, some climax or solution, it has a plot analogous to that. Roots has, of course, a single action with a definite beginning, a middle and an end. It has a unity of action having no sub-plot — only a few episodes are there, such as the Jenny-Jimmy episode and Stan Ilkan episode. But what branches are to a tree those episodes are to the main plot. The Third Act being an excellent one, has the captivating stage situations that bring a stimulating breath of reality, and the other two acts are complimentary to this act, but still we feel that this play has no indication of being a one-act play as John Russel Taylor is of the opinion[34].

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32. "Jenny : Where's Reuben?
Beatie : He's comin' down at the end of two weeks" — Act I.

33. Scott Sanders in his article "The Left-handedness of Modern Literature" in Twentieth Century Literature, vol. 23, No. 4, December 1977, p. 488

34. J.R. Taylor : Anger and After, op. cit. pp. 154-55
"Roots has every indication of being a one-act play (an excellent one-act play in all probability) blown up to three acts by the exigencies of the modern theatre".

The complications of the main action occupy the first two acts leading to the Third Act where all the characters meet. Still each act has a separate entity of its own without which the play might have been unmitigably stale.

Roots has

> two major themes, the relationship between Beatie and her family as it is affected by her love for Ronnie; and the relevance of Socialism to rural working class life. 38

In Roots Wesker's emphasis is upon the process of working class regeneration and its self-realisation in a pseudo-feudal background. That Arnold Wesker chooses for his heroine a burgeoning young woman is historically appropriate, for he is concerned with the historical awakening of the working class and while he was writing this play there was Queen on the throne of Britain. That Wesker prefers Beatie Bryant as the heroine of the play is significant from the viewpoint that the new generation with the awakening of a new era is to dominate the old generation, and to begin with from the very roots. Beatie's rebirth is not possible as long as Stan Bunn exists, and her awakening is not complete until her family is in a viable position with the rising bourgeoisie represented by Mr Bealey, a farmer's son and manager of the estate. The object of dispute between the rising bourgeoisie and the awakening working class is there. Almost all the characters perform their

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38. R. Cowell : Twelve Modern Dramatists, op. cit. p. 103

symbolic roles. While the primary focus is upon Beatie, and the secondary focus is either upon Stan Mann or Mr Healey, Jeanie's letter of refusal plays a symbolic role in adding fuel to the flame. It is symbolic enough that when the world of Stan Mann was on the verge of extinction, the world of Mr Healey is born in its wake. The outmoded forms of social life having been extinguished the new forms take shape until they surrender to another subsequent form. The world of Stan Mann having been stunned, the world of Mr Healey is being born and waits to be beaten when awakened personages like Beatie Bryants are beginning to stand on their own feet. If Stan Mann is the prelude to a process of life, Mr Healey is the interlude, then Beatie's role is quite artistically premonitory. All that Hunter does here is to depict the romance of her progress with regard to her class, and the correct realisation of the way in which her whole generation is groping. The play, like a romance, begins with the zest for union with Jeanie, grows with individual need in the perspective of social reality, and then ends in the building up of the social need rather than the individual need. While the death of Stan Mann heralds the dying side, the beginning of Beatie marks the developing side withal.

The story of Hobby should not be viewed as the story of a foolish young woman tortured by the near and dear ones whom she loves. If Hobby is considered from this sort of pathological point of view, we are sure to lose the actual essence of the play. It does not tend towards a domestic tragedy as one may suppose it to be

It is a historical play that implies socio-political importance. It is historical not in the traditional sense of the rise and fall of magnificent heroes or heroines, but in the growing and developing aspect of the working class. All that is important is the Event contributes to the working class consciousness in the rural background. In the conflicting society consisting of the rising bourgeoisie and the working class it is 'the baptised' Beatie who is to play the role of a saviour to her own class. The circle of vision is limited and stratified to a great extent from Mr Bryant's point of view, but from Beatie's point of view the traditional frame-work is in a changing state, interconnecting all on an equal footing. While the existence of the working class is at stake, the 'beginning' of Beatie is clearly a pointer to a new Joan of Arc in another background. Yet there is a difference between Joan and Beatie. Joan's motivation is actuated when she 'hears' voices from within, but Beatie's beginning is actuated when she is influenced from without; while Joan had the spiritual urge, Beatie has the social responsibility.

There is a conflict not between good and evil as in morality plays or inner conflicts as we experience in Shakespeare's superb tragic heroes; but between modern and age-old belief based on hypothetical assumptions — the-apple-don't-fall-far-from-the-tree mentality. It is Kiplingesque. Beatie Bryant and her mother embody two distinctive ways of life. While Mrs Bryant represents a traditional mode of living which considers society as an immovable

and unalterable entity controlled by those in power, Beatie sees society as a lifeless mechanism governed by a definite purpose — the purpose of profit-making resulting in exploitation of the working-class.

Roots is a closely knit unified construction, every element of which culminates in a working class regeneration against the background of a Norfolk village. Beatie's rejuvenation and realisation is cast into a dynamic conflict between what might have been and what is going to be. Other characters are designed to converge to a particular place and point to be divulged at different directions after having felt the necessity of germination from the very roots of their existence. Beatie is not only to envisage, the creation of a new society here in her countryside but also to galvanize the working class people or the farm-labourers of the countryside with those of the town or the industrial labourers. In this regard we are definitely one with Walter Allen who observes that this play is by far the best and the most faithful play about British working-class life[36].

Perhaps for the basic structure of the play, Wesker is indebted to his original architectonic skill of The Kitchen. No character of Chicken Soup appears in Roots. Only Beatie sometimes quotes Ronnie. Yet it belongs to the Trilogy owing to the oneness and conformity of theme with the other two plays. Roots has a

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36. J. R. Taylor : The Angry Theatre, p. 155

peculiarity of its own. It forms the middle chain that connects the other two chains, Chicken Soup and I'm Talking About Jerusalem but it has some of the documentary feeling of the other plays. This play may be staged anywhere and at anytime regardless of the actual time-scheme mentioned in I'm Talking About Jerusalem although Clifford Leech observes that

> the action of Roots occurs in post-war and covers only a fortnight in the life of Beatie Bryant and her family.37

4. 'I'm Talking About Jerusalem'

I'm Talking About Jerusalem is the third or the last component play of the Trilogy following the three-act divisions like its predecessors. While the Second Act and the Third Act each has two scenes, the First Act has no such scene division. This closing piece of the Trilogy is more akin to Chicken Soup than to Roots so far as the time-scheme, course of action and characterisation are concerned, but it retains its close proximity to Roots, so far as the unity of place is concerned. There is no unity of time as the action of the play takes place over thirteen years from September 1946 to the autumn of 1959 although the play meticulously observes the classical unity of place. Dave, Ada,

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37. J. R. Brown and B. Harris : Contemporary Theatre, pp. 19-20

Sarah, Ronnie and Gisele — these five characters who belonged to Chicken Soup appear also in this play; but no character of Roots appears here; only the name of Beatie Bryant has been mentioned several times. For the title of the play Wesker is notably indebted to William Blake's preface to his poem 'Milton'. The last stanza of the preface goes thus :

> I will not cease from Mental fight,
> Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand
> Till we have built Jerusalem
> In England's green and pleasant land[38].

I'm Talking About Jerusalem, begins in the late forties when the Second World War was over. The members of the Kahn family and Dave Simmonds may hope that the slums would really go from London and the millennium in the offing. Still the Simmonds do feel like coming to the country side near Norfolk with a view to finding a good living there. Dave prefers the countryside to London. He works in a factory where he sees men hating themselves; morning after morning they come in with a cold hatred in their eyes. To Dave these people are all brutalised — devoid of humanity. Moreover, they are going to drain their energy into something that gives them nothing in return. He hopes to be happy when he works in colonel Denhurst's firm where, at the same time, he will have the opportunity to see his family too. Life, to him, is cruel and

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38. J. Bronowski (ed.) : William Blake, p. 162

sometimes hopeless too. Yet he believes that the dignity of man lies not only in his consciousness of things but in making the consciousness a hopeful one without a thought of surrender. He never longs for the civic amenities of London to which he was used, he has come to a Norfolk village to live a bracing life in the country.

Like Libby Dobson he, too, is aware of the backwardness of the countryside and has developed a desire for prospective career in a town, whereas Dave is engaged in doing experiments in a William Morris style, seeking the self-sufficiency of an artisan in a rural area with a wrong belief that fine craftsmanship could stand in competition with mass produced goods[39].

Wesker's technical skill does not lie so much in the weaving the plot as in controlling it through the presence of the characters. The plot does not occupy a prominent place in this play. Wesker does not appear to be a great story teller here. He is rather the surgeon of the element and dissects it adroitly. Since the scheme of the plot happens to be simple although equally implicit of a greater meaning, it comes under his perfect control.

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39. "It is really William Morris style reversal to a rural state of artisan self-sufficiency. Unfortunately, by the end of the play this reversal has been exposed as yet another romantic dream, and Dave finds pack up house to return to London. Again, the cause of his failure lies outside of Dave himself, for he is a fine craftsman; the cause is that the world doesn't want or recognize fine craftsmanship any more, it is quite content with mass produced goods". — 'Arnold Wesker's Mission', an article by John Garforth in The Modern Reader edited by Charles Marowitz, Tom Milne and Owen Hale, p. 216

Whatever architectonic defect it may have, the play proper does not begin in the Second Act as a noted critic Mr J. R. Taylor observed[40]. Had Mr Taylor paid attention to the dialectical progress of the play he could not have made this remark. What the First Act, seems one in Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" is, the entire First Act is to Arnold Wesker's I'm Talking About Jerusalem.

The plot in this play owes its presence to the divisions accomplished by episodes, the main plot wields the episode of Dinnie Kahn and Esther Kahn. The backbone of the story, according to the Production Note of Ivan Butler, consist in

> failure — the failure of a brave attempt, doomed from the start, and a commentary, all the more penetrating for its restraint and fairness, on the stage of our society to-day. But it is also a human and very moving Chronicle, extending over thirteen years, in the lives of two people that we met briefly in the first part of the Trilogy. It has a single, not necessarily complicated, set, an easily manageable cast, and the most straightforward story of the three plays. It offers, in addition, equally with its predecessors, some fine opportunities for strong, dramatic and subtle playing. 41

However, the canvas of the plot is just like a mural painting.

The suspense that made and unmade the catastrophe of Roots is not prominently traceable here; we may take it for granted that this play in comparison with the two other plays is 'slow-moving'[42]

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40. "The play proper begins in the second act, with Dave's dismissal by his employer". — Anger and After, op. cit. p.158

41. Wesker : I'm Talking About Jerusalem, p. 4

42. F. Hamley : New Trends in Twentieth Century Drama, p. 278

or is of 'loose construction'[43]. If craftsmanship or architectonic skill were the only viewpoints and the only criteria, many of Shakespeare's plays wouldhave been flung into the dust heap. Thank God, it is not so. A drama becomes a work of art when there is a unity of impression on account of a plot which is logical, argumentative or demonstrative[44]. In this last play of the Trilogy Wesker is determined to depict some man's experiences in terms of society and social structure; in doing so he of course maintains the logic of art. Furthermore this play is intent on making its audience aware of the working man's precarious and unstable position in the place where he is bound to confront a coherent and deep-rooted system difficult to overthrow or uproot Dave and Ada go to a countryside to make experiments that ultimately fails — and we know that failure is not always the gateway to disaster, but may be of some use :

> I'm Talking About Jerusalem is not so much the chronicle of a failure, as of an exploration and discovery; society may be incapable of perfection, but the individual is no better. Dave and Ada return to London without the bitterness of Doreen, strengthened by self-knowledge; their admission of defeat displays a kind of courage.45

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43. R. Hayman : Arnold Wesker, op. cit. p. 42

44. Una Ellis-Fermor : Shakespeare the Dramatist, p. 98

45. M. Anderson's article "Arnold Wesker the last Humanist?" in New Theatre Magazine, op. cit. vol. 3, p. 14

Arnold Wesker's Trilogy may lack some chiselled touches here and there, but the theme that opens through the three plays, has a uniformity of its own and never appears to be dated. Let us hear from Wesker himself :

> The trilogy needs little explanation to illustrate the point further. The first play, Chicken Soup with Barley, about the disintegration of a politically-conscious family, could have been written about the last days of that family; but as, I had to begin at the beginning, when the son was only a child of four, and take the play through years. And then, using the whole of Chicken Soup itself as a beginning, I continued with another, play — Roots, the very title betrays an obsession with beginnings. And this play conveys, through the son, the impact of the ideas contained in Chicken Soup upon the girl from a peasant family. And then I had to write the third play, I'm Talking About Jerusalem, which showed how these same ideas interwove themselves into the lives of the daughter and her husband.46

Thus the trilogy becomes not only 'a panorama of working class life through twenty years of the life of one family' as Ghani observed[47] but of two families. This is the way that Wesker approaches the dialectics. Each Three-Act play of the Trilogy is the proper manifestation of the three formulas of dialectics. While Chicken Soup owes its origin to the unity and struggle of opposites in the form of liberation movement of the working people in a city, Roots owes its origin to the transition of quantity into quality

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46. A.Wesker : Fears of Fragmentation, p. 113

47. J. Chiari : Landmarks of Contemporary Drama, p. 118

in the form of the liberation movement of these people in the countryside, and I'm Talking About Jerusalem owes its origin to the negation of negation in the depiction of the frustration of a group of working people who are completely out of place in a rural background. Hence the birth of the Trilogy.

But a 'Tetralogy' might have been probable had The Kitchen been included in the Trilogy. There would have been then a balance — The Kitchen and Chicken Soup with Barley both deal with either the socio-economic problems of the working people in the urbanised area or with sophistication in relation to production, whereas Roots and I'm Talking About Jerusalem both deal with the two-fold socio-economic aspects in rural areas which are not yet extensively imbued with bourgeois affluence. However, Wesker's Trilogy may be called an epic as Wesker has the occasion to find a comprehensive image of the working class world. If the duty of an epic is not merely to depict the victory of the cause of justice over evil or injustice (as in The Iliad or in The Mahabharata) but to portray the great struggle for the birth of mankind, The Kitchen and the Trilogy may, as a whole, be considered as an epic for the stage.

5. 'Chips with Everything'

Arnold Wesker's fifth play Chips with Everything (1960) has closer proximity to The Kitchen than to his Trilogy. It is purely a Two-Act play as The Kitchen is, although Wesker has displayed dexterity in the field of art by dovetailing and telescoping the

first eleven scenes in the First Act and the last twelve scenes in the Second or the Last Act. For the very title of this play Wesker is indebted to The Kitchen[48]. This is the first of Wesker's plays where a kitchen neither is mentioned nor plays a vital role although the imagery of a kitchen may be had in the title of the play. This play also deserves special mention because there is no female character. So it is the most masculine of Wesker's plays. Therefore, the absence of any feminine aspect has offered the coercive machinery of the state, through the N. A. F., an opportunity to make an outrage upon the traditional mother-son relationship[49]. Wesker deals with psychological problems, but never indulges in Freudian complexes. This is not even the mother-fixation which D. H. Lawrence might have advocated. Here Wesker not only takes pains to depict the perversion of an individual belonging to the ruling class, but suggests that this entire class is corrupted; to this class the prettiness of a woman is nothing but a commodity.

In his Trilogy Wesker explores, or illustrates the organisation of society in terms of the aspirations and disillusionment of one family, struggling against political

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48. "Gaston (to Michael). Never. You'll never create a Mausoleum. Chips you can make — chips with every thing". — The Kitchen. Part One, p. 22, Jonathan Cape, 1966.

49. "First Corporal (To Smiler) ... Is your mother pretty?
Smiler. Yes, she was.
First Corporal. Have you ever seen her undressed? Eh? Have you, lad? Have you seen her naked?"
— Act Two, scene three.

imbalance, or in The Kitchen he depicts the framework of men in society, but in Chips With Everything he

> takes us to an R. A. F. training camp where for eight weeks the recruits are put through square bashing before the final passing out parade.50

Nine conscripts have come to the NAAFI (the abbreviated form of the Navy, Army and Air Force Institute) which is actually 'a scorching palace' to the trainees. These trainees are always forced to remember that their training in the R. A. F. camp is, according to Michael Billington, supposed to be a "microcosm of class war"[51], or according to another critic it is "a cardboard allegory of the class war"[52]. It is in the NAAFI where the trainees are made to stand up straight to maintain all sorts of formalities, to keep their mouths shut but to keep their eyes open; they are to swallow the lesson in the mess of history. The human being is in a constant state of war and so they are asked to be prepared each against the other. They are expected to maintain discipline and to obey the officers even if they have not a sufficient store of coal to warm them during the freezing cold of December. The conscripts who come mostly from the working class who provide food, make clothes, dig

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50. P. Lumley : New Trends in Twentieth Century Drama, op. cit. pp. 276-277

51. Sheridan Morley (ed.) : Theatre 71, p. 218

52. Christopher Booker : The Neophiliacs (a study of the revolution in ENGLISH LIFE in the fifties and sixties) p. 178

coal and mend roads, are normally asked to put their working-clas
hale away at the R. A. F. But in the face of base pop culture the
somehow, under the leadership of Pip, manage to sing 'The Ugly
Wren', an old peasant song. It is pip who successfully leads the
workmen in stealing coke from the cokeyard in defiance of a wire
netting and a patrol when they have run out of coke. Pip Thompso
who belongs to the aristocracy, yields in the long run to bayonet
practice and rushes at the dummy with a terrifying scream, sticki
it three times with three screams in order to avoid a court marti
This Pip Thompson, however wise, is found out by other officers a
one of their men, when his real motive is discovered. The working
class conscripts are rather late in discovering a clever useless
leftover in Pip who betrays when they really make an unsuccessful
revolt. Pip's change of uniform, from an airman's to an officer's
is no more a matter of surprise to the other conscripts. Pip is
condescending enough to sprinkle some sweet words of humanity an
to declare their respective appointments at different places. The
short-lived revolt of the airmen ends in fiasco and they are forc
to parade, to hoist the R. A. F. colours and to play "the Queen"
or the national anthem of Britain and finally to swim with the
stream without making any sort of revolt.

So far as Wesker's architectonic skill is concerned Chips
With Everything is unique. He has established himself as one of
the best Dons of the British stage since the Second World War
because he creates the best moments of galvanic action on the

He not only is efficient in creating a breathtaking moment as in the coke-stealing scene, but creates in hysterical and moving moment in Act Two scene ten. There is a theatrical excitement in the silent, precise, breathtaking and funny coke stealing scene when the conscripts use chair to clamber over the wire fence about six feet high and successfully return with two buckets full of coke. This scene has almost no talk, but much silent action full of verve and emotion whereas in Act Two scene ten there is the more hysterical monologue of a persecuted conscript than any sort of action. But while Act One scene ten is funny as well as mechanically perfect in its logic with the captivating stage situation, Act Two scene ten tends to produce a sequence as if in a scorching hell where Miller carries the stamp of doom on his face. This scene resembles the solitary confinement of Falder in Galsworthy's "Justice", but it is more heart-rending than that, for Falder knew that there was an end of the tenure of his confinement, but here Miller learns that his trouble is only beginning. Let us quote what an eminent critic says :

> Precision of timing here is made theatrical, as organized chaos was in 'The Kitchen'. 53

Wesker has gathered a great deal of technical knowledge from John Dexter, the great director of the modern British stage, who helped Wesker to understand the theatre of his plays and

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53. R. Hayman : Playback 2, p. 86

directed them all when most others said they would fail[54]; moreover, he remains greatly indebted to Bertolt Brecht, the great German playwright of the mid-twentieth century. According to an eminent critic

> Chips With Everything, indeed, shows the influence of Brecht — for good so far as Wesker's mastery of the art of the theatre is concerned.55

Wesker, in fact, not only uses a Brechtian technique of alienation in this play, but also uses economy and incisiveness in making each of the short scenes capable of standing up as dramatically effective; and finally he prepares the ground for [illegible], his first television play where he enters a new phase as a dramatic artist. If some architectural blemishes and shortcomings are ignored, the play, according to Harold Hobson[56], may be noted as the first anti-Establishment entertainment of which the Establishment need be afraid. However, we may conclude with Michael Anderson who says :

> the ultimate impression that the play creates, whatever its feelings, is one of dramatic integrity, and not of distortion of character for political ends.57

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54. Chips With Everything, title page, Penguin paperback, 1971

55. D. Daiches : A Critical History of English Literature, vol. IV, 1969, p. 1130

56. Richard Findlater : Banned ! a review of theatrical Censorship, p. 178

57. "A. Wesker, the Last Humanist" The New Theatre Dramatists, op. cit. p. [illegible]

6. 'Menace'

Menace is the first play that was written specially for television. There is neither act division nor scene division in this play. There are sixteen shots in all — eleven internal shots and five external shots to cover the course of action. Shot number thirteen is the biggest and there are three very small shots to the credit of the play. The shot number Three, Eight and Fifteen are devoid of any dialogue, but not without action. Shot number Nine is twice repeated. No unity of place is maintained; eleven Internal shots occur either in Harry's room or in Annie's but under the same roof of a basement flat, or at a restaurant; and five External shots occur either in streets or at a club. The total duration of the play is from one winter evening till night. But the action is one and is amenable to discipline so far as the unity of action is concerned. Sometimes the shots are apparently enlivened by touches of the fantastic and the absurd, but the onus rests not mainly on the supposed effect of cacophony but on that of the proposed symphony — where there will be all the perfumes and the light of the working class life. The visual shots tend to coalesce into a vital image of post-war Britain, which has determined to continue military supplies to other nations but only to avoid betrayal, while the present generation at home is rolling in an abyss of depression and decadence. In this play there is no conventional beginning, middle and end.

Wesker maintains brevity with respect to characterisation. The minimum number of characters are introduced into this play. There are five adults including three women and there are also three boys. The presentation of so many boys has never been done by him before. There was only one boy — namely Ronnie in Chicken Soup, and Danny Simmonds, a child, and Jenny, a boy apprentice, in I'm Talking About Jerusalem, but if they be the obverse of the bright side of struggling life that brings a stimulating breath of reality, these three boys in Menace are the reverse of the darker side of an apparent tranquil society that brings a deadening breath of reality. A total of sixteen shots have been dovetailed into a nice montage of two young men in a basement flat and three women of different age-groups.

This is the play which particularly differs from all Wesker's previous plays. This is the play where he does not introduce a character who is a mouthpiece[58]. There is no such mouthpiece to lodge a direct protest against the ruling class in Menace. But then we should not assume that the people of this play have surrendered to the hostile force. The play rather pronounces a warning against the menacing silence. Had the play been a

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58. "In it (Menace) he seemed less determined to preach than ever before, less eager to use two characters as mouthpieces. Instead he merely presented us with a group of unhappy misfits, only one of whom really has a Weskerian dream and left us to draw our own conclusions about them and their relations with the world about them". — J. R. Taylor : Anger and After, pp. 169-170

surrendering one Garry and Harriet would never have striven to portray a splendid but defiant horse on the wall. When a menace in the form of an aeroplane looms large over the country, it is Garry who makes a protest — in the shape of the stout and invigorating horse. Garry must exert his energy lest the humanity should say good-bye to the world, or the world says good-bye to humanity.

This television play is more important for another reason. From now onwards Wesker determines to focus all his attentions not only on erecting Centre-42 but also in portraying a sterile and tableauesque life in a country where the working people had to lodge a protest against the disparities of the ruling class. Wesker, in fact, takes one bold step forward obeying the principle of art as a subjection to portraiture as well as a subjection to protest. In Menace Wesker perhaps desires to come out with a word of encouragement but remains standing completely stunned though not perished in the wild waste of the seething discontent, anxiety and tension.

## V. 'The Nottingham Captain'

The Nottingham Captain 1962) is the new type of a short documentary, the first of this sort by Wesker, with lyrics, presented in two different settings, one classical one jazz

especially for Centre-42[59] festivals that would take place at Bellingborough in late 1962. The play was first performed on 11th September 1962 at Bellingborough.

As regards form this documentary has the least resemblance to its predecessors, but so far as content is concerned it bears tonal and temperamental affinity with Chips With Everything. While Wesker portrayed a sudden but baffled emotional protest of a group of conscripts in a R. A. F. camp, here he depicts the historical upheaval, generally called Luddite Movement, claimed to be directed by one Edward Ludd alias Ned Ludd who, in Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cheshire, conducted an unsuccessful campaign that began as early as the spring of 1811 and went on till February of the next year. The Luddite Movement[60],

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59. "A cultural organisation, directed by the playwright Arnold Wesker, who first had the idea of interesting the Trade Unions in the propagation of culture for their members". — P. Marshall (ed.) : The Oxford Companion to the Theatre, p.161

60. The Luddite Movement "was not directed against new machinery, but against the abuse of old machinery. The framework knitters found their livelihood half-ruined by the war (i.e., Napoleonic war) ... The Luddites appeared in village after village and smashed the wide frames, and any other frames worked by unapprenticed labour ... Parliament, frightened and vicious, passed a Bill making frame-breaking (already punishable by fourteen years' transportation) a capital offence .... No assistance for any of the Luddites came from the official opposition in Parliament ... Sir Francis Burdett, Samuel Whitbread and a few others alone protested in the Commons against the Bill for the death penalty : in the Lords, Byron added a more famous but equally ineffective plea in his most memorable speech there. 'Suppose it passed', he said of the Bill. 'Suppose one of these men, as I have seen them — Meagre with famine, sullen with despair, careless of a life which your lordships are perhaps about to value as something less than the price of a stocking frame — Suppose this man (and there are a thousand such from whom you may select your victims) dragged into court to be tried for this new offence by this new law, still

as it is known, was named after Ned Ludd who organised the campaign. It was an unorganised uprising of the English proletariat against the rising bourgeoisie.

As the work was neither meant for a conventional peak stage, nor for any repertory, but for Centre-42 (which was 'an attempt to enable works of art to be communicated to as many people as possible') and as Wesker wanted to depict a documentary picture of a by-gone movement, he did not maintain either act division or scene division in this work. He just wanted to make an effective intercourse between the living characters and the living audience in a new platform where a live actor or an actress would be in a position to kindle an instant collective response from among the audience. It is a composite sequence of narration, action and music. If there is any plot it is perceptibly loose, but not incoherent. As the physical endurance of the spectator was limited in the Centre Forty-two, Trade Union Festivals in 1962 this documentary was probably written to satisfy those who belonged to the working class. It is neither a playlet proper, nor a one-act play. The mere rudiments of a play are there, yet it is far from being a play. What a negative film is to a full-fledged photograph, it is to a play. It may be called a pseudo-

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there are two things wanting to convict and condemn him; and these are in my opinion' ". — Cole and Postage : The Common People, Op. cit. pp. 105-106

play; it is in a nebulous state of being a play that requires proper crystallisation and artistry. The story here is composed of a number of detached incidents, having little logical skeleton among themselves obviously depending not upon the machinery of the action but upon the person who is none but the Narrator who, as the central figure, binds the otherwise scattered elements together. Needless to say that Seeker should have thought out beforehand the details of his drama; it was enough that he should have in mind a broad general notion of the course the story was to take. Here Seeker feels the necessity of giving the spectators a particular idea out of the incidents of the past rather than tellingthem a tale.

Here the Narrator plays the chief part. He occupies the most important role. He is the pivotal person round whom all other persons evolve. As many as fourteen persons excepting the Narrator and the chorus are introduced here. It is interesting that there are personages but no characters, for they are merely introduced but not given scope for development. Either they appear on the stage or their voices are audible through tape. The author throws light not upon characters but upon incidents of facts. Spectators of the Forty-two Festivals were supposed to belong to a particular class. They would have come not to glance casually over the course of action but to gather something of the true nature of those who were in power and how they remained in power. It was a performance with a purpose ---- the purpose of making an

assessment of the ruling class in relation to the ruled. What is interesting here is that powerful men when they were threatened with extermination, became self-righteous and then their sense of sacred duty made them discover the traitors who should be legally prosecuted. It depicts the tragedy not of a particular man (say, Ned Ludd), but of a movement generally known as the Luddite movement. The farcical trial of the Nottingham Captain is not only an anathema to the British court of Justice, but reminds us of the trial of Saint Joan as depicted by Bernard Shaw in one of his plays. Warwicks might have been dead, but their ghosts still tread on the periphery of power and self-righteousness hazarding the self-determination of people. However, this work of art is elegiac in tone but edifying in spirit.

If Masaniello portrays stereotyped affluent society, The Nottingham Captain tells of the end of a feudal society. True, that Henker has tried to demonstrate his technical ability in these two plays as he has done in his previous plays. However, he is never tired of exposing the inhumanity of the bourgeois society. Both the plays depict the belittlement of the working class in either type of economic set-up, and the ruling class determines the ruling ideas through cunning or coercion. In both the plays Henker portrays the dreariness not only of the present epoch but also of the near future. Disillusion or despair looms large in these plays, but the ultimate allegiance goes more to the working class than to the hostile ruling class. Here in these

plays Wesker communicates some moral lesson but merely to justify the cause of the working people. The picture he paints here is much more analogous to living frescoes, whereas, in his previous plays, he depicts a world of throbbing reality with its fourth wall removed.

## 8. "Their Very Own and Golden City"

Arnold Wesker's play Their Very Own and Golden City (originally entitled 'Congress') is a highly technical play, which may, to some extent, be compared with Shaw's "Back to Methuselah". While in his Trilogy he covers the period from 1936 to 1959 only, this play covers a long period of time, from 1986 to 1990. This play seems to be much more complex from the histrionic point of view. The Trilogy was feasible, for most of the situations and incidents were nearer to Wesker's actual experience, whereas in this play it is not so. The Trilogy was written when Wesker was in his thirties but this play, according to an interview between Wesker and Simon Trussler,

> does not really begin until characters are thirty five and then goes on to the age of eighty.61

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61. Charles Marowitz and Simon Trussler (eds) : Theatre at Work, pp. 92-93

This play, indeed, covers sixty four years, and its time-structure reminds us of that of Time and Conways (1937) by J. B. Priestley. Without the flash-forward technique this play might have been a technically different one. Wesker, however, presents not only the imprisonment of a group of idealistic young men with their female companion in a Gothic cathedral, but also their helplessness in a society mostly dominated by the moneyed class. Arnold Wesker sees this play as a film and it is full of subtle devices reminiscent of the cinema. The play depicts the story of Andrew Cobham, a working class architect of genius who is ultimately purchased by the establishment when a knighthood, which is actually a noose to trap a working class talent, is conferred upon him in a grandeloquent manner. It may be noted that the English aristocracy has recruited its members for centuries from the middle classes, and we here behold the bourgeoisie recruiting the members from the working class. Andy is snatched off from his working class background only to smile among his peers as one Sir Andrew Cobham. The play traces the development of a betrayal of a working class architect; but it is neither a betrayal of Andrew Cobham, nor that of the author. It is not Wesker who deviates from his mission of struggle for the working people, rather he maintains fidelity to the truth of life — that the society of the ruling class which has been losing its potentiality from within, has to exact and extract the generating force from the working class itself. One may easily believe that Wesker, in the like manner of William Morris, acknowledges here the necessity of the master's

existence for the proper recognition and due honour to the trade unionists who may form a kind of privileged group among the workmen and finally turn as allies of capital with the total obligion of the class enemy; but no, Hasker was perhaps the last artist to do that. Had he been so, the doors of Durham Cathedral might have been bolted against Andy for ever. To Andy one door was still open. This play may be regarded as a modern play; modern in the sense that it depicts the prospect of a city where the people, who are mostly divided into the rulers and the ruled, are engaged in finding a new way of life that will be acceptable to them both.

Previously the aristocratic lords, with a view to securing their position through state, a machinery of coercion, used to behead their rivals belonging to the working people (as in The Nottingham Captain), or the feudal lords like Colonel Newhuret (cf. I'm Talking About Jerusalem) dispensed with the services of Dave; but in a highly industrialised society things become totally different. In a sophisticated industrial society the so-called 'captains of industry' are not only aware of the importance of 'a cog and a wheel' but are willingly ready to reward them for their actual importance. The cogs and wheels — or properly speaking the working people — are most important for the very existence of the ruling class. Following the same strategy the ruling class not only rewards Andy but makes him a partner even to use him as a prop in order to avoid the total crumbling of the machinery of exploitation and oppression. What was merely a seed in The Kitchen, or a seedling in Chips with Everything,

becomes a full-grown tree in this play. Andy, with Peter and Pip, might sing — we are not of the kitchen, nor of the military nor of anything where there is no human relationship; we are something more than nothing; we are only what might have been, and have been waiting upon the shores of the dreamland of humanity for thousands of ages before we came to this position, and have names, and we shall not cease marching till our goal is reached.

In Chips with Everything there was protest as well as warning against the bourgeois leadership. But here in this play Wesker, the artist, warns the working class of the massive piece of self-deception from within. Andy, within the norm of patchwork, builds a city and thus tends to build the habits of a way of life in that city, which is far away from the dream of his youth. Andy most foolishly allows himself to be swallowed by the spirit of that city which is, in fact, like a dragon that goes its own way towards a golden city but without the heart of a human being. This play of Wesker's is not essentially a compromise nor does it indulge in morbidity and pessimism[62]. The picture, which he draws, of the conflicts of forces or feelings preserves a truly objective spirit; these conflicts stimulate reflection rather than indicate a doctrine. We are one with John Russel Taylor when he observes :

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62. Ibid.

> throughout the play the way that his vision is frittered away in practice through the years forms a constant, bitterly ironical counter-point with his expression of the vision itself, but the end is a sort of triumph, in that the play is not finally one of defeat. 63

Amidst the winter of despair comes the spring of hope when the chariot, at the end of the play, bearing Jessie upon it is carried by stout stallions.

The play begins in the interior of Durham Cathedral and ends at the same place. The first act covers only ten years from 1926 to 1936 whereas the second act covers forty three years from 1947 to 1990. The scene at Durham Cathedral intermittently comes in both the acts to heighten the dramatic intensity as well as to dovetail the present with the future. While many of the modern dramatists are conservative regarding the form, Bonker makes experiments with forms. Bonker has made his originality felt not only by grafting intermittent scenes, but by introducing a sequence of flash forwards and flashbacks with compression of the time sequence and other epic devices amounting to little more than the use of a cinematic technique of montage and cutting[64]. For this introduction of newer form or technique he will be remembered for a long time. In spite of all such techniques he made the plot consistently plausible. It has a conventional

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63. J. C. Taylor : Anger and After, p. 169

64. Martin Esslin : Brief Chronicles, p. 93

beginning, but no conventional middle nor an end proper. The play rather comes to a pause but not to an end.

Yet Wesker appears to be a great narrator of genuine quality. His popularity lies in the fact that he is not merely a narrator of a story of the working class life, but a purposeful dramatist who uses drama as a platform for the social consciousness of the working class. He has been proved to be a rare type of dramatist who can warn with a smile on his lips, and mix the class conscious powders in an excellent jam of humanity, and he forewarns the working people before their adjustment to the ruling class during the time of necessity when the reins of power are vested with the ruling class. Yet the play does not lapse into mere social photography with the episodes that range from the pre-war period to the post war period and give the consistency of a conventional plot.

9. 'The Four Seasons'

The Four Seasons (1964) is not only a musicalisation of moods, but is a dramatic poem about love which extends for a year and takes in all four seasons. So far as the form is concerned the play has been divided into two parts ... each part contains two seasons; Part One presents Winter and Spring and Part Two, Summer and Autumn. This is the only one of Wesker's play where the minimum number of characters are introduced. There are only two

characters — Adam and Beatrice who are between thirty and thirty five years old. This play differs from any other play of wesker. This is his only play where society is, as far as practicable, set aside and an intensive relationship between a man and a woman is given more importance. In this regard let us consider what a critic observes :

> It is the only play by Wesker which can be described — in so far as any play can be described — as totally unpolitical. It is a play about love in which there are no other characters than the two lovers.[65]

This lovely play delineates the free love between Adam and Beatrice. Adam, who never symbolises Adam the first man as described in the Bible, is probably a city clerk or an estate agent[66] who has worked in a kitchen[67] and whose mother was probably of Hungarian origin. Beatrice, who is no Eve nor an eternal woman, was actually a university student[68] and a daughter of a botanist[69]. Both Adam and

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65. M. Hayman : Arnold Wesker, p. 72

66. "Adam : ... The clothes I have belong to a city clerk or an estate agent, now I feel they should belong to a prince". — Part One, Spring, Penguin Paperback, 1964

67. "Adam : ... Did I ever tell you about my student days? About the time I nearly set fire to the kitchen I worked in ?" — Part Two, Summer.

68. "Beatrice : ... And when my university days were over I took to the hills and bandaged dying firs and damaged pines". — Part Two, Summer.

69. "Beatrice : ... My father studied plants, and I learned from him the dream of watching things grow". — Part Two, Summer.

Beatrice have their respective wife and husband; Adam has children even. They come to a deserted house to spend the four seasons of a year. They seem to have no previous engagement nor a post-dated romantic affair. Strangely enough the house belongs neither to Adam nor to Beatrice, nor to any of their friends or relations. The house they come in is strangely equipped with civic amenities although it is deserted. We have the feeling that the master of the house, if there is any, will not come to disturb this couple for at least a year and there will be no perceptible communication between them and the society around although there will be an ample provision of food, water and other domestic needs for all the year round.

The play begins in winter and ends in autumn. Adam and Beatrice come to the house, furnished with a mixture of antiques which, if they have any beauty at all, have only the beauty that accompanies neglected and sad things. There is too the plain and cheap furniture to greet them. The house may be deserted, but there is nothing which suggests antiquity nor is there anything uncanny about it. On the other hand, the house has a kitchen where the ingredients of modern dishes or even for the Hungarian apple strudel are available. The derelict house they enter is not given a name or location. Literally there is no third person to interfere with Adam and Beatrice. They enter the deserted house to make love, to understand each other but not to convey a sense of unknown modes of being. They are neither fairies nor naiads to

bring about anything unnatural. They are, in fact, pure human beings. Their feet are resting on reality proper although this play is set romantically, through the remoteness that time and space can create and that this play does not relate to the heart of contemporary England nor any country.

Both of them enter the abandoned house simultaneously, but it is Adam who speaks, chants, recites or sings for the whole winter. Sometimes his language throbs with passion that resembles the passionate elaboration of some Vaishnab poets of Eastern India. Yet Beatrice breathes in or cries or smiles, but never utters a single word in response to Adam's gestures of love throughout winter. With the coming of spring she brings a large bunch of bluebells to decorate Adam from head to foot, not to offer love as though it were a favour but to lay bare her heart to Adam. Gradually they become too engrossed to enjoy drinks together. (This is the second of Hooker's plays where drinks are offered and enjoyed, the first being Their Very Own And Golden City where drinks were offered in a cocktail party given by Alfred Harrington, an industrialist). While Beatrice talks about how she has destroyed a marriage and failed a lover, it is Adam who desires to paint the house from top to bottom if they intend to live for the whole year. Finally they make love. This is a fine example of how sexual relations may artistically be presented by an artist without creating any sensational reaction. Here sexuality is reduced to egoticism which finally becomes love.

If Spring was golden and lively, Summer goes grey and weary with Adam. He finds more pleasure in kneading the dough for an apple strudel than in the company of his mistress. During Autumn the green hopes turn to dead cinders of nothing. They become aware that lovely moments of youth will not return. At long last both realise that the year has ended. The play comes to an end when they try in vain to light the leaves in order to bring them to flame.

The play ends rather abruptly though it is not on a reduced scale; it might have been adequately and effectively developed even within the prescribed limits of two parts. But it has the flavour of a short love story and deals with but one phase of the experiences of a man and a woman, and we might consider that something would have been gained by further elaboration. It, of course, transfers lyric material to dramatic form but the phase of experience might have worked out to its logical conclusion although Hasker spares no effort to maintain the absolute singleness of aim and directness of method. However, the purpose of the dramatist is aptly served — the purpose of delineating 'how love came, and worked its transfiguration and then went away' or how Adam breaks away from Beatrice without any strenuous conflict. Still it is far from being "an elegy of love" as a noted critic observed[70]. If it is an elegy at all, it is an elegy of human

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70. J. Hanley : New Trends in Twentieth Century Drama, op. cit. pp. 277-278

relationships but not of love in a greater sense.

In form the play has unity of place but is lacking in dramatic action or conflict; and it has no classical unity of time. In style it is sometimes bleak and bare, in places harsh and forbidding, specially when Adam slaps Beatrice's face although in several places Adam's soul is wrung with pity. However, there are some passages that apparently float about somewhere above life in a cloud of words, such as —

Beatrice : Now? I have golden eagle for a lover.

Adam : But the sun has burnt his wings.

Beatrice : Nothing shall burn your wings — I am your sun.

Adam : Where shall I fly?

Beatrice : Anywhere — as long as you carry me with you.

Adam : But you are my sun.

Beatrice : When you need me to be your sun, I'm your sun. When you need soft winds I shall cover that land with my breath. When you comfort then I offer my breasts and my limbs and my lips. Whatever you call for you shall have.

Adam : And You ? What shall I give you?

Beatrice : Every second. Every touch, every thought, every feeling. Every second you shall give me. 71

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71. Four Seasons, Part Two, Summer.

Yet here lies the crux of human relationships in a commercialised society that poisons the relations between a man and a woman. Is there not a suggestion of contract in which true affection is quite secondary? Does not each of them submit to some loss of his or her own liberty, for the pleasure of curtailing the liberty of the other?

If suspense be the soul of a play it is a superb dramatic work. All through winter Beatrice successfully maintains silence, and the suspense is heightened when she breathes a deeper breath or develops an enigmatic smile. She keeps quiet throughout intermittent but poetic garrulity of Adam. There is a poetic but mocking suspense when Adam says during summer :

> With you at my side, tenderness all about you.
> You're like a woman who's just given birth. 72

But through an acquaintance with Beatrice for four seasons weary Adam does not produce anything but an apple strudel. This play tends, in fact, more to be a ballet than a play proper. Or it may, in the words of Lascelles Abercrombie[73], precisely be called a species of poetic drama which broadens the basis of intoxication or in which the characters who have in them all the splendour and vigour of life can speak poetry naturally and inevitably.

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72. Ibid.

73. Phyllis M. Jones (ed.) : English Critical Essays, 1st Series, O.U.P. pp. 270-271

Wesker has set the play for a year instead of a day or a couple of hours, and he makes a fine orchestration of four seasons — each season representing a different symphony: winter denotes symphony of acquaintance, spring a symphony of colour, summer that of sound and autumn that of alienation. Yet Mr Ronald Hayman complains :

> there is no plot and only the simplest pattern of development : the relationship, like the year which the lovers spend together, passes through four seasonal stages. Emotional liberation is followed by the building of a love which ripens in the summer and goes to seed in the winter. But there will be no repetition of the cycle for these lovers. At least not with each other. 74

But if the plot be the selection and arrangement by the dramatist of the incidents and information contained in the story of love that is coming and dying, there is a comprehensive plot; and if art, according to a commentator, be an experience[75] — say an experience of love and the frustrations of youth — this play can be called a work of art.

Many twentieth century plays are either didactic or entertaining. But the play allows the spectator to know and enjoy at the same time. The method of making an apple strudel on the stage is not only a very dramatic one, but it entertains the spectators also. Apple strudel as stage entertainment is bold and

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74. R. Hayman : Arnold Wesker, Op. cit. p. 72

75. Gaston Roberge : Mass Communication and Man. p. 22

notable. Wesker deliberately as well as elaborately allows Adam to prepare it in order to translate the action into visual objects. In a stage of inaction Adam is in keeping with the rhythm of action which provides a lesson from a world of make-believe and illusion. Thus Adam finally brings people to art while Harry (in [illegible]) tried to bring art to the people.

## 10. 'The Friends'

The Friends (1967) is considered by some as too sentimental and vague or "the most despairing play" by a young director named Roy Slater[76]. But there is nothing vague about this play. It is about England in 1967 and the years before and after. The people it reveals live not in Walt Disney-like dreamland but in London. All the characters, with the exception of Simone and Manny, are of working-class origin; they are the owners of a small chain of shops. The story of this play is concerned not with love in the abstract, but with the passions of living people, with business ownership, with social relationships with the importance of widening the cultural horizon of the masses, and with the relations of the people of the affluent society with those of the third world. It is not a play of despair either; the working-class characters, who in general find customers in 'the trendy middle class'[77] may have been paralysed by a sense of their own

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76. A. Wesker : The Journalists in January, Cape, 1971, p. 144

77. ADAM, nos. 401-403, 1977-78, pp. 71-72

hopelessness owing to the indifference shown by their own class, but it is far from being a play either of despair or of disillusionment. When Rousseau in his "Social Contract" said — 'Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains' — he meant that man sometimes felt despair and disillusionment, but at the same time he knew for certain that man was also free to change the chains into bonds of human love. Despair and disillusionment may be the characteristic features of a class society, but these are not definitely the be-all and end-all of this society.

Wesker uses the play to present his own interpretation of life — of the wastefulness of dying and the pleasure of living. He retains his social involvement too. He is concerned with the problems of human existence, man's relationships with their fellows and the inmates of the third world. He has combined the hopelessness of a group of working-class friends who are supposed to be the directors of a well-run show, which is meant for their mutual dependence. Wesker, who scorns lethargy and indifference, places his trust in art which, in the words of Jean-Louis Barrault[78], instead of being a trade, may render scope for the corporate life. The play, however, hoists a flag of life vehemently against death. The appeal is both to the heart and to the head. The clarion call of the play is :- it is time to live and love, love and live, for life is love and love is life.

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78. John Hodgson (ed. ) : The Uses of Drama, p. 19

So far as the technical skill is concerned this play is less impressive than The Kitchen and Their Very Own And Golden City though it does not lack verve and passionate intensity. Again it is the impassioned presentation of his theme which accounts for his poorest as well as his finest qualities. At one time he is content to allow his ideas to emanate naturally from his characters, at another his use of dialogue touches the heights of poetical utterance. He often achieves a perfect naturalness of dialogue, which is seen particularly in his masterly handling of the rich north-country dialect used by Crispin.

The Friends does not deviate from the two-act formula which has been followed successfully right down from Chips With Everything (excepting The Nottingham Captain and Menace). There are three scenes and four scenes in Act One and Act Two respectively. Here there is no plethora of scene-divisions as we have seen in Chips With Everything and Their Very Own And Golden City. The scene one of Act One is the biggest scene whereas the scene one of Act Two is the smallest one. It is unusual that all the seven characters are introduced in the first scene of Act One. The music — "We've buried the winter married the spring, and now we have a time to pause and think again and sing, we've planted seeds granted birds their songs, now we have a time to rest and right again these wrongs" — played by Tessa on her guitar serves as a keynote as well as a dramatic relief just after the delineation of the revolutionary history of science from 1600 A.D. to 1930 A.D. by

Manfred. Yet one thing is significant. Seeker, this time, feels the importance of the bourgeoisie at least for the well-being of the working class. He realises that the working people, in order to achieve full humanity or to be true to themselves as human beings, must associate themselves with the other class while class society exists. Therefore, winter, which evidently denotes despair and disillusion is to be buried to make the marriage with spring complete. In the following dialogue, especially through the voice of Crispin, we understand what Seeker wants to suggest :

Manfred : Sad like disappointed lovers, all that love, gangrenous inside us.

Crispin : We must just be calm.

Manfred : I try to ignore it, start afresh, find the world extraordinary —

Crispin : It's true — we must love one another, or die.

Manfred : — but I've no energy, no appetites for new loves.

Crispin : Believe me.

Manfred : Some men could, some men could stay perplexed and wondering all their life and still survive. All their life —

Crispin : It will —

Manfred : Amazed !

Crispin : — everything will be all right.

Manfred : Each moment — surprised !

Crispin : I promise you.

Manfred : And finally — joyous ! Joyous to be witness to it all. Lovely men they were ... not sour and thorny like us, but eager, capable — splendid outrages. (Pause) Terrible !

Crispin : Peace —

Manfred : Waste !

Crispin : — and silence.

Manfred : That's what I really wanted to say.

Crispin : Blessed peace and silence[79].

But the Second Act reminds us of the tomb setting of Virilius in Christopher Fry's A Phoenix Too Frequent, a verse-play.

There are, in all, seven characters, four males and three barren and sterile females. If there is any hero it is Roland, the lover of Esther; if there is any heroine it is undoubtedly Esther who is supposed to be a jew. All the six characters excepting Nancy the Jew who is aged about fifty five are between the ages of thirty five and thirty eight. All the six characters are the directors of a shop that makes so much profit that they can provide arms for South Africa, medical supplies for North Vietnam, funds for guerrillas in Latin America and books for Cuba out of one-third of their profits. Nancy is the manager of this shop. All the characters play their roles till the end of the Second Act except Esther who dies at the end of Act One. The presence of the covered

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79. The Friends

dead body of Esther throughout the second Act creates an impression of resurrection at the end of the last act and helps to revitalize the characters, uniting them to a particular idea. This united effort to make Esther sit bears a significant relation, though faint and distant, with the portrait of Lenin opposite which Esther's corpse is set. The image here is, however, reminiscent of Michaelangelo's Pieta, that is, dead Christ in the lap of Mother Mary in Rome[80]. This scene is appalling, yet, at the same time, inspiring. The way Esther's spirit pervades through Act Two is much analogous to the spirit of Julius Caesar minus the evil motive after his death in Shakespeare's "*Julius Caesar*". However, the characters of this play resemble negative photographs waiting for washing and development.

The time of the play is autumn and the action takes place in Esther's bedroom. The duration of the action is from an evening before dinner till morning next day. Most of the action occurs at night, yet this is barely noticed until there is the invocation of dawn at the end of the play in the way that primitive man would deny death by bringing the dead one back in the form of spirits symbolizing the graphic representation of resurrection.

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80. Cf. the photography in T. H. Henn's "*The Harvest of Tragedy*".

11. 'The Old Ones'

The Old Ones (1970) is the first play by Wesker about the Jewish festival of 'Succoth'[81] being celebrated by some members of a Jewish family with some non-Jewish people. After Chicken Soup With Barley and I'm Talking About Jerusalem this is the most important play with Jewish characters probably of Ashkenazim and Sephardic origins[82]. But the play has nothing to do with Zionism — that is, Jewish nationalism which is as racialist as Nazism — although Wesker himself was once a member of the Zionist Youth Movement. However, a vast chasm yawns between the members of the Kahn families (of his previous plays) and the old ones of this new play. The Kahns were committed socialists, whereas most of these Jewish people are 'religious socialists' ; the Kahns manifest the glory as well as the limitations of the working class people, whereas the characters of this play aim at the rituals of belief and to build the succah to declare the glory of man. (This succah or the Jewish ritual tabernacle obviously reminds us of the Hindu 'Vanamahotsava' or afforestation ceremony and also of Hegel's planting a Liberty Tree along with Schelling in defending the cause of the French Revolution)[83]. While Wesker's previously

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81. cf. Isaac Fabricant : A Guide to Succoth, London, Vallentine, Mitchell, 1957

82. cf. Interview of A. Wesker with Prof. Bigsby, cassette No. RI 2004, British Council Literature Study Aids (LSA)

83. Will Durant : The Story of Philosophy, p. 273

mentioned plays are of youth, vigour and energy, this play is essentially about old age. In his early play death is reported, but here there is no death that inspires the theme of the play. Moreover, action is given preference to feeling or thought in many of his previous plays, but here the whole thing is reversed, the feeling or thought comes first and the action last. In Wesker's early plays there were rebels or even revolutionaries, but here there are either reformists or reactionary characters; rebels are introduced here, but they are never given due prominence; while the invisible social structure becomes the hero of his early plays, this play more or less circles round a particular community irrespective of creed or class. Wesker was once intent upon forging social plays, but now he is on the threshold of a new kind of theatre adapted to suit the demands of an age different in outlook and in circumstances from that earlier one. In each of his early plays the dominant socio-economic problem has been taken for the theme, but here, in The Old Ones, he displays an interest in measuring life quantitatively rather than qualitatively. The family mentioned in this play is no doubt left-wing and still politically conscious although the members are seen principally resorting to a religious ritual which is an ordered ceremonial that may be seen as the outcome of the human desire.

According to Jacob Isaacs this play

> is an extension of the family situation we have encountered in his earlier plays : the same close-knit

> Jewish family of second and third generation immigrants from Eastern Europe, with their quarrels and questioning, their ambitions and dreams and shattered hopes. Becker remained true to his origin, his background, to himself. At 40, he seems to be obsessed with Old Age and 'The Old Ones' is essentially about ageing, about lives unfulfilled.84

One is apt to believe that people as they grow older generally identify more and more with their background or with their early background, but that does not mean that they are essentially riveted on the past without caring for the future. Truly speaking old age, that was either shuddering in Waiting Room (in the case of Harry in Act Three, scene one) or terrifying in Jacob (as in the case of Stan Mann in Act One and Act Two), shows the other facet of itself in this later play, but it is far away from decadence or foolish faddism. If theatre is the most social of the arts and most directly responds to social change The Old Ones still retains the relation with its predecessors. Jack's joke "Jack's a-dying, the young folk is living. Jack's a-going, the young folk is coming"[85] is not only analogous to the playfulness of Daniel who plays "Look I'm Alive !" game with his mother[86], but also bears witness to the above statement that theatre is the most social of the arts.

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84. The Jewish Quarterly, vol. 20, No. 3(75) Autumn, 1972, p. 37

85. The Old Ones, II, xi

86. I'm Talking About Jerusalem, II, ii

After the Trilogy Arnold Wesker has been successfully maintaining the Two-Act form. There is no exception to that dramatic architecture in The Old Ones. So far as the architectonic distribution is concerned this play faithfully obeys the tradition of Chips with Everything. While in Chips there are as many as twenty three scenes telescoped into two acts, in this play there are not less than twenty four scenes which have been made into two acts. Act Two scene nine is not only the last and the biggest but also the most important scene of the play; the dancing and the shouting and the singing within a background of the presence of all the characters (except Martin and the three street urchins) remind us of the rustic revelry of the last scene of the Fifth Act in Shakespeare's "As You Like It". Yet there is a difference — while the Duke along with other companions came to know at last that the darkness was completely over and the bright sun was ahead, here the old came along with the youths, however jovial they may be amidst darkness, have yet to hope for the birth of a bright epoch. Scene four, scene six and scene ten of Act One are the smallest scenes of the play. Scene two, scene five, and scene eight of the First Act denote the relationship between the old and the young; while the old in the age of computers, prefer to quarrel with invisible god not with visible man, the young are ready to quarrel with man "about trivialities — poverty, injustice and social orders". But the actual problem in this play lies in the conflict between wisdom, which is the other name of tested

failure, and a youthful 'tour de force' that is ready to question, examine and test; here is the tense conflict between the self-pitying failure that has got to go with the old and the unspent energy that has got to move with the young.

The Old Ones seems to be a story of a Jewish family of working people who reside in a city. Emanuel or Manny, aged about seventy, is the male head of the family. Gerda, aged about sixty eight, is his wife; they have no issue, but Manny's brother Bonny, who is about sixty eight, has a son named Martin who is in his twenties. Emanuel's sister Sarah who is seventy one, lives with the family along with her daughter Rosa who is about thirty two. Rudi is Sarah's nephew, son of a dead sister; he is about forty two. Almost all assemble in Sarah's council flat to celebrate 'Succoth' in the presence of other guests and they are to celebrate it almost without an iota of faith. They are about to erect the 'Succah' which is believed to be a symbol of the tent used as a sanctuary before the final settlement of the Jews in Palestine. They erect it for the sake of a ritual, butnot out of an orthodox faith in Judaism. Here the ritual does not refer to any religious or numinous view of human living, but goes back to a memory that can be revived.

There are as many as seven different settings in the play inclusive of one outdoor setting in the street. But Sarah's council flat is the very important setting. If action can often be carried on by words alone this play then vibrates with action.

Almost all the characters are talkative, especially the two brothers Emanuel and Benny who are as if engaged in a kind of game — a game of throwing quotations from Carlyle, Buber, Voltaire and even more frequently from Ecclesiastes. Wesker has not used quotations for the first time in this play. He has frequently used them before. First in Roots through Beatie Bryant, then in The Kitchen Caption, and on a single occasion through Adam in winter in The Four Seasons. However, Bill Matheson in Act Two scene six, sub-scene six in Their Very Own And Golden City quotes from a small notebook. And now in The Old Ones this practice goes on at random. Their game of throwing quotations has reached such an extent that their voices are heard even in Teresea's flat or in Millie's flat. The peculiarity is that when their voices are heard, the lights go dim and there is banging on a wall. (Is it a device to create an uncanny atmosphere or purely a sarcastic reflection on those who thoughtlessly and unnecessarily resort to quotations with a complete indifference to science and reality?) However, the dim light and the banging on the wall do not necessarily unleash some unearthly or supernatural suggestiveness but do intensify and illuminate the human action. Maybe Anna's manner, when she lectures to her apprentice students is similar to these interfering voices to Teresea or Millie. The excessive quotations do not necessarily mean that Wesker is stepping back and giving his place to the stilted words of men of genius of bygone days. He, on the other hand, promotes action without denying the potentiality of speech.

It may be identified as a sort of vocal communication in a non-communicating world. Talking is not final, there is dancing too (in the last scene all resort to a dance). In this way there is the suggestion of the victory of life as well as the love of life for the young who do not deny the contributions of the old. This is evident through Jack —

> Jack ' Jack's a-dying, the young folk is living,
> Jack's a-going, the young folk is coming'[37].

Here too is the beginning line that of Roots. In Roots youth began in defiance of the old, where youth apparently begins with the experience of the old and the wisdom of antiquity.

## 12. 'The Wedding Feast'

The Wedding Feast is an important play both from the thematic and aesthetic points of view. The play is short, probably of three-hour duration, and we know that it has no exciting story to tell compared with The Kitchen. Instead it focuses our attention on present day inner-thought. It is mainly a drama for a stage with cinematographic devices which are supposed to be effective on the stage and have direct bearing on the content of the play. The shop-scene in the Third Act is one of Wesker's finest theatrical effects

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37. The Old Ones, II, ix

and it is in no sense inferior to his other theatrical effects such as when Peter goes berserk (cf. The Kitchen), or the bayonet drill and stealing scene (cf. Chips with Everything) etc. The play has indeed some of the so-called compromises, such as song, dance, fun, frolic, rollicking scenes and it has too the elements of farce and low comedy, and above all, caricature. One may detect too an amount of intrigue cleverly worked out in this play. But apart from all these, this play has a sustained and fine humour and irony that livens it up. However, the message of the love of man irrespective of station and class has been created with a complete mastery and exquisite humour and irony and this enhances the play. This play, if it is considered from the aesthetic point of view, creates clarity of purpose and then emphasises it comprehensively. The theme is, however, not the wedding feast or the depiction of a munificent humanitarian, but a study of a man at ease in his own class but unsure of himself out of his class — or the study of a man who impresses on the audience the importance of personal benevolence, which according to the author, is not only a palliative but a charity with a stigma.

The title of the play suggests that it is a comedy, pure and refined. But if we go deeper into the play, this idea withers away, for the play is not necessarily concerned with comical situations, or the follies of particular men or of particular groups of men. But all that we notice here is that Wesker reproduces the manners of his age. This play is entirely different from the others. While in Wesker's previous plays both emotion and intellect

are given due importance, here what is essentially important is intellect; this play primarily appeals to our reason. The important point is that an 'intellectual distancing' is effectively maintained between the characters involved and the spectators. It is the intellectual distancing that paves the way for satire which is the principal tone of the play. The picture it presents is only of a certain aspect of contemporary life, and that aspect is focused in a peculiar way of its own. The characters of this play cling firmly to the circle of Norwich society which is clearly divided between classes — the class of the Employer and that of the Employees. The play deals with the conventions of an artificial society where the genuine harmless grace or the habit of culture of the Employees is humorously and satirically contrasted with the artificial harmful grace or the habit of affected culture of the Employer. The play is realistic, and it believably and convincingly reflects real life although it is reflected in an artful as well as artificial way. The play is an artificialised comedy of manners which depends upon irony and satire although the manifestations of the comic, the laughable, or the vulgar and indecent situations or certain abnormalities or eccentricities are not far to seek. True, there are some characters like Stephen Bullock, Hammond, Bonky, Knocker, Tinker, Ringe who, at a first glance, may remind us of the conventional characters of a comedy, yet this play may not be categorised as a comedy, which has, in general, a tendency to make every one of the characters an eccentric of some kind or the other. It deals fairly with the follies of particular men or of particular

groups of men but not with the manners of their class. This play, on the other hand, deals with the social follies of two classes —— the follies of the working class people and those of the tycoons of industry. The play is not concerned with what the individuals do, but with what they are or who they are in relation to society. The play begins with the prestigious pride of Mr Louis Litvanov and ends in his undoing; among the employees or shareholders he is the very important person whose power and prestige is beyond question, but among the assembly of guests at the wedding feast he is definitely a figure of disgrace.

The plot of this play gives us the reminiscences of an interconnected system of events selected and arranged in a deliberate way with a view to fulfilling a complex set of dramatic purposes and theatrical conditions. The plot is simple with a simple line of action that does not allow any other sub-plot or episode to interfere or to mar the totality of events. Mr Louis Litvanov was only once allowed to speak on telephone to his wife in London; but this subsidiary event does not, in general, make a dent in the skeleton of the plot, nor does it circumscribe the continuity of the action. The play is not essentially an action play in the sense The Kitchen is although it is indeed a perfect sequel to that play. It is interesting too from the point of view of dramatic technique. We know that drama is a thing written for the theatre, and the theatre is a place where men come to see as well as to hear. What Wesker does here is not to deliver lectures

in the styles of Ronnie Kahn or Beatie Bryant or to afford scope for meditation only but to employ devices which are expected to make an appeal to the eye and the mind as well. The moment when Mr Litvanov, the factory owner, is playfully beaten in a shoegame with the shoes manufactured presumably by his own shoe factory, does not only remind us of the murder of Julius Caesar in the Capitol at broad daylight but shows Wesker in the prime of his dramatic art. From the very beginning of the play Wesker carries us leisurely and sometimes unemotionally forward through a series of events — comic events too are there — but through these devices he is preparing the ground for the final shock of surprise. Mr Litvanov's illusion is so surprisingly shattered during the shoe game, and the effect of the dramatic tension is such that we feel[88] that violent things are really going to happen in this play. The spectators may wonder what is going to happen, they may relish the theatrical quality of the scene and, above all, their emotions may, for the time being, be deeply engaged. But there is only the revelation of something comic. This Wesker does, not by depicting his characters as characters proper, but as theatrical stereotypes. Consequently his characters obviously become symbols of reality, not reality itself. Yet there is an action unfolding, and this action is the rapid and inner transformation of Mr Litvanov himself. Still everything in this play remains at a distance because between the scene and the audience there stands, with an insistent solidity,

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88. Bonny's words too are helpful in this regard : "It all comes from the earth. And when you die — you go back there". — Not Three, scene thirteen.

Wesker himself.

It is however true that the subject of play is a society, the world of well-to-do England in the second half of the present century. And Wesker is concerned with the relations of man and society as they reveal themselves in the actions, and this subject is seen in terms of specific human relationships. As we look back on this play we recall a whole world — a bustling, lively, gay, and crowded world, and we see it in terms of individual people and their relationships. And these people are presented to us, by and large, in the tradition of a comedy. Each and every character has particular characteristic of his or her own, sometimes exaggerated and sometimes simplified, and this is the way they become easily comprehensible. Almost all the characters are static, and whatever they do, they do not change, even Mr Litvanov and Katherine White, for instance, remain the same persons and do not develop a great deal in the course of the play.

The central relationship with which Wesker is concerned here is marriage and this play is about the difficulties of class relationships. Wesker, in the William Morris style, does his best to portray his picture of the working class world in terms of the ruled. Louis Litvanov, who himself comes of a working-class origin, has been elevated to the ranks of the bourgeoisie, and he is far away from Katherine White, who is working class and who works in his office. He loves her dearly: in fact, he could have married her had he been less conscious of his station and status. Then

Knocker White's wedding feast which he attended uninvited would have given him the opportunity he sought to be present among White's-in-laws. But it was his false sense of status that led him astray. His presence in White's house is not only a 'puncture' (we may be excused, for this very word was used by Litvanov himself) to the sanctity of the occasion but is really humiliating to those who were invited. Litvanov too felt embarrassed from the very beginning of his visit to Knocker White's house. An employer is an employer whether he is a magnificent humanitarian or not. He has a separate entity as long as he does not come down to the common platform with his employees. Practically speaking that platform is possible only when there is neither an employer nor employees. Mr Litvanov from the pedestal of an employer tries vainly to reach the platform of normal human relations without shedding the pride and vanity of his class. The point of anti-climax, however, lies in his faulty attempt to de-class himself at least for the time being. He is crestfallen. He, as an individual, tries to come out of the sphere of his class, and attempts to adjust himself to the other class, but the two points never meet, and can never meet so long as the class society exists. Seeker only introduces the interplay between the individual process and the societal process here and thus he tries to communicate with the man of his time and place. If "art is the pattern evolved in a complex interplay

of personal and societal processes of adjustment[89], Wesker appears to be a great artist here.

With this play Arnold Wesker appears completely free from formal preoccupations, and this play completely differs from any of his previous plays. As for the relation between rhythm and the content this play maintains an affinity with its predecessors. But the form or above all, the tone and temper of it characteristically differ from that of the other plays. Moreover, the sympathy, that always sided with the one set of persons remains divided here in this play. Instead of sympathy here is the effect of irony and satire. Yet, the style of the play is perfectly appropriate to its subject-matter and the play itself is beautiful. What is remarkable here is the beauty of maturity — the maturity of Wesker's art. The beauty of this play is that of truth, sincerity and accuracy.

Wesker's attitude is not allowed here to evolve but is rather imposed upon the play with distance and detachment. He no longer has a passionate concern for individuals, but he tries to transform them almost into puppet figures. He does not allow us to conceive of his characters clearly nor does he project them fully. Yet we see Wesker with compassion on the one hand and forgiveness on the other. But what is interesting is that he never looks sentimental here although some of his characters may project a

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89. Herbert Read in his article "Art and Society" in 'The Arts and Man' published by UNESCO, 1969, p. 28

stirring emotional power. All he does is to create the theatrical machinery ready for making the dramatic situations effective. This he does by finally storming the bastilles of a bourgeois sense of false prestige by indictment upon the stage.

In this play he takes the minimum of incidents and facts instead of resorting to an accumulation of facts, details and observations, yet he proves that he knows how to make an abstraction of the type of characters who through their habits, tendencies, gestures, views, speech mannerisms etc. represent the class features in a characteristic way. Again the play has been saved from being a melodrama, although Wesker sees and admires the violence. What is worth noting is the organic fusion between the artistic reality and the probable reality.

13. 'The Merchant'**

The Merchant is the only one of Wesker's plays for the story of which he remains highly indebted to Shakespeare's 'The Merchant of Venice'. Wesker is never a great borrower and rarely does he borrow a plot. Yet for this play he took his materials obviously from Shakespeare. Still Wesker's greatness as a playwright is in no way jeopardised by this undisguised indebtedness.

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** All the quotations used here are taken from ARAM, international review, Nos. 401-403, 1977-1978

for it is in the interweaving of diverse plots, the treatment of the story, the intensification of dramatic interest at particular points, the characterisation, the humour and irony and, above all, in the deep probe into human nature and its humane exposition that his dramatic genius is revealed.

This play, therefore, has much similarity with Shakespeare's play. It, too, has the Bond story, the Caskets story and the Lorenzo-Jessica story. It is, however, interesting to note that Wesker has successfully and quite subtly interwoven the different threads of story into one harmonious design. With the exception of some minor characters all the major characters of Shakespeare's plays are to be had here in Wesker's, although Wesker's characters are not always identical with those of his predecessor. It may safely be thought that the originality of The Merchant does not lie in the material borrowed but in the treatment of the material exploited.

The Merchant, too, is a blending of two stories and two episodes — the Bond Story and the Caskets Story, the Lorenzo-Jessica episode and the Portuguese episode. Wesker avoids the Ring episode of Shakespeare's play, which, according to him, is rather insignificant for the fabric of the plot. Wesker in a very skilful way has interwoven all the four stories and episodes into one harmonious whole.

What is worth noting is that Wesker has written The Merchant confessedly in imitation of Shakespeare's style. Yet Wesker's play is not simply an adaptation or a carbon copy; rather it sets out to

fashion the theme of "The Merchant of Venice" into a shape harmonious with the humanity of the modern age. It no longer upholds the conflict between the national bourgeois capital and the foreign capital and it rejects the Elizabethan addiction to blind love. It, on the other hand, presents a clearly wrought and economically patterned version of the logical events that rest upon wisdom, humanism and the complex emotions of lovers. Still the great strength of Wesker's play lies not in the skilfully managed story of The Merchant of Venice but in its deviations.

Let us now contrast Wesker's The Merchant and Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice. The main point of contrast is that Shakespeare's play begins in a state of opposition not only between Antonio and Shylock but between two communities, whereas Wesker's play begins in a condition of harmony not only between Shylock and Antonio but between two worlds — the world of the old and that of the young where the old are to make room for the young[90]. While

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90. Bassanio : I must out my suits and sharpen my wits for Belmont. I chuse a woman there, they say she has intellect.
Lorenzo : And what is her inheritance? Ruins !
Bassanio : Which she will rebuild.
Lorenzo : If the elders will allow her.
Bassanio : Despite them she will.
Lorenzo : If their laws don't cripple her.
Bassanio : I know her. She will.
Lorenzo : If she has cunning and connections and the facility to learn.
Bassanio : She will, she will ! Rebuild ! with my help, of course. As youth does, ignoring the evil within, defying the past. We're young. Don't be so solemn Lorenzo. — The Merchant, I, v.

Shakespeare's play, in the end, restores harmony in place of the state of opposition, in Wesker's play harmony is dissolved and disintegrated, and eventually a state of isolation, which is the common characteristic of a class society, arises. While the theme of Shakespeare's play contains the race-hatred between the Christians and the Jews in the most crude form, the theme of Wesker's play contains the seeds of forgiveness and humanitarianism. In his play Shakespeare, who must have had an intimate knowledge of human nature, wanted to criticise[91] Christian society for its intolerance of the Jews, although he knew very well that anti-Jewish sentiment[92] was rife among the Christians of his time. But all along Shakespeare, as an artist, not only maintained an impartiality, but he remained secular. Whereas Wesker, who himself

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91. "Launcelot : We were Christians enow before; e'en as many as could well live, one by another. This making of Christians will raise the price of hogs; if we grow all to be pork-eaters, we shall not shortly have a rasher on the coals for money". — The Merchant of Venice, III, v.

92. a) "Antonio : I am as like to call thee so again, to spit on thee again, to spurn thee too". — Ibid. I, iii.

b) "Launcelot: Certainly the Jew is the very devil incarnation". Ibid. II, ii

c) "Launcelot: My master's a very Jew : give him a present ! give him a halter". — Ibid. II, ib.

d) "Gratiano : (to Shylock) O, be thou damn'd, inexorable dog !" — Ibid. IV, i

is a Jew, seems to be more Jewish[93] than secular although as an artist he never forgets to chastise[94] his own community.

The most striking contrast between these two plays is that Shakespeare's Antonio is an inveterate enemy of Shylock, and their enmity is more of a national type than of a personal one. Whereas Wesker's Antonio is a real friend of Shylock and he is almost prejudiced in his love towards Shylock. Their intimacy reaches such a texture of friendship that he does not hesitate to stay at night with Shylock in the Ghetto, the quarter for the Jews, where the Christians are never permitted to stay at night. While Wesker's Shylock and Antonio have, by and large, locked themselves into an inseparable bond of love and friendship, Shakespeare's Shylock and Antonio were reluctantly thrown into an outer bond of hatred and malice. Moreover, Shakespeare has given equal importance to both the Bond Story and the Caskets Story which run almost parallel in his play, but Wesker has given more importance to the Bond Story — and it is the Bond of love that can, according to Wesker, solve all the human problems.

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93. "Shylock (to Lorenzo) : The Jew is the Christian's parent. Difficult, I know. Parent — children relationships, always difficult, and even worse when murder is involved within the family. But what can we do? It is the family" ! — The Merchant, I, vii.

94. "Lorenzo (to Shylock) : It must be very difficult for your tribe to produce much of art or thought, as civilised nations do who have roots in territory". — Ibid. I, vii.

There are some other points of contrasts between the two plays. In Shakespeare's play there are the arrangements of three pairs of marriages between Portia and Bassanio, between Nerissa and Gratiano, and lastly between Lorenzo and Jessica. But in Wesker's play there is the culmination of the marriage between Portia and Bassanio, a foiled marriage between Jessica and Lorenzo and no mention of the marriage of Nerissa. In this regard Wesker's play is more serious than that of Shakespeare. While Shakespeare introduced a happy ending into his delightful comedy, Wesker never feels the necessity of making his play either a comedy or a play with a happy ending. Therefore, the very texture of Wesker's play does not necessitate the ring episode which was an inseparable as well as an enjoyable part of Shakespeare's play.

In some other respects Wesker deviates from his predecessor. Both his and Shakespeare's Portia is an accomplished and vivacious lady, but while Shakespeare's Portia is a woman of high intellect uniting in herself almost all the noblest and most lovable qualities of a distinguished woman who is being courted by suitors from the four corners of the world, Wesker's Portia is a more usual type of Renaissance woman, determined to creep out of the sphere of the kitchen and to play the role most probably of a managing director, whose fortune depends on investments. Both the Portias have cultural as well as scholastic accomplishments, but while Shakespeare's Portia, (who in many respects is superior to Wesker's Portia) is a

conservative person[95], Wesker's Portia, who is free from all Medieval prejudices, comes out as a modern woman even in her view of marriage[96]. Shakespeare portrayed Portia from the point of view of a sixteenth century artist, whereas Wesker depicts Portia from the point of view of a twentieth century artist. That is why Shakespeare's Portia conducts the legal proceedings of the court of Venice in male attire, while Wesker's Portia attends the court and is accompanied by Nerissa and Jessica in the dress of their own sex.

The characters of Nerissa and Jessica are differently treated by the two playwrights. Shakespeare's Nerissa is a skilful follower of Portia in respect of love and wooing; she gets consent from her Lady to harass her suitor and finally to marry him as does Portia herself. But Wesker's Nerissa is supposed to be an ill-educated though not illiterate woman of common stock almost

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95. "Portia (to Bassanio) : She is not bred so dull but she can learn; Happiest of all is that her gentle spirit Commits itself to yours to be directed, As from her lord, her governor, her king. Myself and what is mine to you and yours Is now converted: but now I was the lord Of this fair mansion, master of my servants, Queen over myself; and even now, but now, This house, these servants and this same myself, Are yours, my lord :' — The Merchant of Venice, III, ii.

96. "Portia : My marriage is a parent's will ... I'll fill my house with poets and philosophers, and politicians who are poets and philosophers. Bassanio will come to know his place, accept it, or leave it. I am to be reckoned with, you know, not merely dutiful. Although something in me has died struggling to grow up". — The Merchant, II, vi

betrothed at the age of seven[97], but throughout the play she, unlike her counterpart in Shakespeare, is being depicted as a completely sexless woman; she is a confidant of Portia and even chaperons her mistress whenever necessary. She is sometimes witty, yet she lacks the flavour that Shakespeare's Nerissa possesses. In fact Wesker's Nerissa is a shadow of her mistress and gets no opportunity to blossom or develop. Shakespeare's Nerissa, who to a greater extent reflects her mistress's glory, is also more attractive, more intelligent, wittier and more resourceful.

There is dissimilarity too between Shakespeare's Jessica and Wesker's Jessica. While Shakespeare's Jessica is all emotion, Wesker's Jessica is much more elegant and reasonable. Both are pert, haughty and flippant, but Shakespeare's Jessica is an entirely faithless daughter who has not a drop of filial respect[98] nor respect for her faith[99]. She is crude, prejudiced and earthy.

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97. "Nerissa (to Portia) : He didn't commit you in marriage at the age of seven as my father did. He gave you tutors". — The Merchant, I, ii

98. "Jessica : Alack, what heinous sin is it in me to be ashamed to be my father's child! But though I am a daughter to his blood, I am not to his manners". — The Merchant of Venice, II, iii

99. "Launcelot : Yes, truly; for look you, the sins of the father are laid upon the children ... I think you are damned.
Jessica : I shall be saved by my husband; he hath made me a Christian". — The Merchant of Venice, III, v.

Wesker's Jessica lives by instinct to a great extent and is sometimes ill-mannered[100] especially when she sits for a self-portrait by Rodrigues. She knows too how to rationalise her instinctive responses[101] even when she goes to Belmont to marry Lorenzo[102]. It is again Wesker's Jessica who never loses faith in Judaism nor is she converted to Christianity as is Shakespeare's Jessica. But it is significant to note that Shakespeare's Jessica is purely a type character — she does not develop; there is no inner struggle and no compunction when she leaves her father[103].

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100. "Shylock : Forgive her. She's had good tutors to exercise her mind but no mother to shape her manners". — The Merchant, I, vi.

101. "Jessica : At what point is the child's right of movement and taste taken into consideration? Does she only become whole when taken from the possession of her husband? .. Look how my father smiles with pride at his daughter's intellect. He's given me teachers to nourish and exercise my mind, while he continues to exercise control". — Ibid. I, vi.

102. "Portia : I'll look after Jessica. My marriage is a parent's will, not hers, though. Mine can't be held back, here, I will see, never takes place". — Ibid. II, vi.

103. "Jessica (to Shylock) : Farewell; and if my fortune be not crost/I have a father, you a daughter lost". — The Merchant of Venice, II, v.

Whereas Wesker's Jessica clearly reflects the inner struggles inherent in the acceptance of Lorenzo's unsanctioned love. What is important to trace is that she in the early part of the play, submits completely to emotional impulses, but, at the end of the play, she shows some conscious control over these impulses. Yet whenever we make a comparative study of the "two Jessicas" we observe that Shakespeare's Jessica is real, and normal as well as artistic, whereas Wesker's Jessica is artificial, clumsy and a martyr to the judaic faith and a disillusioned lover; or a victim of love[104] being inartistically redeemed from a Christian stronghold.

In the portrayal of Lorenzo Wesker definitely shows some originality. Both Lorenzos are poets as well as philosophers and both are romantically in love with Jessica. But Shakespeare never allowed Lorenzo to stand face to face with Shylock which Wesker deliberately and repeatedly does. More than once he makes Lorenzo and Shylock confront each other, sometimes as two Venetians, sometimes like scholars and sometimes as an accuser and an accused. First, he wants to depict the hiatus between two generations. A young man in general cannot tolerate an old parent however accomplished the parent may be. Or may be Lorenzo is the Jessica of the male sphere. The part Jessica could not play as a daughter with Shylock is perhaps transferred to Lorenzo. In the sixteenth

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104. "Antonio : But which place will she ( Jessica) take? There's no father's house to return to.

Portia : But there is a Jerusalem, where he ( Shylock) can be followed". — The Merchant, II, vi

century background Jessica, as a woman, would have been handicapped in treating Shylock in an unconventional way. That is why Lorenzo is essential to uphold her cause — it is as if there is a confrontation between the apparently conservative father and the newly acclaimed daughter. Secondly Lorenzo may be the alter-ego of Shylock. Shylock is not only very proud of his collections of books but also he has intellectual pride[105]. He is all scholar minus common sense (This is proved true in the case of his foolish bond with Antonio). He is a scholar of vast learning and from that point of view he remains in an invulnerable position[106]. But this scholarly pride has almost muddled his mind and has left him the most impractical man of the play. He merely tolerates the guests from Portugal but is indifferent to his only daughter who owing to the slight restriction; little codes of her father runs away

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105. a) "Lorenzo : That's his sin : intellectual pride, His daughter can't bear it". — The Merchant, I,v.

b) "Jessica : My father is an intellectual snob". — Ibid. I, iv.

106. "Lorenzo (with evangelistic fervour) : 'They are not humbled even unto this day, neither have they feared, nor walked in my law, nor in my statutes, that I have set before you and before yours fathers'. thus sayeth Ezekiel.

Shylock : It was Jeremiah" . — Ibid. I, vii.

successfully from his house of which he is so proud[107]. Again it is the lack of practical knowledge that has tempted him to make a bond with Antonio for which he is not only ridiculed but is publicly censured in the open court of justice. Thirdly, weaker names Lorenzo and Jessica meet not as two persons proper, but as two representatives of two respective communities. Lorenzo is the upholder of any Christian cause. As a Christian, too, he plans to baptise Jessica[108]. Shylock, who has firm faith in his own creed, not only plans to erect synagogues but is loth to look at Jessica who has joined the camp of the Christians. He makes friends with a Christian, he is even able to tolerate Lorenzo, but not as a renegade, as he regards his run-away daughter, and he maintains his abhorrence of pork. He takes pride in his Jewishness. A Jew, according to him, is far superior to a Christian[109]. Lastly

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107. "Jessica : As you've told me a thousand times that this is your house and your roof". — Ibid. I, vi.

108. "Lorenzo : I will make you (= Jessica) a wife, a woman and a Christian. Come!" — Ibid. II, iv.

109. "Shylock : The Jew is a Christian's parent". — Ibid. I, vii.

the Lorenzo-Shylock meeting may remind us of Wesker himself for he is also a Jew. The Ghetto is the probable replica of the twentieth century East End of London where Wesker was born.

The point where Wesker's Lorenzo categorically differs from Shakespeare's Lorenzo is in his class-consciousness. While the latter is first and last a Christian who has a genuine prejudice against the Jews (though not for the unmarried girls like Jessica of that community of course), the former (who himself belongs to a silk-manufacturing family in Venice), is much more clear-sighted as well as critical about his society and the rulers of his time, and in this respect he is not only secular but is strictly modern, may a Marxist before Marx[110]. The second point of contrast (between Shakespeare's Lorenzo and Wesker's Lorenzo) is that the attitude of the latter, towards love is modern in comparison with the attitude to love of the former who seems to belong to a leisured class that has been provided with ample time to court his sweetheart in a garden flooded with moonlight; in this respect he appears to be a lover of the Elizabethan age, whereas Wesker's Lorenzo, who too is a romantic lover, believes

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110. "Lorenzo : Power doesn't reside in principle but in the hands of a few families.

Emeranie : ... Venice is a free city. Her doors are open, open!

Lorenzo : Her legs are open, open! Venice — brothel of Mediterranean. And all so that we can boast to everyone of our legal codes and a freedom which tolerates corruption". — The Merchant, I, v.

that love like other desired things in life cannot remain constant in a class society where a handful number of people occupy everything. He knows for certain that it is the class feeling that has come between him and Jessica. Such a young man as Lorenzo must first become an avaricious trader[111] than perhaps a lover. In such a society of trade, commerce and competition, a woman, who is a commodity, may not remain fixed to a point or a place for any length of time — for she too is inconstant like any other commodity. Therefore, love, according to Wesker's Lorenzo, is a fleeting object purely to be held permanently[112]. Here Lorenzo becomes purely a Jonsonian character and a direct descendant of Adam who says to Dametrios :

> Do you think that when the millennium comes there will not be lovers who grow weary of their sad girls, or that wives will not weep over empty beds. Even when Jerusalem is built friends will grow apart and mothers will mourn their sons growing old ... But the heart has its private aches. You must allow the heart its private aches. Not all the good great causes in this world can stop me crying for a passing love. 113

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111. "Lorenzo : ... The spirit of trader is in me as is every Venetian but there is such a frenzy of avarice and unbridled ambition that I feel the end of the world must be near ... " — Ibid.

112. "Lorenzo : Love? Who knows about love? She (= Jessica) admired the poem and those who admire us must have merit, we think. We snatch moments together, walk, talk, complain about our separate worlds. Sometimes we don't see one another for weeks, and on the first day there's a sort of longing, makes me think the ache is what they call love, but as each day passes she drifts away from my thoughts. I lose her. Can that be love? Unexpect perhaps". — Ibid.

113. The Four Seasons, Autumn

Both Wesker's and Shakespeare's Bassanios are similar in respect of love; both are thoughtlessly extravagant. But Wesker's Bassanio makes a more favourable impression at the outset although he is never a bosom-friend of Antonio as Shakespeare's Bassanio is. He claims, on the other hand, to be Antonio's Godson who for the first time meets Antonio to borrow three thousand ducats to dress himself to reach Portia. Wesker's Bassanio is, therefore, much younger in age than his own Antonio who is professedly much older and a friend of old Shylock. Wesker's Bassanio is much more practical, intelligent, quick-witted[114] and above all a man of the world[115]. In order to reach the goal he knows very well where to hit, what to hit and how to hit. He also knows that flattery may

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114. "Antonio : Just such a woman (=Portia) I'd like to have met in my youth.

Bassanio : You'll understand, then, the reason for my agitation". — The Merchant, I, iv

115. "Bassanio : I think you're mocking me. Have I come at a wrong time? Perhaps I shouldn't have come at all. To be honest I hate arriving behind letters of recommendation, it's so undignified and besides, what can the poor host do but be courteous, obliging. Forgive me, sir. You know nothing of me. I'll go. But I'll find ways of making myself known to you, and useful, and in the coming months I'll try to earn your trust. Goodbye, Sir". — Ibid. I, iv.

be raised to the level of art and at times it can perform a miracle; this is the way he wins over his Godfather :

> Bassanio : The early years were so full of my father's talk of you and your goodness and your good time together, but — he made no effort to make us known to one another. It was a cause of distress between us.
>
> Antonio : There were good times together, were there?
>
> Bassanio : He spoke of little else. What he shared with you, I shared. What happened between you, I saw happen. If I did wrong he'd say, your Godfather would not approve of that. And as I grew I did what I did, thought what I thought, saying to myself — what would the good Antonio do now, how would the wise Antonio decide ? 116

But what is the point of contrast between the two Bassanios? Shakespeare's is, at the beginning, a fortune-hunter, and at the end a tamed and domesticated husband who has perhaps no separate identity from his wife whereas Webster's is purely an adventurer who desires to invest three thousand ducats in order to amass an enormous fortune. May be he is in love with Portia, but his ultimate motive is profit :

> Bassanio : I mean to choose the right casket, marry that extraordinary woman and work to restore her property to profit. 117

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116. Ibid.

117. Ibid. I, iv.

While Shakespeare's Bassanio is essentially a member of the nobility or aristocracy, Wesker's Bassanio is almost a declassed patrician who is going to be a member of the profit-making class :

> Bassanio : Nonsense! Everywhere I turn I hear of young patricians being schooled for trade, diplomacy, the council's work. 118

There are some other minor points of differences between Shakespeare's play and Wesker's play. In Shakespeare's play we come across only three Jewish characters, they are — Shylock, Jessica and Tubal. Whereas in Wesker's play we come to learn of fourteen hundred Jews who reside in Venice. But of this enormous number only eight appear in the play and it is significant to note that there are only seven Christian characters in Wesker's play. It therefore, may be called more a Jewish play than a Christian one. But far from it. In Wesker's play the Jews may have outnumbered the Christians, but the courses of action depend on in the hands of the Christians. While two (Shylock and Jessica) but of eight Jews are more important, four Christians (Antonio, Bassanio, Lorenzo and Portia) out of seven Christians not only dominate the play but steer the course of action.

While Shakespeare has put stress on the conflict between Shylock and Antonio, Wesker attempts to harmonise the relation between these two. In Wesker's play, therefore, importance is given

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118. Ibid. I, v

to depicting the inner life of these two men. And in order to make an inner and comprehensive study of Shylock another new character Rivka is introduced into his play. In Shakespeare's play there is no such character. Rivka, Shylock's sister, serves a twofold purpose. First, she acts as a true shadow of her humanitarian brother. It is she who faithfully shields him when Jessica attacks him[119]. But again it is she who does not hesitate to attack Shylock when the harmony inside the house (owing to Jessica's running away) and outside it (owing to the mockery of the band) is disturbed. Secondly, she plays the role of the representative of her own community[120]. A Justice incarnate she torments Shylock about his fault[121]. However impressive Rivka is, Becker has failed to justify this character. Had Rivka been real and true to her sex, she could have spread a feminine atmosphere in Shylock's house quietly countering the masculine as well as authoritarian atmosphere; then

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119. "Rivka : She (= Jessica) exaggerates. My brother is not a tyrannical father ... He wanted to prove that daughters would achieve the intellectual stature of sons". — Ibid., I, iv.

120. "Rivka : It's not your problem now, it's the community. You can't see that?
Shylock : Tomorrow, tomorrow.
Rivka : And who will you choose? The one foreign friend you love or the families of your blood you barely know?" — Ibid. II, iii.

121. "Rivka : ... Having beat the law for us, how often will they bend it for themselves and then we'll live in even greater uncertainties than before. They'll be divided, as you are, my clever brother. She to save — your poor people or your poor friend? You can't see that?" — Ibid. II, iii.

and then only Jessica's flight would not have been precipitated. If she blames Shylock for her niece's elopement, can she not be blamed on the same ground? When Shakespeare wants to bring about a separation between a parent and a child, it is his art to rob the house of feminine charm — between Shylock and Jessica, between Lear and Cordelia, or even between Prospero and Miranda, this scheme is followed. Whereas Wesker, by introducing Rivka, has done something new from the point of view of technique. From the point of view of art it is, almost a complete failure.

There are some characters in Shakespeare's play who belong to the working class — these characters are Launcelot Gobbo, his old father etc. All the others especially the major characters belong either to the aristocracy or to rising capitalists or traders or their staunch supporters. But in Wesker's play all the major characters belong either to group A, that is, traders, merchants and manufacturers or group B, that is, loan-bankers. All the Christians belong to group A, whereas the Jews, namely Shylock and Tubal belong to group B. It is, however, strikingly interesting that Wesker's Christian characters, who have been raised to the level of merchants or traders, had previously belonged to the working-class. If we forget about their present status and go back to probe their lineage, we will be able to see that this profit-making class of people were actually fishermen, the then working people of Venice[122]. But it is ironical that some of these

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122. a) Bassanio : Her (= Portia's) father's family goes back to the time when Venetians were fishermen, and ... and like all of those ancient families, became wealthy". — Ibid., I, iv.

descendants are ashamed of their humble heritage. Graziano, Antonio's assistant, is one. And we notice that Wesker, as an artist, reprimands those who do not recognise the heritage of the past, and uphold the tasks of the working people[123].

We may wonder why Wesker should have written a play so similar to Shakespeare's; does he add something new in his play or does he really differ from his predecessor on some specific points? To Shakespeare the city of Venice was not looked upon as an Italian city, but as the city of London, and Antonio was most probably the representative of the English ruling capitalists who were contending with the foreign bankers like Shylock. Shakespeare, therefore, was mainly preoccupied in showing the victory of the national bourgeoisie over the ruins of the foreign bankers. Whereas Wesker denotes the rise and growth of the emerging bourgeoisie against a background of human relationships. His play has, of course, the quality of a social document. In spite of the high pitched emotional relationship between Shylock and Antonio, its subject is all pervasive and affecting; it is a play with a purpose.

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b) Bassanio : And all were fishermen?
Graziano : No! I mean, yes! I mean the point is, we don't think of ourselves as descended from fishermen. It's just that we're — old". — Ibid., I, v.

123. Antonio : I thank the shepherd for my clothes and the tiller for my food, good man. Blessed. Let them be paid well and honoured". — Ibid. II, v.

with the disintegration of the peasantry, the landed gentry had reached its final stage. For subsistence this class has to find a new means of living. Hence the necessity of capitalist farming which Portia talks about[124], and for the extension of this farming, which is mainly for profit, technical advances are essential. Scientific experiment or widespread education too were necessary at this stage. The whole interest, the very existence of the landed gentry, therefore, demands the collaboration with the city bourgeoisie, to which class Antonio belongs. The conflict, in Shakespeare's play, is of national not personal interest. Whereas Wesker puts stress on international interests that mainly depends on human relationships in different communities engaged in trade and commerce, and their peaceful co-existence. That is why the title of Wesker's play is The Merchant while that of Shakespeare's play is "The Merchant of Venice". If jingoism pervades Shakespeare's play, Wesker, in his play, is supposed to be a staunch supporter of the principle of peaceful co-existence through non-intervention in state affairs. It is interesting that public criticism[125] or

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124. "Portia : Decided! The speculating days of the family Contarini are done. The good warehoused in our name at Beirut and Famagusta we'll sell off cheaply to cut our losses .... The famines are cruel and constant visitors, we must reclaim the land. Besides, the competition for the trade routes is too devious a task for my taste, and ... It's goodbye to Venice, and into the wheatlands of my estates near Treviso and Vicenza and here, Belmont. We'll become graziers ! Stock-breeders ! Cattle and drainage ! That's where our fortunes will go". — Ibid. I, ii.

125. "Lorenzo : Perhaps it's not Shylock who should speak but some of our own city councillors. Why were they silent? What Jewish money do they owe? It must

vehement censure[126] or even an indirect attack on the state as an institution[127] may be made in Shaker's play, but there is no close

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: be huge if they're prepared to let a fellow citizen be skinned alive". — Ibid. II, v.

126. "Antonio : ... And though I wish I'd been a professor from Padua or a painter from Florence yet give me my ledgers of profit and loss, for I can't pretend this is a city of holiness and light. These are empty boasts, wind fit for the lungs of impatient youth but they have nothing to do with our humiliation in this court". — Ibid.

127. a) "Portia : As his ( Bassanio's) wife the State claims me". — Ibid. II, i.

b) "Antonio : Justice? For the people of Venice? The people? You pride yourselves you mirror Rome! But one benefit that the great Empire had we lack : equal political citizenship. Here, in Venice, political power rests quite firmly in the hands of two hundred families and those only. That, though he talks of principle is what Florence cannot wait for, to share that power, take it over, perhaps, but not eradicate its core corrosiveness. You use the people's name, for through their grievances, you'll come to power. One of their grievances is what you call usury. The usurer's a Jew and the Jew the people's favourite villain. Convenient ! Easy ! But the Jew pursues what he hates to pursue in order to relieve us of the sin. Usury must exist in our city for we have many poor and our economy can't turn without it. Do we condemn the Jew for doing what our system has required him to do? Then if we do, let's swear, upon the cross, that among us we know of no Christian, no patrician, no Duke, Bishop or merchant who, in his secret chambers, does not lend at interest, for that is what usury is. Swear it ! On the cross ! No one, we know no one ! " — Ibid. II, v.

struggle or any attempt at class annihilation. Here Portia or Antonio or even Bassanio or even Lorenzo (in Act One, scene five) does not speak in the manner of a national of a particular country, but they are supposed to be the citizens of the world state chastising the practices, but not the principles of a capitalist state. Yet a subtle and poignant struggle may be traced here, and this struggle is going on, not from without but from within the class. This is not found in Shakespeare's play. While in Shakespeare's play the feudal forces with the faithful co-operation of the national bourgeoisie were out to outwit the foreign bankers in order to safeguard the profits of the national investments, in Lessor's play the inter-community harmony runs parallel with the rising national bourgeoisie in the beginning and although these get a temporary jolt at the end a human harmony without any injury to any person or creed is restored. Obviously the subject of the play is — whether a friendliness is possible between a Jew and a Christian. This is precisely what the play is about.

## 14. 'The Journalists'

The world of The Journalists is the world of modern journalism against the world-wide background of fascist attacks on sleeping university students; the struggle for freedom of different nationalities; guerrilla enterprise in urban areas as well as in

underdeveloped countries; civil disobedience marches; abused democracy; the liberation of sex-scenes in the columns of widely circulated papers etc. Thus it apparently is the depiction of the disintegration of modern capitalist society that has reached a certain stage, the stage previously envisaged in The Kitchen. While in The Kitchen there is a deep sense of strain and insecurity, the prevailing tone of this play is of uncertainty and of grave tension. But in this play there seems to have been portrayed a greater complexity of modern life; here is the sense of isolation on the part of the intellectual columnist, but not on the part of the artist; for neither nightmare nor pessimism pervades this play; individuals may be trapped here but it is not a tragedy of character. The point is that Wesker indeed takes us into the very schemes of a catastrophe, but never does he seem to conclude that the catastrophe is the last thing in life. It is the particular journalist, not journalists in general, that is condemned here. Obviously the final appeal is to the world and the people in it, and the attitude here is neither life-denying nor art-denying.

The theme of The Journalists is the antithesis between conservatism and humanism. While conservatism consists in bringing all manner of mischief on mankind, humanism is necessary to remove it outright. It is this abstract antithesis that builds the whole play and makes it into the kind of thing it is, and we gradually

realise the kind of drama Hocker is dealing with and the reactions to it[128].

The Journalists is not a psychological study nor even an exposure of the stubbornness of any one. The characters, if they are considered to be characters at all, are all significantly relevant to the basic pattern of the play — the antithesis already mentioned. It is not Mary Mortimer herself, in magnificent isolation, that interests Hocker, not simply Mary Mortimer the super columnist, but Mary Mortimer as a representative symbol. Mary is not seen here as an individual case, but as a symbol of and participant in a social situation almost rotten at the very foundations. So we are not invited to pity here but to think over and alienate ourselves. The protagonists of the contending camps, the conservative and the humanists, are Mary and her children; but still the drama is not about Mary and her children, it is about post-war twentieth century England. Great are the successes of England, the conservatives — not just the Marys but the editors, the politicians, the rulers, the exploiters; the

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128. The Journalists is a fictional, dramatic account of the workings of a present day Sunday Newspaper. It is, of course, based on personal observation; but it is not a piece-a-clef or simple documentary of 'The Sunday Times' — nor is it the author's purpose that the play be misread as such" — publishers note on 'The Journalists'. The Writers and Readers Publishing Co-operative, 1975.

humanists are not just Mary's children but all those who put human values above the so-called successes of the society.

This play shows men as they are, not as they ought to be or are capable of becoming. Wesker is taking stock of the affluent society where images of man's so far changed lives are organised in time. Here he makes an attempt to give an impression of life in the present time as well as in the office of the Sunday Times instead of making an attempt at conveying a new meaning or philosophy. The primary function of this play is to serve as the expression of the thoughts and directions inspired by journalistic realism, to translate in terms of schemes, actions, and characters, the subtle varieties of journalistic sentiment and the highly sophisticated code of journalistic behaviour. The major characters themselves neither are revolutionaries in the slightest sense of the term nor do they participate in the consequences of any revolution. Rather what they do is to report or inform[129]. They are free in movement and in discharging their duties (of course in the interest of the ruling class), although occasionally they are realistic in attitude in revealing the society to which they

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129. "Harvey : ... you can't reveal, you can only inform. Don't simply what's complex and then imagine you've clarified the truth. And it is complex, its frighteningly complex". — Act II, Part iv.

belong[130]. In almost every page of this play there emerge the attitudes and prides of the modern lilliputian man. The tone of this play is that of the supremely intelligent and sensitive member of the ruling class who has behind him all the sophistication of a conservative society[131]. And it is England of the nineteen seventies that is Wesker's subject and here his former weapon of class indignation has been turned into a means of class collaboration.

The Journalists symbolises the continuity of life and human aspirations and it is Mary who comes to understand the hollowness of her purpose of bringing down giants. She, who is portrayed in terms of hubris, has come to see the pointlessness of her intellectual fight to avenge herself on the world of the working

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130. a) "Martin : How much are they paying you for all that, Kathy? Secretary : Well they get a separate bill for every lie I tell — if that's what I mean". — Act II, Part iv.

b) "Ronnie : Occupational hazard, mate. Unlike the other departments in this autocratic establishment we have democracy for on us". — Act II, Part iv.

131. "Macintyre : ... It's terrible problem, democracy. You see, if we could turn round and say all the men who are dustmen are dustmen because of their inequality of opportunity then it would be easy ... Make opportunity equal and the inequality of their qualities soon becomes apparent. It's a cruel statement to make but, men are dustmen or lavatory attendants or machine minders or policemen because of intellectual limitations ... we can't talk of these things, its taboo. We can't say in public 'some men are less intelligent than others' — though its part of any discussion on democracy". — Act II, Part III, page-36.

class who are believed to be no longer aliens by the ruling class. She learns that life (business too) will go on although other stubborn columnists or intellectuals will at last wither. This play, if considered from Mary's point of view, may be characterised as her tragedy and the tragedy of such hubristic characters; but it is no one's tragedy. Wesker works on a plan that is formal in rhythm and design and reveals particular symbols through universal issues. The world he creates here is his own, yet he loses his grip on reality and ceases to be a child of his time[132].

There is hardly any unity of conception or design in the characterisation of this play. There is no scope for development of characters nor an attempt to give a concrete idea about them. Only Mary is somewhat an exception to this rule and she is more perceptive than the other characters. The play lacks action, although Wesker has an eye for the sharp detail. It is full of passion, pride, tenderness, and inner dramatic conflict. The core of The Journalists is the human problem which it treats. Mary, the tough journalist, never yields although it is against the instincts

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132. Wesker states - "My journey into journalism was an unhappy one — an affectionate excursion which went sour. It's sad since I'd been very impressed with what I'd encountered in my eight weeks with them and thought I'd written a fair, serious and, though critical, yet affectionate piece. They didn't agree and so, since I'd obtained their cooperation for a play, I couldn't abuse it by publishing something they felt unfairly represented them". — Publisher's Note on The Journalists, WRPC, op. cit. 1975.

of her sex. It is the unyielding pride that makes her more rather than less sympathetic. The conflict, however, is deep and difficult, and Wesker treats it with fairness and sympathy. The conflict he depicts is of two right causes — the betterment of humanity and the necessity of order. He has studied the growth and development of the capitalist society and he knows that the consideration of total power in them means the sacrifice of the other class, that is the working class. Therefore, he wants them to learn and improve their ways, and thus he reconciles the two opposed forces with a view to bringing order in the class society. This issue provides the shape of the play, but Wesker does not fall into didacticism or propaganda although he sees the struggle as something extremely important and exciting in a class society.

The force of this play emanates from Wesker's social vision which instils life into it. The conversations between Mary and his colleagues, the scenes with the public figures (e.g. Sir Roland Shawcross, Rt. Hon. George Carron, Sir Reginald Macintyre and Oliver Wassingham), the scene between Mary and Oliver Wassingham — these are what capture the imagination. One of the descriptions (such as, that of Mary with her children) has a ruthless realism; here there is more than a precise vividness, more than a determination to leave nothing unspoken. And when Wesker speaks of Mary's children it is obvious how much there is of humanity as well as conservative stubbornness in this play. However one cannot say

that there is no respect for life here; had it been so situations would curdle and art could not take shape. Wesker shows here too that he has almost mastered most of the slick technique of the film, especially the art of montage in this play.

But for all its power and its insight The Journalists is not quite a great drama and its weaknesses as well as its strength derive from Wesker's social vision.

Mary's weaknesses are important because, as the chief representative of 'conservatism' in the play, she is essential to its pattern. Only twice in the play does Mary truly come to life (cf. Act I, Part Two and Act II Part Four). Her weakness as a symbolic figure is revealed when she, like Marange (of The Kitchen), tries to defend in the way most well-to-do middle class parents do :

> I love and care for my children. That's natural, an old, old cycle, termed 'long' before man began exploiting man. If I'd forced you ( children) into professions you'd've been miserable with, if I'd have given you luxuries to soften the spirit of your spine. That would have been bourgeois. But I've given you a home to dig your personalities in; security ! Not to seclude you but to help you face an insecure world. 133

There is a critical weakness too in the resolution of the plot which involves the production of a 'deux ex machina' — the playwright ultimately ensures that right prevails, wrong is defeated, public good supersedes the private grudge[134]. It is the

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133. The Journalists, Act I, Part Two, p. 28

134. "Mary : But I could have brought him down. I promised you I'd bring that man down ! " — Ibid. Act II, Part Four, p. 84

playwright who saves the board of editors from the evil and uncompromising influence of Mary, the proud columnist. The real limitation of the play is that the Marys are inevitably punctured at the end and the humanists are wrongly considered to be the half-baked revolutionaries who've borrowed other people's tongues[135]. The basic weakness of this play is that no one on the conservative side actually fights (though they are sometimes garrulous) for human values although some of them do not lack vitality and vigour. It is one of the weaknesses of the play that although the journalists are supposed to remain within one family atmosphere their personal relationships are tenuous enough. Although the play captures a tone of conversation at once colloquial and pointed, it, in most cases, fails to convey a sense of physical action. This play that mostly depicts the genteel atmosphere of middle-class living, does not reflect the lives and sensibility of the working people. A question on the technicality and possibility of the scene, between Mary and George Carrom[136] may be raised : can persons play chess and discuss science and politics seriously at the same time?

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135. Ibid. Act II, Part Four, p. 48

136. Ibid. Act I, Part Two, p. 23

## CHAPTER FIVE (B)

## THE ART OF CHARACTERISATION

We have discussed how Wesker has made out of facts, fragments, incidents or events a precise and beautiful shape, round the fragment of a crystal which is the other name for a plot. But now let us approach his plays by way of character instead of by way of plot although we are aware that Aristotle placed plot above character. Plot and character are the only aspects of the indivisible whole which is the play. We cannot really separate one from the other. In relation to the whole and to each other "they are", according to Professor Ellis-Fermor, "inseparable; each may in fact appear at times to be an aspect of another, since their territories are ultimately indivisible"[1]. But for an elaborate discussion we are going to separate character from plot according to an agreed convention. We are no longer concerned with the narrative, but are primarily concerned with the delineation of character that is based on a sequence of action and dialogue occurring in space.

Although Wesker examines the problems of the working class in the twentieth century by dramatising the struggle, or sometimes puts into practice their socialist ideals without offering clear-cut solutions in his plays, he does not spare pains to portray the

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1. U. Ellis-Fermor : Shakespeare the Dramatist, p. 78

working people, for his concern is working man's life — acting and suffering. True, he might choose a theme which has social realism that aims at the triumphs of socialist enterprise without bourgeois aberrations, but he has tried to depict and display the truthful spectacle of the working class life before and after the Second World War.

In his plays more than two hundred characters drawn from different classes of society represent the twentieth century vividly and clearly giving a proper study of various classes in society, their mutual relations and conditions. In his plays Wesker's England leaps to life as we go through them. In the delineation of characters Wesker unlike Sir Terence Rattigan[2] adopts the method of an artist and a painter. He aims at exactness of feature and correctness of emblem either to extol or to expose — to expose all the dark forces harming or hoodwinking the working people, and to extol their struggles for success. He may not have adopted any definite pattern in the description of portraits. He seems to amass details not haphazardly but mostly from his own experience. That is why almost all his characters are distinguished from each other, and not only in their inclinations but also in their physiognomy and their psychology. The aim of his plays is not to individualise but to allow the individual characters to appear

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2. Sir Terence Rattigan believes that the character makes the play. (cf. F. Lumley : New Trends in Twentieth Century Drama, p. 312)

as catalysts of large collective actions or as representatives of groups, their significance being that of the group forces. Various characters, in his plays, comprise almost all sorts and conditions of men, and many of them are so real that they can be easily recognised in society. The members of the Kahn family, Dave Simmonds, Beatie Bryant, Peter, Marango, the conscripts and the officers of the Royal Air Force, some of the characters of 'The Old Ones', 'The Journalists' or 'The Wedding Feast' are figures drawn from Wesker's personal acquaintance. There is ample reason to believe that most of them are real characters.

Most of Wesker's characters are not caricatures or flat simplifications of topical issues. They are flesh and blood characters. They speak like men, not card-board puppets. Let us observe what Wesker says ....

> My people are not caricatures. They are real (though fiction), and if they are portrayed as caricatures the point of all these plays will be lost. The picture I have drawn is a harsh one, yet my tone is not one of disgust. 3

Many of his characters seem to be a living person, not a figment of imagination. His characters are irrepressible as they are born alive in their author's memory and imagination. Wesker successfully animates different bodies only when he deems it fit that the characters are indispensable, but he never feels the need to

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3. The Wesker Trilogy, p. 7

pronounce the last word as their creator. He makes them lively and vivacious, yet he maintains a kind of impartiality. His characters are more dramatic than narrative. He gives his characters social, not psychological motivation. He makes them coherent in time, place, and circumstance. In *reading* his plays we do not learn merely what his characters say, but see their persons. Sometimes a word or an epithet paints a whole scene. How well the anguish of Harry Kahn is conveyed to the reader thus —

> you can't alter people, Ronnie. You can only give them some love and hope they'll take it. 4

With the ambit of his creation Wesker may claim to have produced more than two hundred characters. The characters that he has created between 1956 and 1960 (that is, from the period of 'The Kitchen' to 'Chips With Everything') are rather militant and typify the struggles within them attempting to transform their environment. Here in Wesker we experience events which are inherently significant because of the direct involvement of the characters in the events and because of the general social significance emerging in the unfolding of the characters' lives. Here we are the audience watching events in which the characters take active part and we ourselves experience these events. But the characters right down from 'Menace' are rather ineffectually beating

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4. Ibid. p. 56

their wings in vain more in the spirit of adjustability rather than in doing anything positive. Here the characters are more spectators, more or less interested in the events. The events themselves may, according to a critic, be called a tableau or, at best, a series of tableaux[5]. Yet he successfully makes a comprehensive study of the unity of time, space and individuals in his plays. These individuals as social beings in the space of class structure surrounded by the time of exploitation is rightly delineated in almost all his plays. Implicitly or explicitly he delineates the characters who are either exploiting or are being exploited subsequently reducing them to mere shadows or burnt out cinders. However, for a thorough study of his characters the following table may be helpful, where all the characters are divided into three major categories, such as —

1. Characters belonging to the upper class : Stan Mann, Colonel Newhurst (of '<u>The Trilogy</u>'), Pip Thompson (of '<u>Chips With Everything</u>'), Kate Ramsay (of '<u>Their Very Own and Golden City</u>'), Beatrice (of '<u>The Four Seasons</u>'), Simone (of '<u>The Friends</u>'), and Privli (of '<u>The Merchant</u>').

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5. G. Tulnoe : <u>Writer and Critic and Other Essays</u>, p. 116

2. Characters belonging to the ruling class or their supporters : Marriage (of 'The Kitchen'), Mr. Healey (of 'Roots'), Alfric Harrington, Reginald Maitland and John Casper (of 'Their Very Own And Golden City'), Mr. Litvanov, David Lowery and Hammond (of 'The Wedding Feast'), Sir Roland Shenstone, Rt. Hon. George Carron, Sir Reginald Macintyre, Oliver Messingham and Mary (of 'The Journalists'), Shylock, Tubal, Antonio, Bassanio, Lorenzo, Graziano, Roderigues, Solanzo, Nerea, Girolamo, Jessica, Nivka, and Portia (of 'The Merchant')
And their supporters : Chef (of 'The Kitchen'), Five officers (of 'Chips with Everything'), Worthington, Matheson and Cambridge (of 'Golden City'). Harvey, Paul, Anthony, Dominic, Morty and Mary (of 'The Journalists').

3. Working-class characters : Peter, Gaston, Kevin, Dimitri, Hans, Raymond, Magi, Max, Mangolis, Michael, Owen, Alfredo, Frank, Head Waiter, Nicholas, Paul and the tramp, and Monique, Bertha, Molly, Winnie, Hettie, Cynthia, Anne, Daphne, Betty, Jackie and Violet (of 'The Kitchen'). Harry, Monty, Dave, Prince, Hyne, Ronnie, Sarah, Cissie, Ada and Bessie (of 'Chicken Soup'). Mr. Bryant, Frankie,

Jimmy, Mrs. Bryant, Beatie, Jenny and Pearl (of 'Roots'). Libby Dobson, First Removal Man, Second Removal Man, Sammy, Danny, Postman and Esther (of 'I'm Talking About Jerusalem'). Archie Cannibal, Wingate (chem), Wilfie Seaford, Andrew McClore, Ginger Richardson, Dodger Cohen, Dicky Smith, Smiler Washington, Guard, Night Corporal, First Corporal, Second Corporal, Airman (of 'Chips with Everything'). Chris, Julian, Harry, Martin, Morty, Dominic, Sebastian, John, Ernst, Ronnie, Marvin, Jordon, Norman, Pat, Desmond, Jonathan, Max Smith, Fink, Jane, Angela, Tamara, Cynthia, Agnes, Secretary (Editor), Secretary (Newsroom) (of 'The Journalists') Herissa (of 'The Merchant').

1. Characters belonging to the upper class

Most of the characters of Wesker's plays represent their class and their profession, but they are also individual figures with their notions, idiosyncrasies, arguments or particular temperaments. Despite commitment and personal attachment to a particular class Wesker's art of characterisation is free from personal malice and spite, bias or animosity. He is an artist with whom it is easy to have a sense of comradeship. Thus he becomes the true representative of the working-class as T. S. Eliot, Christopher

Fry, Ugo Betti or Jean Anouilh or even Shaw are the representatives of the middle class[6].

Although Stan Mann, Colonel Newhurst, Pip Thompson, Kate Ramsay, Beatrice, Simone and Friuli belong to the topmost position in relation to the working-class characters, there is a subtle distinction among themselves. They belong almost to the same class yet with different temperaments and sensibility. There is, still among them, a decaying side and a developing or reviving or adjusting side. If Stan Mann is the representative of the decaying side, Colonel Newhurst and Pip Thompson or Friuli (Dogs) to the reviving or developing side, and Kate Ramsay, Beatrice and Simone represent the adjusting side.

Stan Mann is an old man of about seventy five, one of the oldest persons portrayed by Wesker. He slightly stoops because of paralysis representing the stooping of the feudal age, but he stoops in order to arrest the public attention. He may have the uncouthness or even the vulgarity of a bygone age, far from the manners of an industrial age, and yet he does not lack the vigour of life. One may detect in his eyes gleam of greed if the following lines are taken into account——

> Stan [to Beatie] : She's fat ent she? I'm not sayin' she won't do mind, but she's fat. [As he goes out]. All right ole sweet heat, I'm goin'. I'm just right for bed. [7]

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6. John Kershaw : The Present Stage, p. 34

7. Roots, I

But there is in him more affection and humour than lust.

> Stan : Tell your boy he don't wanna waste too much time or I'll be havin' yer myself for breakfast — on a plate. 8

We do sympathise with him whose salad days have gone for ever. We pity him too when he vainglariously ejaculates —

> Stan : There ant much life in the young 'uns. Bunch O' weak-kneed ruffians. Some on 'em like livin' look, none on 'em ! You read in them ole papers what go on look, an' you wonder if they can see. You no! Wonder if they got eyes to look around them. Think they know where they live?' Course they don't, they don't you know, not one. Blurt ! The winter go an' the Spring come on after an' they don't see buds an' they don't smell no breeze an' they don't see gals, an' when they see gals then don't know whatta do wi' 'em. They don't ! 9

He is well aware of the discrepancy between the old and the new order. It is obvious that his days are numbered whether he physically dies or not. When he says — "Gimme my young days an' I'd show 'em ", he does not throw a challenge to the winning side but rather complains against run-away time. However, he can never be called a villain or a superficial character. He is not depicted as one who is wholly of the surface but rather as an assiduously analysed character. Strangely enough, he is a secular character with an elemental endowment of instincts and passionate impulses. He is a human type who sorrows and rejoices with the working class people.

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8. Ibid.

9. Ibid. II

Stan is a man who has not only seen much but has enjoyed much yet with an unsatiated desire as if he wanted to drink life to the lees. He is, according to a critic "an elderly reprobate still singing the praises of drink and sex, though crippled and on the brink of death"[10]. He is perhaps the only epicurean character among those created by Osborn. He is certainly the only typical Bohemian character who desires to make the most of the few hours which are still in his possession.

Colonel Newhurst is a country gentleman who has absolute faith in the state of belonging to a society superior to that of the working people. He is really a foil to Stan Mann. All that he believes in is the right sort of master-servant relationship. He firmly believes that each person has his place in society. He does not understand those who try to break ranks. He will have Dave Simmonds believe that they ought to go on keeping to their respective positions, otherwise Dave will be a subject of his admonition.

> Colonel : In fact I don't understand you at all, Simmonds. What did you come to the country for? It's a different way of life here, y'know. They're slow people, the country people — slow, but sound. I know where I am with them, and they know their place with me. But with you I could never —
> Dave : Never get the right sort of master-servant relationship?

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10. L. Kitchin : Mid-Century Drama, p. 112

> Colonel : Yes, if you like. But you didn't like, did you? You? spoke to me as if I were a — a —
> Dave : An equal.
> Colonel : I don't like it Simmonds[11].

In this computer age he [redacted] dares to ask question although he may not get the proper answers.

> Colonel : We 'ask', Simmonds : in my sort of society we ask. That's all. [12]

He is very careful about maintaining the class structure.

But he is chivalrous, as long as the relationship with Dave is smooth. He remains polite, humane and courteous towards Ada and Sarah. He does not hesitate to greet Ada and Dave when they come from London. Then he talks to them and is oblivious of his rank and position. He talks as if with equals. But he turns vehement when he realises that his stable position and rank is at stake.

Pip Thompson is diametrically opposite to Colonel Dewhurst. He is the son of a rich banker who was a general. He once decided to walk through the slums of the East End of London where his car broke down on the way to his father's office. He even went into a slummily decorated dirty cafe where he had a cup of tea. He did all this to prove that he did not believe in the class barrier. In spite of all such practices he cannot win the hearts of the people

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11. I'm Talking about Jerusalem, II, i
12. Ibid.

belonging to the working-class, for he was born and brought up amidst 'bleeding wealth and comfort'. The following conversation bears testimony not only to that but exposes his real leanings towards his own class.

> Pip : 252 ringatel — give me a hand with this bed, will you, please.
> Chas : Why I bloody help you I don't know, not at all I don't.
> Pip : Because you like me, that's why.
> Chas : Like you? Like you? You're the lousiest rotten snob I know.
> Pip : And you like snobs.
> Chas : Boy, I hate you so much it hurts. You can't even make a bed properly.
> Pip : It was always made for me.
> Chas : There you go. See what I mean. Boasting of your bleedin' wealth and comfort. 13

He boasts of their beautiful home consisting of twenty four rooms all large and thick with carpets. It is his boasting about possessions that makes the deprived Chas (alias Charles) arrogant. It is the upper-class halo with which he tempts and attempts to domineer over the working-class halo of Chas.

Yet through intelligence, his perfect knowledge of history and his fine oratory he captivates Chas and all the working class conscripts. Slowly but steadily he takes the lead first by insisting on Andrew's reciting a poem by the Scottish poet Burns at the Christmas Eve Party at the NAAFI and secondly on the same occasion persuading the guitarist to sing 'The Cutty Wren', an

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13. Chips with Everything, I, vi

old peasant revolt song. It is the Wing Commander who detects insolence in Pip's eyes, and again he recognises a budding leader in Pip on this very same occasion. So this officer adds —

> We need you. Let your time here be a truce, eh? Answer me, boy, my guns are lowered and I'm waiting for an answer. 14

To Chas, Pip makes a clean breast of everything about how he despises manual labour —

> The number of intellectuals and artists who are fascinated by manual labour. Not me though, Charles. I haven't the slightest desire to use my brawn, prove myself a man, dirty my nails. 15

or again —

> God, how I despise this yearning to be one of the toilers. 16

Wise Pip knows that the offer made by the Wing Commander is not only to his liking but is alluring as well; yet he is aware that the time is not ripe to swallow the bait; he must strike while the iron is hot. And that moment comes when their camp runs out of food and conscripts cannot boil their water. If necessity makes a leader, Pip becomes a leader. He convinces Corporal Hill, whose

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14. Ibid. I, vii
15. Ibid. I, viii
16. Ibid.

out a plan and actually executes the plan of stealing coke successfully in ten minutes, with no one caught, after negotiating wire netting and outwitting the patrol guard at the same time.

Thus he makes a stir among the conscripts but there is no delay in discovering his actual motive. It is the Pilot Officer who does this; it is discovered that Pip is hankering after power. Among his own people there are too many who are powerful, Pip prefers to take the leadership among 'lesser men, among the yobs, among the good-natured yobs'. When his motive is discovered he loses his stock among his trustworthy comrades who now consider him 'a hypocrite', 'a coward' or even a 'clever useless leftover'. Literally and significantly he changes his colour when he changes his uniform, from an airman's to an officer's (in Act Two scene eleven) when the whole hut is under arrest because of the insubordination of a few conscripts. Pip "dons the uniform of an officer and goes back to his class"[17]. He actually changes sides not to avoid a court-martial, but to serve his own class. He thus proves the adage that birds of a feather flock together. While Colonel Newhurst considers the class-division as two separate entities, it is Pip who uses the working people as stepping stones. Pip uses them as tools only to translate his intentions into reality. His significant exchange of smiles with the Pilot Officer (in Act Two scene eleven) and with Chas (in Act One scene eight) does not produce anything good, but gives an impression of a shrewd warning to the airmen, of the betrayal of leadership at the right moment.

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17.. J. B. Bayler : Anger and After, p. 167

Katherine Ramsay is not the pivotal character as Pip Thompson is. She is the daughter of Lord and Lady Ramsay; Lord Ramsay is a local landlord. In spite of the dying days of the aristocracy she is proud and thinks that they are superior to the working people. It is the mere possession of something material that makes her proud and urges her to laugh at the working people :

> Kate : We have rooms for our guests while you, you have just enough for your family.
> Paul : We're well fed and there's ample roast beef at home.
> Kate : yes Paul. But we know the taste of Caviare, don't we? And there are vintage wines on our tables. 18

Yet openly she declares that she is a classless woman. But here is a declaration of a policy rather than a sincerity. That is why Stoney taunts her :

> Stoney : Classless? The common man would smell you decaying a mile off. 19

Herself a woman, she does not feel ashamed of attacking the working class woman. A particular instance becomes general to her :

> Kate : our house keeper wouldn't put anything back in the drawer without looking for tears and lost buttons. 20

Once she said that it was her nature to take chances. No one denies that nor opposes her saying it. She may flirt with John

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18. Their very own and Golden City, II, iii
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid. I, viii

Latham or Reginald Maitland or may try to be the mistress of Andrew Cobham, but she crosses the boundaries of decency when she flirts with Andy who recollects courting Jessica Sutherland at the 'smelly' by the river side.

> Andy : We used to court here, by this river — the 'smelly'.
> Kate : A clever girl that, her head screwed on[21].

At this Andy defends as well as attacks :

> Andy : Our womenfolk are not social plotters, you know — not calculating, like your lot. [22]

Being attacked she not only retorts but shoots fire and brimstone, hitting cruelly and effectively and with glee at the success of her remarks. But at the same time she perhaps unconsciously exposes herself and her own class-character :

> Kate : Nonsense! A woman will calculate no matter which class she comes from. [23]

In that sense she is truly a classless character indeed ! No matter whether she is ruthless or classless, it is true that she once managed to travel as a journalist to the Mani area in cold blood,

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21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.

parading as a Nazi sympathiser, admitting the activities of concentration camps only because she needed to know. (But in the play we never have the occasion to know what she knew.) She may earn admiration from the Nazis owing to her being a journalist but it is she who does not believe in wearing cloth caps to earn love from the masses ! Andrew Cobham makes an accurate study of her :

> Andy : How clever the young Ramsay girl is, so observant about people, so witty and naughty. 24

In spite of that she quite unreservedly reveals herself to Andrew, the hero of her heart :

> Andy, I'm tired of timid lads who laugh at themselves. I'm tired of little men and vain gestures. I have a need, O God how I have a need to see someone who's not intimidated. who's not afraid to be heroic again. 25

Maybe she belongs to an impoverished aristocracy or a decaying aristocracy, yet there is the spirit of hero-worship in her. It is this love of hero-worship that has made her veer like a weathercock sometimes seeking the favour of Jake Latham, the left-minded trade union organiser or sometimes to make friends with Reginald Maitland, the rightist minister of town and country planning. But in neither of them does she get the hero of her heart, nor will either of them make her a lady (a long-held wish in tune with

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24. Ibid.
25. Ibid. II, ii

aristocracy). At last she finds such a one in Andy. She can have it only with Andy whose mistress she becomes. In this respect she is the female counterpart of Pip Thompson. Both of them belong to the aristocracy, both of them desire a lift in life in their own ways, both of them ultimately become successful. Pip gets promotion at the cost of losing his comrades, Kate makes herself satisfied to be the mistress of Sir Andrew Cobham although she fails to get the honour of being a lady. Therefore, a very typical peculiarity develops in her. When she does not receive the honour of being a lady, she abuses Jessie, the lawful wife of Sir Andrew Cobham, who, she believes, is a housewife only and a nonentity. But through her shrewishness she proves that she herself is unfit to be a lady.

Beatrice is a character whose surname or social position has never been mentioned. She seems to be a romantic heroine with all the feelings of a medieval lady. She never utters a single word during the whole winter as if hibernating; but when spring arrives she becomes as fresh as the month of May. The words she speaks then come as through bubbling honey — honey that resembles gold, and gold is her favourite colour. Adam falls in love with her and like a pagan worshipper of beauty he worships Beatrice. She has lovely eyes, lovely hands sweet lips, hair and skin. Eternity is, as if, in her lips and eyes, and bliss in her brows. Winter may make her speechless and dull, but age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety. It is not only Adam who adores her, but the

loud winds are amorous with her, even the great gods claim her as their paramour :

> Adam : The loud winds carry you.
> Beatrice : Heal me.
> Adam : The great gods claim you[26].

Many persons come to her with different purposes :

> Beatrice : Men come to me with their ideas, politicians with their doubts, poets ask my praise. My home is filled with people seeking comfort because they know my instinct is right. [27]

Maybe she is the direct descendant of Kate Ramsay, who having failed in "Their Very Own and Golden City", succeeds in running away with Andrew who turns into Adam in "The Four Seasons". Like Kate Ramsay she might have wide popularity among the eminent persons of her period although she herself is not bound by a particular period.

It is never mentioned where she comes from or where she intends to go, although we are aware that she will be willing to spend a whole year with Adam. We discover that she was a university student, and that she was a lover of nature and natural beauty. Perhaps she has developed a love for nature because her father was a botanist.

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26. The Four Seasons, spring

27. Ibid.

There is no woman character with a past in all Wesker's plays. She has already destroyed a marriage and failed a lover, and she has come to Adam for she needs to be healed. She intends to have a golden eagle for a lover by making a sacrificial offering of her sensual body just to experience the taste for lust. She might have been a living piece of poetry to Adam, but she is being reduced to a luscious lump of flesh.

In spite of her love and love-making she does not become more than a mistress to Adam. Her love is more a ploy than a sincere emotion. All that she desires is to survive. Her love is self-love rather than real love. Maybe she once recovered sick Adam, but she did her best only for her own interest — the interest of revival with the working-class. It is the vanity of her class that prevents her from being a permanent partner in life for Adam although he tries to demonstrate the importance of labour in life through the preparation of an apple strudel. She wants to see an island in Adam in the sea of emptiness. But it is a foolish girlish dream without having recourse to labour. Manual labour she hates as does Penelope Gilliatt who did not support Wesker to bring Beatrice back to the Kitchen[28]. It is the abomination of

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28. In an interview given to Simon Trussler Wesker said :-
I am sorry — with humble respect ! I can't account for instance, for someone like Penelope Gilliatt : I can't think what happened to her. Her review was venomous ! I think she saw it as an anti-feminist play, an anti-woman play. And this so much clouded her judgment that she spent something like two long paragraphs interpreting the apfelstrudel scene as one in which Adam wants to bring Beatrice back to the kitchen ! — Charles Marowitz and Simon Trussler : Theatre At Work. p. 24

labour that finally sets her adrift from Adam who stands essentially for labour.

She detests labour and she does practically nothing during the whole winter except for an attempt to decorate Adam with flowers. Yet the steady rise of the play might not be possible without her. Through Beatrice again Jessie delineates the same unsteadiness of the man-woman relationship, the fruition of love and the futility of it, although the play was set in a romantic background.

Simone who is a partner and managing director of five shops, comes from an upper-class family and her father was also a company director. She is not married and is absolutely barren and sterile. According to Crispin, who scoffed at her for writing a love-letter to him, she misuses words and emotions like an illiterate office-girl. Many others think that she is silly, insignificant or bourgeois. But it is she who discovers Esther's true colours after her death and sees that she is valued anew. The vanity of her class has been filtered successfully through her. That is why she can willingly massage or wash Esther's feet or sponge Roland without any feelings of pride. Yet there is always a restlessness as well as loneliness in her :

> there's not a creature needs me, not one single one. They'll use me, drink with me, tolerate my company, but not need ... not really need me. And I feel so useless and rejected, so dismissed. 29

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29. The Friends, II, i

It is also this loneliness that haunts her and makes her come down from her own class too. Thereby she wins our sympathy by being a pathetic character. In this way too she becomes truly a classless character.

Girolamo Priuli, the Doge of Venice; may be the descendant of aristocracy, but he is the typical representative of the bourgeois world. In the conflict between humanity and law he acts with honesty and sides with the latter. Being the representative of the ruling class he knows that the stability of the state is more important than the salvation of humanity ! He is very much aware that political power is vested in the ruling class but not in the people. As a ruler of an absolutist state he cannot spare even Antonio who is going either to mock the state or to undermine its authority. He knows very well that the illustrious ruling class depends invariably on the Shylocks, and usury can never be exterminated from the city of Venice until the system is totally changed. As long as the system requires it, and unless the system is changed there must be class-feeling and separation of hearts, and balanced human relationships must be debarred at any cost. That is why he sides with usury which has sustained the state, but parts with Shylock, who has challenged the state's authority. And he really does his duty with an iron hand for he not only knows his place like Colonel Newhurst, but has been systematised. There he is successful as a ruler and there too he utterly fails as a character.

## 2. Characters belonging to the ruling class or their supporters

We have discussed the characters who belonged more or less to the aristocracy, and who had no direct link with capital or any other factor of production. Naturally they did not exploit others. Now we are going to discuss the fairly limited class of characters who hold capital — hence they dominate the factor of production and exert an influence over the modes of production as well as social relation. All these characters except Mr. Healey influence the nature, development and the growth of urban economy, while Mr. Healey influences the rural economy. On the whole, their aim and purpose is almost the same — to centralise the means of production and to hold monopolistic control over them, though their methods are different. Mr. Marango and Mr. Healey are eager to maintain control over production and distribution without sharing their responsibility towards the working class, whereas Alfie Harrington, Reginald Maitland, John Jasper, Mr. Litvanov, David and Hammond are concerned with production with the help of the working people. They are, however, ready to share responsibility with the genius from among the working class people. While Marango and Healy are the directors of a monopoly, Harrington, Maitland Jasper are the managing directors of a joint stock company with limited liability. Despite subtle differences amongst themselves they vegetate side by side and are ready to 'pick up the golden apples dropped from the tree of industry and to barter truth,

love and honour' for profit or power or both. Therefore, these characters may be regarded as the enemies of the working people.

Marango, an old man of seventy five, is the proprietor of a large sophisticated kitchen. He is as stout as his business, and there is a sad expression on his face. According to Laurence Kitchin, he occupies the position of God[30]. If the function of God is to make others lead the life of slavery without love or sympathy, Marango is then a cruel god having close affinity to Jehovah, and the machine (that is, the kitchen) he has set in motion is a machine of oppression to destroy the rights of liberty, including his own too. He suspects that everyone is conspiring to stop it because he himself has already conspired to make all his workers the mere nuts and bolts of his machine of exploitation. His own machine has also turned him into a machine too :

> Peter : He (Marango) goes to market at five thirty in the morning; return here (i.e., the kitchen), reads the mail, goes up to the office and then comes down here to watch the service. Here he stands, sometimes he walks round touching the hot-plate, closing the hot-plate doors, then looking inside this thing and that thing. Till the last customer he stays. Then he has a sleep upstairs in his office. Half an hour we come back, he is here again — till nine thirty, may be ten at night. Every day, morning to night. What kind of a life is that, in a kitchen ! 31

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30. M. A. Armstrong (ed.) : Experimental Drama, pp. 178-79

31. The Kitchen. Part one.

He has lost all human quality too. That is why he remains totally unmoved when Hans, on duty, has accidentally burnt his face. He simply goes away without offering a word of sympathy to him.

He is neither a god nor a devil incarnate, but an archetypal bourgeois. He knows best what is profit and what is loss and thereby he becomes a frustrated man who has no personal life of his own :

a) Marango : It's sabotage you do to me. Its my fortune here and you give it away. 32

b) Marango : Why does everybody sabotage me, Frank? I give work. I pay well, yes? They eat what they want, don't they? I don't know what more to give a man. He works, he eats, I give him money. This is life, isn't it? 33

It is significant to note that Mr Healey appears when Stan Mann, a representative of the decaying age, dies. Obviously Mr. Healey who is a farmer's son, and the new young manager of the estate that Bryant the senior works for, is the r epresentative of the developing, that is bourgeois, age and he practises exploitation and most probably derives most of his agricultural income from this source. As the size of his agricultural enterprise grows larger and becomes more profitable he has to employ more persons to ensure a greater volume of work; thus the enterprise is collective although the ownership is private. Therefore,

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32. Ibid. Part two

33. Ibid.

he speaks in a firm business-like voice with the politeness of a master. Whenever he speaks to Mr Bryant, he maintains an air of a master-servant relationship. He is as polite as his business demands, and he is as arrogant as his class demands. Only once in the play does he appear, but he maintains the pride of his class.

Alfred (or Alfie) Harrington is an industrialist of the twentieth century who like Marange has made a fortune, and wants to make more. But he has no scrupules and thinks only of making money. If there is the probability of profit he will compromise with anybody — be he Andrew Cobham or any one else. He is the representative of the manipulating class of people who hanker after profit or fortune-making.

Reginald Maitland, Minister of Town and Country planning, is not only a dignitary but a man of personality. He attains true prominence among the people of his class and he towers above Harrington and Kate Ramsay. As he is portrayed as a type character, there is no question of his growing into maturity with the moving action of the drama. The towering personality, the weight of his position and above all, the acute consciousness of his class — all these have made him one of Hanker's significant characters.

John Casper, who himself is insignificant and Andrew Cobham's employer, is the head of a firm. He appears for a short while, yet he arrests our attention for his simplicity and unassuming nature, and the funny exposition of his pious nature.

Mr Louis Litvanov[34], the proprietor of a shoe-making factory, is the central character of The wedding feast and round him all other characters revolve. He is an integral part of the plot and his absence would entirely alter the composition of the whole. Yet he is a foil to almost all the characters, especially to those who belong to the working class.

But now he has changed his coat and he has become the 'owner' of a factory, and deserves awe and respect but not love and friendliness. He may be categorised as a liberal bourgeois or moderately as a doctrinaire socialist, for liberalism has made him believe that there can be reform without bitterness, hatred and class-struggle.

But it is clear that he is not at all a serious character nor does he exercise any moral influence among others. He, who expresses his desire to promote the happiness of his employees, himself is in danger of being a butt; and it is only gradually that he begins to appear as a person to be laughed at rather than admired. He is the principal character of the play although he

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34. He needs no comparison with Pavel Litvinov who in 1968 was tried in the U.S.S.R. for his active involvement in Liberal circles. Pavel is a historical figure who made serious protest against the Soviet invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia (cf. William Ebenstein : In Our's Time, pp. 77-78), whereas Louis Litvanov, although a liberal in social circles, is purely a comic caricature.

does not deserve to be a hero; yet it is he who lets down the play which becomes a comedy in prose. We see his diplomacy, an astute eye upon the needs of employees, the excellent acting of a part in his lounge, in the house of Knocker White, or in his bathroom, and only when we try to look into the heart of the man do we find that it is hardly acting, after all, that the character has been wholly converted — the individual utterly eliminated — there is no Litvanov, only an owner or an employer of a factory who represents the prejudices of a class. Thus he is not only the social prototype of Britain in the second half of the twentieth century but is comic and sentimental. In this character there is the essence of satire.

Yet Wesker has made this character a lively one and has put life into this conventional William Morris-type character. Litvanov wishes to attend the wedding feast of Knocker White but on his entrance to Knocker's house he sheds every social and individual trait reducing himself to just a person. He, as a participant in the feast, drinks, dances and behaves in a manner which is not befitting the owner of a factory but a common member of Knocker's family. Thus Wesker paints a type when he gives the impression that he is painting some one person whom he happens to have met.

David Lowery is the tough and matter-of-fact Scottish manager in Mr Litvanov's shoe-making factory. He is a typical, selfish, muddle-headed bourgeois manager with very limited ideas

of business and the world.

But this type character is individualised when we along with Louis Litvanov discover in him a critic of the art of painting. Besides being a manager he knows something of painting and thus sufficiently impresses on us.

Duncan Hammond, the Managing Director of a chain of shoe shops, is an honourable man who has little to say. He is a typical conservative bourgeois character who is on the side of those who want to keep the class society as it is. He differs from the humanitarian attitude of Louis Litvanov because as a Managing Director he cannot afford to indulge in any soft sentiment like humanitarianism.

Sir Ronald Shamerons is the Minister for social services. As a man of his class he believes in a hierarchical society which is divided between government and the individual or the employer and the employee :

> Shamerons : And that Miss Mortimer, is precisely what democracy is ! a risky balancing act. The delicate arrangement of laws in a way that enables the state to conduct its affairs freely without impinging upon the reasonable freedom of the individual. Tilt it too much one way or the other and either side, state or individual, seizes up, unable to act to its fullest capacity. 35

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35. The Journalists, I, part one

He may believe in civil liberty or the freedom of the people, but at the same time feels the necessity of loyalty of the people to the government for the security of the state. But what he prefers most is the concentration of power in one class only, that is the ruling class. And here lies the key to his principle of political democracy :

> Government can only legislate for the common good: the individual good is, I'm afraid, what men must iron out among themselves. 36

He at best remains a type of the conservative class that wants to remain in power in exchange for political freedom to the people. He is never individualised and remains as if far away from the common run of people.

George Curran, Minister for Science and Technology, is almost the opposite of Sir Ronald Shamerons. He is sufficiently individualised; but seems to have few interests. It is his rare quality that he can go back to the past with reference not only to his own life but to the economic prosperity and rivalry of Europe. He is at ease both in playing chess and serious deliberations. He has the rare quality to transform a debate into a chat and the chat into a debate. In spite of the achievements of this society, he has not lost faith in man and also in humanity. This is what has made him perfectly individualised.

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36. Ibid.

Sir Reginald MacIntyre, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, like many other characters of 'The Journalists' does not grow and open himself out through action and circumstances into full blossom. Sometimes his principles are actuated by humane consideration and understanding, but he is truly a proud representative of the ruling class who, he believes, are as if God ordained them to rule the other class :

> We are appointed because our judgements are more often right than wrong. That too is one of the risks of democracy, unless you can find me a man who can create a system — or a system which can create a man — whose judgement is right, all the time about everything.37

Oliver Basingham, the under Secretary for State for Foreign Affairs, is a friend of Mary Mortimer. He is supposed to be a leisure-living person. By profession he belongs to the ruling class, but by temperament he practically belongs to no class at all.

Shylock Kelmer, a middle class gentleman of a persecuted race, is an eminent money-lender in the city of Venice. Although he has settled permanently in the ghetto, there he is not a citizen. He, along with other Jews, does not enjoy the rights of a citizen like other Venetian christians. His life and the lives of his community depend upon the contract and respect for the laws behind

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37. Ibid. II, Part three

the contrast. He, like the people of his community, is compelled to wear a yellow hat and to dwell in the ghetto — the particular quarter which is exclusively for the Jews.

He is tender-hearted, intelligent, dignified and humane to those who know him. He bears no malice towards anybody even when he is attacked by Lorenzo and others.

Wesker has very carefully drawn this character. Although by profession he is allied to Louis Litvanov, yet he is never caricatured. Unlike Litvanov he is a serious character and probably the spokesman of Wesker, the artist. He is the representative of the persecuted Jewish community, but what makes him the most important figure is that he appears to be a twentieth century humanist in a sixteenth century background. If we analyse the play we may show that the idea of humanism was in Wesker's mind in portraying this character. Shakespeare's Shylock was either a caricature or a martyr or both, whereas Wesker's Shylock is primarily a genius and a humanist who sees further, and probes deeper than other Venetians (Antonio is an exception) and has energy enough to give effect to this extra vision and its valuation. He is the defender of a persecuted community, the mouthpiece of a class and the upholder of humanity. He is sufficiently modern in a medieval background.

Antonio Quarini is one of the most important characters in the play, second only to Shylock. Professionally he belongs to the merchant class in which he considers himself a square peg in a

round hole. He finds no prospects or even joy in being a merchant; on the contrary, he detests his profession of buying and selling and he is sometimes jealous of people belonging to other professions:

> A lawyer, a doctor, a diplomat, a teacher — anything but a merchant, I'm so ashamed. 38

Wesker's Antonio unlike that of Shakespeare thinks ahead of his time. Shakespeare's Antonio never felt the enthusiasm of humanity more intensely nor expressed it more nobly than Wesker's Shylock. Wesker's Antonio is not a melancholy man but throughout the play he is never light-hearted (although sometimes ironical especially in reference to his being the godfather of Bassanio or in the Court of Venice with the Doge) nor do we see him hilarious or merry; on the contrary what haunts him most is restlessness and discontent. This restlessness and discontent is due to the duality of the Venetian law that prohibits friendship between a Christian and a Jew, between a man and a man. Therefore, he too becomes a rebel like Shylock and signs the bond to mock the law.

Bassanio Visconti, the son of a rich merchant in Milan, is a young man of patrician stock. The blood of a merchant and the heritage of the nobility have perfectly made him a man of the

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38. The Merchant, I, vii

world. He is introduced in the play as a destroyer of Venetian peasantry and the builder of nationalistic capitalism. As a member of the landed gentry and a son of a merchant, Bassanio has probably noticed that with the extension of capitalistic farming the old class of small holders or peasants, with their traditions of independence and their own native culture, is bound to disappear. He observes that young patricians are running after either a trade or a job such as that of a diplomat or a lawyer. And he, born and brought up into such a world, senses that to achieve his goal, he must associate himself totally with an eminent merchant like Antonio. It is known that he is deliberately on the side of the capitalists. He is not only active and intelligent but manages to carry his ambitions easily. He, therefore, becomes a speculator and through speculation he hopes to build up his fortune :

Lorenzo Pisani, a member of the silk manufacturing merchant family of Venice, is, according to Bassanio, a philosopher and a prophet who may one day lead Venice. But his fame rests not in his being a philosopher but in being a poet. Once he wrote a long poem "The Ruin of the Nation's Heart" which, according to Antonio, was full of disgust with the great wretchedness of the world and the sins of man. Besides this, Lorenzo with the help of this poem was able to appeal to Jessica and finally to elope with her, of course with her dum consent (although their love was not consummated in the marriage).

But what is primarily interesting about this character is not his philosophy nor his poetry, but his achievement of a culture, of course, a university-made culture. Actually his education represents his class — the class of the commercial bourgeoisie, and Lorenzo is soaked in the learning and tradition of his class.

The introduction of Portia contarini shows the transformation of an agricultural country (here in the play, Venice) into a commercial one so that it may finally turn into a workshop of the bourgeois society. Portia's father is an aristocrat, but her mother is descended from a peasant family. The blood of the ruling class and the ruled has made her a rising bourgeois who is a staunch supporter of the new capitalism. She finds her material prosperity not in agricultural produce but in being a stock-breeder. She is not at all proud of belonging to an illustrious family; but she is proud of her intellectual powers. She has property, position, and power as well, but what she lacks most is proper initiative in the field of commerce — and in commerce she collaborates with Bassanio. To some extent she performs a symbolic function; sometimes she appears to be not a character proper but a flourishing partner of a company with limited liability. Bassanio plays the role of a partner in life as well as in her profit-making trade and commerce. The idea of love to her is a thing of the past; she wants none of it :

> Bassanio will come to know his place, accept it, or leave it. I ( Portia) am to be reckoned with, you know, not merely dutiful. 39

Therefore, she has no urge to go against the will of her dead father. Being a person of the Renaissance age she cares little whether her husband is Bassanio or anybody else; what she really cares about is profit and her position in the capitalist society. She appears to be the saviour inspired by nationalistic capitalism that confronts the evils of foreign capital. Her presence in the court of Venice is therefore a matter of great historical significance; she is in a sense more important than Antonio. Therefore, her triumph in the court of Venice is the triumph of every Venetian merchant and the area of her success is much larger than even the career of Portia, the individual.

Chef (his Christian name is Napoleon) is a man of fifty nine. According to rank he is second only to Marengo. He thinks himself too big for the kitchen. He is an ease-loving person who has a tendency to evade responsibility. But when he thinks his authority is questioned he becomes very angry. Then he may become mean too or he may side more with the ruling class than with the ruled.

Corporal Hill, Wing Commander, Squadron Leader, Pilot Officer and P. T. Instructor (or Flight Sergeant) are the five R. A. F. Officers. None of the five officers who obviously represent types of their own, have been given Christian names. Even their surnames have not been mentioned. If the state is the

coercive machinery than they are mere tools of it. Hence there is no need of their separate entity. They are officer-types rather than sufficiently individualised.

Corporal Hill feels like staying in a 'scorching palace' which may befittingly be called 'a scorching hell'. The following address of Corporal Hill to the recruits evinces much similarity with Hamlet who says — "Denmark's a prison" !

> Hill : You're in the R.A.F. now, you're not at home. This hut, this place here, this is going to be your home for the next eight scorching weeks .... The R.A.F. brought me up. You're going to go through hell some of you will take it and some of you will break down. I'm warning you — some of you shall end up crying. And when that happens I don't want to see anyone laughing at him. Leave him alone, don't touch him. 40

Still there is a peculiarity about him — it is his peculiarity of using poetic language. We can hardly imagine how he remains so lively when his life is so stereotyped and routine-bound. He finds pleasure only in playing the mouth-organ. He is the only officer who, somehow or other attracts attention, if not love, from the recruits. He is the most real character among the R.A.F. officers.

Wing Commander is the most shrewd character and a typical representative of his class. In his introductory lecture to the

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40. Chips with Everything, I, 1

conscripts he makes them conscious of a war, for he seems to be a true deputy of warmongers. The importance of love and humanity is a far cry to him. He is more an automation than an individual.

Squadron Leader may be called an alter-ego of Wing Commander. During the short tenure of his stay he tries his best to purge the prejudices of Wing Commander about the working class. He too is a class character pleading for obedience and discipline among the recruits though he is without bigotry and ill-feeling. He has a common sense attitude towards society and the working class :

> They provide your food, they make your clothes, dig coal, mend roads for you. 41

Pilot Officer is rather a younger man whose father was an electrician who owned a factory. All that he requires is cleanliness; he wants a man clean from toe-nail to hair root. However, he is a very class conscious character :

> We listen but we do not hear, we befriend but do not touch you we applaud but we do not act. 42

Physical Training Instructor (alias Flight Sergeant) is a very proud officer and he has the typical complex of his class. He

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41. Ibid. I, vii

42. Ibid. II, iv

is to some extent individualised when he is portrayed as a poet with the gifts of poetry.

Ted Worthington, Bill Matheson and Brian Cambridge are three trade union leaders and members of the general purposes Committee of the Trade Union Congress. But they are wily and jealous of Andrew Cobham whom they call "a silent revolutionary" for his intention of building six golden cities co-operatively built. They determine to clip off Andrew's wings for they are fearful of seeing him a hero. But these three, who try to keep the wheel of progress to a standstill, ultimately yield to Andrew.

If we seek a 'chorus' voice in the play, The Journalists, that is, if we want to see a character who in his action, attitude and words represents indirectly what Wesker's view is with regard to the head-on collision between the ruling class and the working class we should turn to Harvey Winters, the editor of the Sunday Times. He intervenes between two parties — Mary Mortimer and Morgan King — and settles the matter tactfully. Thus he eradicates hatred and paves the way for sweet reason and friendliness. Harvey is an efficient editor, a man who knows his function. He has all the intellectual resources, all the patience and practical good sense that go to make a successful editor. As he is a gentleman, he sees the points of view of both Mary and Morgan King, and senses the irony of the situation, the mistake which might have led the two redoubtable champions to engage themselves in an uncompromising fight. As an enlightened and experienced editor

he has perhaps closely studied the points of the rulers and the ruled, and has found fault with the cantankerous Mary. He, who is the very personification of reasonableness and patience, knows about the thankless job of an editor, who, according to him, should have no partisan spirit at all. To him business is business, and it has nothing to do with class feeling nor with the sentiment of an individual. Therefore, it is his responsible task not only to rebut the charges of malicious Mary against Morgan King but to gag opposition in order to make the way to co-operation and conciliation clean and smooth. He may belong to the ruling class but by temperament he is not of this class.

Paul Mannering, the News editor, is undoubtedly a sincere man who has clear idea about the duty of a journalist But he is a typical conservative journalist who is afraid of the infiltration of radical views in the newspapers

Anthony Sherrlee, the Business News editor, is the typical editor of the Sunday Paper. He is not at all a full blooded character.

Dominic Fletcher, the journalist in The Sunday Paper, is the son of a rich man and is a typical conservative who has not the slightest regard for the working class.

Morty Johns, another journalist, has some affinity with Dominic. He is the elderly journalist with some knowledge of business and the world. He has no sense of humour and no

understanding of the shape of things. He seems to be a type who believes strongly in the capitalist system.

Mary Mortimer, the eminent columnist of The Sunday Times, is an elderly mother of three grown-up sons and daughter. She is an intelligent overbearing columnist and a wily and cunning person. She is an important character, but Wesker makes her unfit to be the heroine of the play. When she says — "I am not bourgeois ! Bourgeois is a state of mind not of wealth", we tend to believe in her sincerity. But when she says to Harvey about Morgan King — "I could have brought him down. I promised you. I'd bring that man DOWN ! " she drifts away from being the heroine of the play.

Yet Mary is the most important character of the play, and it is she who binds it altogether. Without her there is little development of the plot, and the plot involves a struggle between her and her children; properly speaking the struggle between her class and the working class. The central struggle is, however, one that has direct reference to the political situation of the moment. It is quite clear that Wesker has a keen eye for character and he successfully writes brilliant sketches of those who belong to the ruling class. Mary is one of that class although due to her cunning she is declassed at the end of the play. Thus Wesker displays a bitter wit and "The Journalists" is mainly devised with the idea of caricaturing Mary — and he is successful in doing it. She is conservative, old fashioned, proud, strong in her

opinions and self-confident. She acts strongly and sincerely according to her own belief, but her children disagree with her. She is a failure to her children and ultimately to her employer. It is her unyielding as well as inhuman pride that perishes her. With this she claims our sympathy. She is truly a tragic character in the tradition of a tragedy. Yet she is a 'flat' character, and at best remains a type of the old conservative bourgeois without having any idea of class-consciousness.

Tubal Di Pegti is the friend and partner of Shylock. He is the true spokesman of the persecuted Jews of Venice. In short, Tubal may belong to a money-lending class, but he represents a cause of deprived humanity.

Graziano Bassio, who is in charge of the import of spices in the warehouse of Antonio Querini, is a typical, flattering bourgeois character with very limited ideas of taste and the world.

Rodrigues de Cunha, a young Jew, is a Venetian architect who plans for a new synagogue for the Spanish and Portugese Jewish. But he has established himself more as a designer than as an artist. His love for Jessica is the conventional, academic or literary love which has nothing to do with natural love.

He does not belong to the structure of the play. Yet he is important for he contributes to the joyous note of the play.

Solomon Usque alias Duarte de Pinel, is a playwright from Lisbon. Writing plays seems to be a secondary job. He is the self-appointed plenipotentiary for Portugese Jewish refugees, and he plays the role of a humanist.

Moses of Castelasse, the renowned Jewish portrait painter, is the oldest person portrayed by Asher. He is serious about portrait painting. He does not care for any sort of formality and he has become a stoic. He, therefore, affords a complete antithesis to Rodrigues da Cunha .

Jessica is Shylock's only daughter, and she too like Portia has lost her mother. But she was not, probably, deprived of filial affection due mainly to the care of Rivka, her aunt. She is portrayed in contrast to Portia. She is sufficiently educated, but she is not at all polished. She not only quarrels with her father in the presence of the distinguished guests, but wildly and wantonly leaves the room with a gratuitous insult to her father. It is her lack of naturalities and obligations as well as lack of scruples that drives this impulsive woman to run away with the Christian Lorenzo. She is not only a young woman of the toughest mettle, but she is a shrewd contriver who shapes circumstances in her favour. She seldom speaks unless a pressing occasion bids her speak out. But when she speaks out, she, as if, shoots fire and brimstone, hitting cruelly and effectively and enjoying the success of her taunts. Not for nothing has Antonio called her "very haughty".

Yet she may be called the symbolical representation of the individual rebel against all sorts of tyranny — be it paternal tyranny or any other.

> As you (to Shylock)'ve told me a thousand times that this is your house and your roof ... to whom does a house belong? Only the father? Not even the mother? And if not the children and the mother, then how must their relationship be described? As long standing visitors? As temporary occupants? At what point is the child's right of movement and taste taken into consideration? Does she only become whole when taken from the possession of her husband? ... Look how my father swells with pride at his daughter's intellect. He's given me teachers to nourish and exercise my mind, while he continues to exercise control. 43

She, therefore, abandons her father's house in search of a free world but in vain. Besides, she is, in a sense, a liberal link between the two conservative religious groups — the Jews and the Christians.

Wesker's Jessica is becoming completely disillusioned, at the end abandons Lorenzo, and follows her father to Jerusalem. Is this not shock-tactics? Here we see that Wesker, the Jew, intervenes between Wesker, the artist and does not allow Jessica to develop.

Rivka is the elderly sister of Shylock Kelner, and she lives with her brother. She has deep respect for her brother, yet she is very affectionate to Jessica, her only niece. She, therefore, may be regarded as a link between the two groups — the old and the new — the polite father and the haughty daughter.

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43. Ibid. I, vi

Rebecca da Mendes, the young daughter of the late Francisco Mendes, a banker of Lisbon, is also a humanist ambassador like Solomon Usque. Only once she appears in the play, but her sunny, bright nature and her brilliant personality attracts our attention from the beginning. She is not only the daughter of a banker, but in every inch she possesses the virtues of the bourgeois world where success mostly depends upon decision, firmness, practical experience and above all the correct knowledge of human psychology. However, she serves as a foil to Jessica and she has much similarity with Portia.

3. Working-class characters

Now we discuss the working class characters who belong to the last category according to the table given before. Most of these characters are wage-earners; they sell their labour to those who purchase their labour in exchange for money. All these people have in-born labour power, but it is a pity that they cannot always sell their labour properly and justly to a proper and just place. They become more or less wage-slaves and obviously become merely commodities. There is no way out for they must earn their living. Wherever they work, their condition remains more or less the same. They are the anti-thesis of those who are supposed to harness them to a machinery of exploitation — exploitation in the sense that the working people are deprived of their surplusvalue. They are nuts and bolts in the big wheel of production

but they are never the owners of the machinery nor do they have control over that. On the contrary they do not get what they deserve; thus they resort to surplus labour that ultimately procures surplus-value in favour of a group of persons or a class.

Some of these characters are acquainted with the concealed process of exploitation, while other characters remain unaware of it. But all of them live, struggle or even argue and expound their respective causes to one another. It is as though Wesker has granted complete autonomy to every character and, as a result, the whole web of the drama is woven from confrontations between these autonomous characters, and Wesker himself, it appears, remains independent of it. He never tries either to coerce these characters or to pronounce the last word as their creator. He does not for he knows that obedience to the laws of art is the price of his survival. For the sake of art he endows these characters with a convincing illusion of reality, and through them he endeavours to explore issues of wider significance than merely the psychological problems of any individual personality.

Peter is a young German cook who is the pivotal as well as volcanic character of the play. In Marango's kitchen it is only Peter who throbs with life, there is animation and life within him while almost all, even Marango have been, as it were, fossilised for a particular reason in a particular set-up. He is as if a grave-digger of the bourgeois machinery of exploitation while all the others accept their destiny. There is an unhurried

spirit in him, which all the rest lack. He talks, walks and sees like others, yet he differs from them. He shouts and protests, moves and lets others move, and dreams a dream though he knows full well that he cannot dream in a kitchen. There is an eternal dissatisfaction which always haunts him and cannot keep him at rest. He is the most restless product of a class society where family happiness is an impossibility.

Owing to this inherent restlessness nobody, not even Monique, his fiance, understands him. Many others too do not understand him. To Frank he is 'mad', to Dimitri he is 'a bloody fool', to Max he is a 'bloody German fool' and to Violet he is a 'bloody German bastard'. It is Anne who to some extent understands this burgeoning youth of twenty-three whose parents were killed in the war. He may pick a quarrel with Gaston, but he is never quarrelsome, for it is not his nature to be so. He is a passionate lover, and is, as if, saturated in love with Monique who has run away from her husband. He does not make love, he hates to flirt with Monique, nor he yielded to the Venus-mass of her. She is his real love. That is why he cannot bear her to flirt with any other.

Peter is not only a loving character, but also a lovable one. He becomes fully aware that this kitchen acts as an apparatus for the stabilisation of slavery, and thereby he detests it and tries to paralyse it. Thus he becomes a rebel if not a revolutionary and tries to throw off the yoke of capital in a limited

way. He may be called a modern Prometheus, but he is not "a captive Shelley preparing turbot and cod" as Laurence Kitchin observes[44].

Gaston is a Cypriot aged forty odd. He hankers after money and delights in quarrelling with Peter. He, according to Nicholas, is the best cook in the kitchen, but he is discontented although he does not know why.

Kevin, an Irish cook and a Roman Catholic, works hard in the kitchen. But he too like Peter believes that the kitchen is no place for a human being.

Dimitri, a Cypriot kitchen porter, is a young, good-looking, and intelligent man who loves to listen to rock 'n' roll played loudly on a self-made portable radio set. To him all the world is a kitchen — be it Harango's or anybody else's — where people come to make a noise, and then go away. Harango's kitchen seems to him to be a prototype of the United Nations Organization full of sound but signifying nothing.

Hans, a sensitive German boy, who once worked in New York, cannot acclimatise himself to the kitchen where he dreams only of money. The heat of the kitchen makes him remember the tranquil meeting during his 'glorious honeymoon' days.

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44. W. A. Armstrong (ed. ) : Experimental Drama, pp. 177-78

Raymond is an Italian pastrycook in the kitchen. He is calm and unemotional. He dreams of women only because his wife does not love him.

Magi, Max, Mangolis, Michael, Owen, Alfredo, Frank, Head Waiter and Nicholas all work in the kitchen for their living. They accelerate the course of action of the play to some extent, but they are not aware of their roles. They are types of working people and they do not impress themselves upon us by their individual traits. They are socially, politically, economically and culturally ignorant mass characters devoid of enlightenment.

Paul, a young hard-working Jewish pastrycook, works in Marango's kitchen. He is sensitive but not emotional. He is ironical as well as sympathetic. He has spite against none, but he calls Peter and Gaston lunatics when they quarrel. Once he married a mean-minded woman who came of a well-to-do family, but the marriage was a failure. He, therefore, buys comics and magazines to make his disconsolate soul happy. He speaks little but what he says is sensible. He is actually a sleeping volcano that never erupts. He has lost faith in man. As he is unable to withstand the wear and tear of reality he becomes frustrated not with life but with idealism. Yet there is a peculiar phenomenon about him: he does not reflect despair or lack the zest for life. He is one of Wesker's carefully drawn characters.

Save and except the characters described above there is one character, a tramp, who comes to Marango's kitchen in search

of food. He does not play a conspicuous part. He never works for his living, and he begs for a paltry mug of stale soup. He can concoct a story in support of his cause that he is an ex-soldier who has lost his pension-certificate without which he is unable to obtain his pension. Peter offers him pieces of cutlet, but he never utters a word of thank. This tramp is a veritable example of a lumpenproletariat who can only arrest our sympathy only. When each human being in a welfare state, according to Professor Ebenstein[45], is entitled to a minimum standard of living as well as full employment, he manages to obtain neither. He is definitely a threat to the structure of the welfare state. He is to the welfare state that cancer is to a human body.

Monique is a married woman who works in Marango's kitchen. She lives away from her husband and she and Peter are lovers at least until her husband buys her a house. She regards marriage merely as a business contract.

Bertha, Molly, Winnie, Hettie, Anne, Betty, Daphne, Jackie, Cynthia and Violet are the types who are mere nuts and bolts in the machinery. They undoubtedly love life, though they are never rewarded for that. They do not represent the hopeful picture of a welfare society.

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45. William Ebenstein : To day's Isms, p. 201

Harry Kahn, a European Jew, is the father of Ronnie. He is amiable, but a weakling and a liar. As a husband he is incorrigibly weak and remains the antithesis of Sarah, his wife. He never commands respect from her. He is never so determined a character as Sarah. He is more a visionary than a man of strong nerves. Whenever any situation demands risk or smells danger he is far away. He is theoretically the most radical among revolutionaries, but practically he is the last man to face any difficult situation. He may be called a representative of the petty-bourgeois mentality. As a father and as a husband he is a complete failure like Willy Loman[46]. But while Arthur Miller portrays the tragedy of the ordinary man who failed to lick the system, Wesker portrays the comedy of an ordinary man who is reluctant to face the system. Yet as a diarist he influences his son. He is an individualist among the socialists.

Monty Blatt is a typical character who has considerable energy and manliness. He is pre-eminently a man of action, a perpetrator of deeds — not of serious contemplation. It is not his habit to see the world either as black or as white — right or left. He is of working-class origin from the miserable slums of the East End of London. He was first attracted to socialism only because he wanted a change; socialism has never been the be-all and end-all of his life as it was in the case of Sarah Kahn.

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46. cf. Arthur Miller : The Death of a Salesman.

However, he is the type of man who believes that life is more important than ideology.

We see Dave Simmonds twice — first as a young man in his early twenties who appears to be an active revolutionary who goes to fight for the International Brigade in Spain against the Fascists. He is also having a love affair with Ada Kahn, the only daughter of Harry and Sarah. Secondly we see him as married man who brings his life as a craftsman in the country. He is, as if, the combination of a Byron and a Shelley. Dave, again, plays the role of the Greek Chorus. The Chorus as a device may have lost its utility in twentieth century modern drama, but its function does not disappear. Through Dave, Wesker has successfully established links between one phase of action and another, to recapture the past and foretell the future and thus to make an impression upon the audience of the prolongation of time. It is possible to watch the whorl of events at the centre, and to comment on and evaluate events and action.

Prince Silver who in his early twenties was fervently acting for social change in favour of the working people, became a worker in a second-hand shop. He preferred to struggle at home unlike Dave and he never changed his colours like Monty Blatt.

Hymie Kossof, a Hungarian immigrant and Sarah Kahn's brother is the only character in the play who has sustained injuries during the demonstration against the Fascists. He is essentially presented as a revel against a social order that does

not foster humanity, equality and love. He attempted to justify the ways of humanity to man. He never judges a person from the point of view of the psychology of an individual but as a social being.

Ronnie Kahn is the only character round whom the thread of 'the Trilogy' is spun. He physically appears in two plays and is quoted by Beatie Bryant in Roots. One critic calls him a phoney character[47] and another critic calls him a pedant and a bore[48] so far as his relation with Beatie is concerned. To the Bryants he might have appeared as a would-be husband for their unmarried daughter Beatie and therefore they regarded his refusal as showing a lack of interest in her. But they failed to make a proper estimate of Ronnie who perhaps never wanted to be trapped into a travesty of marriage with Beatie. The Bryants expected too much of him. When his very existence in society was at stake he could not possibly be blamed for being unfaithful.

He is a versatile character blessed with the charms of bourgeoning youth. But it is a pity that all the possibilities in him were, in course of time, nipped. He, who desired to be a socialist poet, turned out to be only a cook in Paris. He is like

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47. J. Wander : The Writer and Commitment, Op. cit. pp. 198-99

48. J. Chiari : Landmarks of Contemporary Drama, pp. 115-116

a Hamlet banished from a world quite contrary to his liking. Both Hamlet and Ronnie feel like living in a place where love is as good as an illusion, and living is as bad as reality. Both being sick at heart are alien to a world unable to redress their lot. Both return home to lose faith and both court their sweet hearts only to lose them. Still there are subtle differences between them — while aristocrat Hamlet was born to set the cursed spite right, Ronnie only sheds tears :

a) Ronnie : I wish I could cry sometimes[49].

b) Ronnie : We must be bloody mad to cry, Mother[50].

Sarah Kahn, of European Jewish origin, is not only two years senior to her husband Harry but also is diametrically opposite to him in energy, vitality and temperament. She is the type of socialist who is peerless among all of Arnold Wesker's female characters. As a mother, as a wife, as a trustworthy comrade, as a firm believer in socialism she remains an imperious woman who dominates the play to the end. She is a strong woman who was born to survive every battle that faces her. She is imbued with an idealism which is far from the selfishness of her husband. She is a born fighter who restricts herself to a particular ideology without blindness and without fanaticism. She is a woman of principle and acts according to it. That is why she soars into

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49. Chicken Soup with Barley, III, ii

50. I'm Talking About Jerusalem, III, ii

prominence and becomes one of the most important figures in Wesker's plays.

As a wife she seems to nag — first bullying and then browbeating her ineffectual husband. But a careful study of her character shows that she is never a common slut. True she uses harsh words to her husband who avoids his responsibility as a husband and as a father. She even had to go to that extent to abuse Harry who failed to make money during the war. This abuse does not indicate that she is adrift from her principles and idealism, but it is a reproof of her husband. She might have been responsible for Harry's first stroke as she made him angry, but it is Harry's continuous avoidance of the responsibility that brought his ruin. Otherwise the role Sarah played as a wife is played with a motive — the motive of correcting Harry. Had she been otherwise she would not so willingly have looked after Harry when he was sick with such compassion.

As a comrade she is always reliable and trustworthy. She is hospitable towards the socialist workers or demonstrators, and her sense of propriety is consistent with her sense of duty. There is not a single occasion when she deviates from the path of duty. She is equally courageous and hospitable to the comrades whether it is the pre-war period or the post-war period.

Sarah is the central figure though not the heroine. She neither dominates the courses of action nor does she influence all the characters. She is a lover of a particular ism — socialism

which is the be-all and end-all of her life. She fights for it and likes to see others fight for it too. But a time comes when she realises that there is not the slightest possibility of having her dream come true. It is time and the spirit of the age that withers her. She comes to the end of her journey weather-beaten and crest-fallen :

> Sarah : I've been lonely for long enough Ronnie. A few more years and I'll be dead. I'm committing no crimes.51

She keeps back a sigh and though her eyes may glisten with tears, she neither complains against nor accuses anybody. She at long last realises like Shaw's St. Joan that life is a continuous process of struggle though few are to participate in it.

Cissie Kahn, a trade union organiser, is one of Harry's younger sisters, and has never married. She is precise in her manner and has a dry sense of humour. She is much more important for her buffoonery. She gives some sort of comic relief.

Ada Kahn, who later becomes Ada Simmonds, is a prototype of her mother Sarah. Fighting spirit is in her veins — she fights in her childhood against diptheria, against the Fascists in her teens, against loneliness when her husband is away, and against poverty in the country with her husband. Yet she dreams to have

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51. Ibid.

her millennium in a country "where the air doesn't smell of bricks and the kids can grow up without seeing grand parents who are continually shouting at each other"[32].

Bessie Blatt, wife of Monty, is a bossy extrovert woman. She is very fashion-conscious and likes to be richly dressed so as to impress people. She loves money and any profession that will make money important to her.

Mr Bryant, the male head of the Bryant family, is not only a secondary character in the play, but also a foil to his loquacious wife. He is merely a 'bloody old hypocrite' or bloody old miser to his wife for he fails to earn enough for his family. He is constantly threatened with being dismissed from his job. Still there is life in him and a sense of making fun.

Frankie Bryant, Beatie's only brother, dresses well and has a pleasant manner. His attitude often seems far away from the stern realities of life.

Jimmy Beales is jealous of the urban bus drivers who earn more. He is a type of man who likes to poke his nose in others' affairs. Yet he is well-meaning.

Mrs Bryant, the female head of the Bryant family and the mother of Beatie, is one of the most vital of Wesker's characters. This uneducated Norfolk housewife who maintains her family on four pounds ten shillings a week, is really a terra cognita — a woman

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32. Chicken Soup with Barley, II, 1

of the earth, earthy. She sometimes may appear to be an intemperate termagant either sour with her husband or with Bertie. Her only wish is to see her daughter married to a young man from the city like Ronnie Kahn.

She is untamable, she is ill-tempered, she is prejudiced, she has an inclination to Malapropism, but she still remains an interesting character with an overbearing personality.

Bertie Bryant is not only the most important character in Roots, but she is one of Wesker's splendid creations. She is the daughter of a Norfolk farm-labourer. She loves Ronnie Kahn, and love to her is not just a means of sensual gratification — but it is a living, a complete living, a whole way of life. It is due to Ronnie that she, according to Lawrence Kitchin, is "newly awakened to the joys of abstract painting, classical music, and extra-marital love"[53]. She is never "the mistress of a London working-class intellectual" as the same critic[54] observes. On the contrary she could have been a poem to Ronnie[55]. She strikes a balance between emotion and intellect. She becomes the quintessence of impersonal spirit, all for the love of her own people. She has the possibility of being a blessing and a delight to her own working-class people. She is no preacher, but it is the innate selflessness

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53. J. A. Armstrong (ed. ) : Experimental Drama, p. 173

54. L. Kitchin : Mid-century Drama, p. 118

55. I'm Talking About Jerusalem, III, ii

in her that inspires her to make her people aware and encourage them to have perfect knowledge and understanding about their life. What Sarah Kahn desired to see in her own way of life is actually translated into practice in Beatie's. She returns from London not merely as an educated person but, as an enlightened and an enlightening one.

When she comes home to seek her family's permission to marry Ronnie her awakening is not fully complete. She knows the usefulness of art, music and literature in the life of the working class people. As long as her attention is screwed to a supposed family in which Ronnie might be one of the members, she remains not only incomplete but also a being of a class society. All families and friends, who assemble to commemorate the occasion, want to see her too as a member of that society. But there is a fundamental difference between them and Beatie. She is educationally and culturally superior to her relations when she comes from London, but when she feels unfettered from the oppressive organ of a family she begins to think herself far superior to all of them. The participants proceed to eat and murmur being forgetful of her presence, and she too feels far away from the whole stinking commercial world.

Jenny Beales, Beatie Bryant's elder sister, is a type. She is a sum total of all emotions and passions and can never remain happy. She loses the charms of life, living and love :

Beatie : Are you in love with Jimmy?

Jenny : Love? I don't believe in any of that squint — we just got married, an' that's that. 56

Pearl Bryant, wife of Frankie, is a goody goody woman who bosses her husband. She is just a smartly dressed quiet house wife.

Libby Dobson, a wartime friend of Dave, is an embittered ex-socialist to whom life is the other name for an idiotic affair into which a considerable amount of heat is imported. He is more a man of contemplation than a man of action. He is a tired man and a cynic. When the world is marching ahead he wants to pull back the wheel of progress. He, who hates industrial civilisation, loathes the large 'inhuman' cities and prefers to go back to nature. He turns into a misogynist only because his first wife lived to eat and sleep, and his second wife married him in order to have a home, furniture, and a baby. This love of possessions on the part of his wife killed his love for her. He begins to hate women for he thinks that they have no vision, except a sense of self-preservation. He has a vision of his own, but he knows that it will come to nothing until it is joined with the steel of will which he evidently lacks. He is a type of scrupulous person who is unfit for a class society and a misfit for a classless one.

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56. Roots, I

The First Removal Man named Jim and the Second Removal Man named Ted are the representatives of the common run of people who work for their living. They do not influence the course of action of the play, nor do they influence any character. They contribute neither to the serious nor to the joyous note of the play.

Sammy is aware of the poetry of his work in the workshop and the monotonous mechanism of a factory. Yet he prefers factory to workshop for money. It is the pressing economic impasse that makes him conscious of it. He knows quite well that with two pence half penny a week it is not possible for him to meet the demands of half a dozen dependents. He, therefore, attempts to gain his rightful position in the class society by making more money.

Daniel Simmonds, the son of Ada and Dave, is a child who at his first appearance arrests our attention. He is fond of thinking of himself as Daniel the lion killer. Thus he is being acclimatised from his childhood to such an extent that he is expected to transform his environment in future.

Esther Kahn owns a market stall. As a Londoner she has an antipathy towards the country. She is a mixture of a shrew and a jealous woman who finds fault with others. She is introduced more as a comic character than anything else.

Archie Cannibal, a trainee in the R. A. F., is more passive than Chas. He, who is a bachelor, likes to remain engrossed in books about ideal marriages; he is more a dreamer than a realist;

he takes more interest in celestial matters or in astronomy than in mutiny affairs.

Chas (alias Charlie or Charles) Bingate, one of the nine conscripts in the MAAFI, is at first a subdued, uncertain, mumbling fellow. There may be ineffable signs of hero-worship in him. His admiration for Pip Thompson borders almost on hero-worship. But when Pip betrays, it is he who takes the lead in defying the authority in the MAAFI.

Wilfe Benford, who is undergoing training in the MAAFI, is a fun-loving fellow. To him the time in the MAAFI seems most dreary, but he is the rare type of man who can pass the time in jollity while his heart aches. It is the sullenness of the camp that induces him either to fight with anybody or to resort to the random use of abusive words. He, too, remains true to his comrades during the revolt.

Andrew McClore, a Scotsman and the MAAFI hut's orderly, is a good, well-meaning and intelligent person. He, who had been an electrician, is perhaps the most class-conscious character among the working-class conscripts. He is a brilliant talker; he is outspoken as well as cautious. He is loyal to his friends, too, in time of trouble.

Ginger Richardson is more a dreamer of dreams than a realist like Chas. When he grows weary of the world he listens to Corporal Hill's mouth-organ. His likings and aspirations are mostly individualistic. Yet owing to the outstanding influence of

Chas he turns into a staunch and the first supporter against the maltreatment of Smiler by the authorities.

Dodger Cohen is not a dreamer like Ginger. He belongs to a family of shop-keepers; the world to him is neither black nor white, it is all shops or warehouses. He finds woman not as a pleasant partner of life, but simply as a means of gratification. He is the typical product of a capitalist society where the value of a woman has been reduced to that of a commodity. There is a pungent satire when he says :

> What's wrong with prostitutes? We need them, let's keep them I say. Nationalise them. Stunk in clubs like poor bleeding ferrets. 57

Dicky Smith is an ordinary trainee, but he deserves some mention. He is frank and genial with everyone. The language he uses is often chaste, pure and occasionally poetical.

Smiler Washington, the smiling son of a beautiful mother, is the youngest of all the conscripts. He is the only character in the play to whom a complete scene has been allotted. He is a living irony in the NAAFI where officers, who are more or less sadistic, cannot bear him smiling. The officers molest him to the greatest possible extent. It is he who puts the whole state system on trial where the military is supposed to be the most vital and law-abiding

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57. Chips with Everything, I, ix

organ. He is tortured between the interrogation of humanity and the coercive measures of the state.

The Guard, the Night Corporal, the First Corporal, the Second Corporal and the Airman are matter-of-fact persons. They neither profess sentiment nor feel any. They are neither commentators nor interpreters in the play. Hasker has presented them in order to give a photographic touch of reality.

Harry is decidedly one of the best, the most charming, interesting and representative of Hasker's characters, and he remains undoubtedly the most interesting character in 'Harvest'. He has a strong will although he is endowed with fine emotion and a poetic imagination.

He is a very sociable man. He finds delight in sharing happiness with others, and is friendly towards his neighbours. He paints a robust and defiant horse on a city wall to escape from 'a timid generation'. There is a breath of freshness about him, and the energy of a healthy, active life which keeps him alive and free from cynicism.

Maxie, a lean and neurotic-looking young man of thirty, is a lonely figure. He is a typical product of the mid-twentieth century. He likes to see nude photographs, plays cassets with others, fills in football coupons to obtain money and does nothing simply because he has nothing to do. Yet he hopes that something will happen and when he sees that nothing is happening he hastens to bring his wireless set as that at least makes sounds. Hasker pokes fun at this young man but never ridicules him.

Terry, Jack and Stan of 'Hannay' are portrayed as ill-bred and precocious children. They are the products of an abnormal social environment. It is a pity that they have none of the sensitiveness, tenderness and affection of their society. If anyone is to blame for this it is society of which they are the product.

Sophie is a type character. In spite of age, illness and depression she takes an interest in her neighbours, accompanies them to a restaurant and peers shortsightedly at nude photographs with a faint sort of nostalgia or tries to read newspapers to keep in touch with events.

Daphne is also a lonely person. She has never been a gay and cheerful woman although she is not tired of the world. In the face of disaster she shows a kind of resignation.

Harriet, Garry's young fiancee, is an ego-centric, individualistic and hypersensitive sort of girl who is physically drawn towards Garry. It is her magnificent beauty and physical charm that attracts Garry. This girl, who has a longing for individualistic affairs, becomes socialised when she participates in the Perenitsa, a Rumanian folk dance along with Garry and others. Thus she is at last reconciled with the feeling of oneness with a community.

To estimate the character of Andrew Cobham (alias Sir Andrew Cobham) it is necessary to understand how far he is actuated by personal motives and how far by motives to revolutionise the lot

of the people. He is a good draughtsman who later becomes a respected man, a war-hero and a famous architect and a master planner of six golden cities. He was given a title and was allowed to build one city instead of six to taste the joy of a socialist who actually wanted to build Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land. He did not just want to follow personal inclination. He knows his stand as an architect. In spite of that he could not build up the cities. The fault is that he longed for six beautiful cities where working people would have owned their houses and might have worked in their factories which did get sanction neither from the trade unions nor from a right-wing minister. So he had to make a patchwork and subsequently he tasted failure and met his tragic doom when he really became Sir Andrew Cobham and the instrument in the hand of establishment :

> Maitland : concentrate on the game, Andy,
> you're my partner now you know.58

Paul Dobson, a young playmate and friend to Andrew Cobham, is essentially a poetic character. He is a person who has an imaginative vision although he is not a visionary. There is a certain beauty in his use of poetic language which is convincing and powerful. Only once, however, we see him somewhat cynical when he says :

> I've no patience with people who still think
> they can advance human progress.59

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58. Their Very Own and Golden City, II, vi

59. Ibid. I, iii

Otherwise he remains a balanced character.

Stanny Jackson, another of Andrew's playmates is neither so critical as Andrew nor so austere as Paul. He talks of religion and the sermons of the Bible and believes in God. But he is the last man to admit insincerity. He is aggressive to Kate Ramsay who declares herself a classless woman.

Jake Latham, a trade union organiser and chairman of a local trade union branch, is apparently one with the workers but aristocratic in temperament. He loves to have power and influence. He does not want to be friends with Andrew nor with anyone. He is, in fact, a clever old man with all the bitterness and arrogance of old age finding fault with others while himself doing nothing.

Chairman Jackson is the chairman of the Local Town Planning Committee and a founder of the local Labour Party. He is a poet and he is bent on establishing order in the midst of chaos either in verse-making or in post-war slum clearance. He influences neither the course of action nor any character of the play.

Smithy, a local Labour Party Chairman, is a typical labour organiser with very limited ideas. He is in close proximity to the labour movement, although we never hear him speak of any effective movement for the working class.

Questioner appears only once and asks Paul an important question — what the golden city's spirit was. He seems more to be Paul's alter-ego than a flesh and blood character.

The Toastmaster is a minor character and does not play any conspicuous part. What sauce is to a curry he is to the play.

Jessie Sutherland became Andrew Cobham's wife. She was once the source of inspiration to Andrew, but now she shares his bed, keeps his house and looks after their children. She is a type who loses her rights in a capitalist society.

Adam is the sad 'professor of words' put in a difficult position in which he finds himself 'cabined cribbed and confined'. Being the son of an Hungarian mother he works in the kitchen and during this time he becomes a 'golden eagle' to Beatrice, his mistress. All through the winter he tries his best to keep himself as well as Beatrice warm in the belief that man should need human warmth most; he prepares apple strudel not to persuade Beatrice back to the kitchen, but to taste the charm of creation. He spends four seasons with Beatrice but nothing can stop him from crying for a passing love and his private ashes. He is in fact a square peg in a round capitalist hole.

Roland, the son of a working-class mother, is Esther's lover and one of her business partners. He is a pathological case mostly intent on remaining in a yogic position to maintain a halo of calmness around him. It is his forced attempt to remain oblivious of the anger which is ablaze within him that sometimes overpowers him and makes him burn paper notes or cut his body with a razor and to rub salt into it. He hugs Esther's dead-body as though she is still living. These things he does for he wants to

come to terms with the world in which he lives. But it is a pity that he cannot face reality or accept it without fear and without illusions. He is an anachronism to his generation.

Manfred, Esther's brother, quotes from books mainly on physics and biology. He is a voracious reader of eminent authors and he has the erudition of a scholar. He is an apostle of sanity (although he burns candles in broad daylight) culture and peace advocating sweetness, light and love.

Crispin whose father was a driver is a friend and a business partner of Esther. He is the most typical of all the partners. He is not at all ashamed of living an abominable life with loose women. Again he remains stoical when their business is on the verge of bankruptcy. He swings from one extreme to another. He needs peace and silence and finds solace only in mutual love.

Macey (or Mason) belonging to the Jewish Community is the seniormost character in '<u>The Friends</u>'. He is a social critic who puts both the bourgeois as well as the working-class values on trial. He, therefore, mercilessly ridicules the human relationships in his society without being a hypocrite.

Esther, a Jewess and managing director of a business firm that soon goes bankrupt, is in '<u>The Friends</u>' what Caesar is in '<u>Julius Caesar</u>'. She is the central character of the play and still after her death she dominates the course of action. She is a psycho-pathological case with her idle and ineffective dreams.

she has a seat for life and she significantly instils that seat in all, not through life, but through her death.

Tessa, the daughter of a railwayman and a sister of bricklayers, is one of Esther's friends. She is as outspoken as she is pathetic. She feels that her life has been wasted as she has had no children. Her personal agony is no longer personal, but she represents a class in a particular age :

> Tessa : We've no children, that's what it is. We're barren; brought forth nothing, sterile. Barren and sterile. 60

Emanuel or Manny is a Jewish tailor who reads widely and likes to quote from the books he reads. He is a delicate and a joyful man despite his old age. He is every inch a man possessing a capacious heart, comparatively cool temper, a discerning intellect, a sense of humour and above all a persistent optimism which is quite contrary to the philosophy of Boony, his brother. Yet he is apt to be a bore.

Boony is a scholar manqué and makes an ostentatious display of his knowledge without being a penetrating observer. Life to him is either black or white, there is nothing between. He cannot see eye to eye with his own son who comes from prison, on bail, to meet him. He does not possess the toughness of a strong-willed person nor is he a cynic. His talk may sound wise, but it is of

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60. The Friends, II, iv

little use to anybody, not even to his own son. Beony is gloomy, nay "a self-pitying malicious failure" as his own son observes. He is really a depressing man who drowns the young with his experience, or mercilessly holds up the follies and foibles of the young to ridicule.

Sudi is a compulsive talker of half-finished disjointed thoughts often resorting to sentences without full-stops or commas. Yet he gets tired of talking. In order to save a lot of talking and explaining to people he has purchased a projector which will serve his purpose of communicating with others. He is probably one of Wesker's experimental characters.

Martin is Beony's young son, but he is never a chip of the old block. He has a strong will and resolution to follow up his convictions, and fight for his principles without consideration of material loss or gain. What interests and actuates him most is the zeal for revolutionary change in his country. His father wants him to stick to his research and to stay out of student politics in which he is very involved. While his father quarrels with God about earthquakes, cyclones and droughts, he quarrels with man about poverty, injustice and the social order. He has abandoned his studies, his wife and his family, but he cannot abandon his idealism.

Jack, the oldest character in the play, is one of Wesker's wonderful creations. He may look a fool ringing a bell to the accompaniment of a sing-song voice — "Jack is a-dying. The young

folk is living, Jack is a-going, the young folk is coming"[61]. But he is neither all foolishness nor all fun: he might talk nonsense from time to time, but almost all his sayings have some truth in them. He is seething about the difficulties that face the younger generation, but he himself is a typical product of his society. He seems to be fun-loving but he is sane and sensitive, and neither a stoic nor a cynic.

Children, in general, are considered as superfluous in a play. They are introduced either as embellishment or for the sake of variety. But Wesker has successfully introduced children in his plays with much dexterity and effectiveness. He has created about a dozen of child characters. But those he has created are real people. The reason for creating them is that he tries to portray life from many angles. While he loves to paint the ideal life for children, he is well aware of the realities. Therefore he has created two types of children — those coming from working class households and belonging to a broad society and the unruly street urchins belonging to an isolated unit of social order. The latter children belong also to the working class, but they are strangers to the more complex and changing capitalist society. In this set-up some sort of estrangement is quite common. But while the former may, owing to paternal care and ideology, overcome this estrangement, the latter, owing to the lack of any ideology, become

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61. The Old Ones, I, ix

parasites in that small closed society. While the former keep contact with the moorings of life, or learn to come and participate, the latter who generally aim at mocking, do stand and stare. If the former represents the joyful side of life, the latter points out the cancerous sore of the society. We may rejoice with the former but we cannot help shedding tears for the latter. Wesker did not want to remain contented with the former ones who might be his dream-children. He looks at both the facets of the same gem. He, as an artist, shows us the childlike happiness as well as the childish frivolity. The two states of life are equally important to him. In dealing with children's happiness Wesker seems deliberately to have worked in low key to indicate what that happiness really means; when he speaks of childish frivolity, he makes us aware of a sour age eager to point out the menaces and the dangers of the dark society. Wesker tells us that the life of the latter children is a sham passed in darkness and cold, and they represent the iniquities of modern life.

Three youths in '<u>The Old Ones</u>', who mimicked Millie and Gerda on the street, belong to the latter group These street urchins select elderly women as their targets of mimicry. They are rude to these women who are not normal either in behaviour or in gait. They, being the self-imposed keepers of the law of the street, are determined to maintain the Spartan discipline there. They let others know in their own way when the order of the street is not obeyed. It is a malign disease to which they are victims. It is the disease of non-communication.

Jerda, wife of Emanuel, is consistently real and convincingly a being of flesh and blood. This woman is virtuous, but is dull. Jerda ponders much over the plots of land for the future burial ground. She, in fact, thinks more about death than about living.

Sarah, Emanuel-Beony's elder sister, who is a widow and a pensioner, is, according to Jacob Jonntag[62], "the caring mother, a recurring figure in Wesker's world. She is practical, wise, consoling, understanding". She is a loving and a lovable personality. It is she who is the central character of the play with whom all the characters are somehow or other related. She delights in gardening and builds 'Succah' to remember her dead father and to please Jerda. She erects it not to place her faith in Divine providence, but to place faith in man :

> Sarah : Let the heavens declare the glory of God, we'll build the 'Succah' to declare the glory of man[63].

In 'Succah' she finds a ritual of belief, but she is not a particularly religious woman although she appears to be 'a religious socialist' to Rudi, her nephew. She is a later sketch of her name-sake Sarah Kahn although she is less impressive and resolute than the former Sarah. But symmetry is there in both the characters. One looks to the future and the other looks backwards

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62. The Jewish Quarterly, Vol. XX, No. 3(75) Autumn, 1972 vide "The World of Arnold Wesker". p. 37

63. The Old Ones, I, ii

to the past. Yet both of them are propelled by the same yearning — the yearning for a new secure generation.

Teresse, a Jewish friend of Sarah, is an elderly Polish woman who once escaped from the Germans during the war with her family. She wishes to beautify herself and makes a great effort to do so in spite of her awkward body, lumbago, her weak bladder, the pain in her chest and her coughing fits.

Millie, another of Sarah's old Jewish friends, has been evacuated to Wales with her five daughters. She is a representative of the Jewish Community that does not get human treatment from the local non-Jewish people. That she becomes somewhat unnatural in her behaviour is due to maltreatment from these people.

Rosa, Sarah's daughter and the wife of a soil expert, is a young 'versity-educated careers-advisory officer with the ministry of Education. She became unhappy and her marriage failed. She is now discontented, peevish and she rails against the vices of civilisation :

> Rosa : I read about the terrible things men do to each other — wars for gain or prestige, massacres for religious principles, cruelty to children, indifference to poverty. 64

Rosa is a background character who does not constitute an integral part of the play nor does she contribute to the solidarity of its structure.

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64. Ibid. II, v

Knocker White, Miss Kate White's brother, is an employee of Louis Fashions Ltd. Although the whole action of the play evolves round his wedding feast he is not the important character. There is the irony in his name that he is an object to be knocked instead of being able to knock others. He, like a tortured human being, withstands it sometimes with buffoonery and sometimes with stoicism.

Stephen Bullock, the reporter on the local daily press in Norwich, Norfolk, is not only a character but the scenographer of '<u>The Wedding Feast</u>'. As a scenographer he not only tells good and ordinary stories about good and ordinary people but he supplies ample indication of the scenes of action. His role in the play is mainly that of a chorus especially in the first half and before the play begins. There he stands aside from the main action of the play and comments on it. But he has a considerable part in the actual exposition of the plot, and he makes himself felt in dancing, acting or in tomfoolery. He attends the wedding feast, turns into a drunken person, picks a quarrel with Knocker's employer and almost like a clown trenches everyone with a soda syphon. But whatever Stephen is, he is not essentially a comic character. Under the pretext of his drunkenness he exposes the hollowness and hypocrisy of the so-called munificent employer and makes him ridiculous before everyone. He carries to a degree the unity of the play as a character and as a chorus.

Henry Harris, the factory operative and an artist painter, is indeed one of Wesker's representative characters. Through this uncompromising artist Wesker has given us an idea of a true working class artist. He works for the bare necessities of life, therefore, as an employee he has some obligations, but as an artist he is quite free, and there should be nobody, not even his employer, to interfere with his perfect liberty. He is a typical man who sells his labour, but does not consider his work of art as a commodity. That is why he is unanimously applauded and praised as an honourable artist. He is again a humorist of a fine order and an accurate observer of human nature. He is a sort of philosopher who may well be remembered for a long time.

Tosh White, Knocker's uncle, is a simple-minded, good-natured elderly man who is prominent for his orthographic eccentricity. Like some other characters of the play he never uses the standard English and says 'stethamething' for a doctor's stethoscope.

Dinker White, alias ringling tingling Dinker, is a significant and interesting character. He is fun and seriousness combined. We must not judge him by what others think and say of him, not even by what he himself does, but by the words he uses or the path he follows. True he drinks like a fish, befools Louis Litvanov among all, but almost always he remains sane and almost all his acts are sensible. He has a keen, sharp and piercing power of observation; he can see through the character of a man from the point of view of his class :

> Tinker : Daphne ! you shouldn't be leaving your employer to drink beer — that's for the proles. Whisky ! Get the man some whisky as befits his station in life. 65

He undoubtedly constitutes an integral part of the play, and contributes to the solidarity of its structure. Without him the play would have suffered as a work of art, being devoid of depth, seriousness and a good deal of comedy.

Martin Dawson, Maureen's brother, plays the role of a clown in the play. He is the sort of man who both drinks and talks too much. He has not his father's seriousness nor the witchery of his sister Maureen. He is an object of ridicule.

Diego Fay, Maureen Dawson's boy-friend sometimes plays the role of a clown, but he is more serious than Martin. He belongs to the working class but unlike Martin he is very much conscious of the prestige of his class.

Mr Dawson, the father-in-law of Knocker White, is a deaf old man of working class origin. Being a man of the old stock he sincerely believes that his society is distinctly divided between the two classes — on one side there are the masters and on the other there are the common people. He knows that the life of his people is not, and was never, very easy in a class society. One may call this old man a cynic when he mumbles away to self :

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65. The wedding feast, I, II, 9

> they keep telling me there's an improvement but I can't see it. There's none on it gotten a great deal better. None on it, — no, — none on it — none on it — 66

Kate White, Mr Louis Litvanov's private secretary, comes of working class origin too and is the female head of the White family. She who learned Marxism from Stephen has turned into a tired Marxist. She deserves a special place not only in her family but in her office also. She talks as though Mr Litvanov is not her employer but her equal. Mr Litvanov once contemplated running off with her, but Kate, the moralist, did not want to run away with a married man. Since then she has remained unmarried. Stephen Bullock was in love with her and was about to marry her. She loved both Louis and Stephen, but she married neither of them. As a human being she became an object of love, but as a politically conscious personality she cannot accept marriage as an institution in which she might become servile. Most probably this psychology plays a part in driving the drunken Louis into the apartment of the bride and the groom on their wedding night. When she bids the couple good night and wishes them sound sleep was there a sarcastic smile on her lips ? If it is so she is the female Iago of the play. Probably it is the jealousy of an unmarried woman that cannot allow even her brother to enjoy his wedding night.

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66. Ibid. II, III-13

Emily White, Tinker's mother, is a minor character who likes to look back. She has been caricatured for her unsteadiness. At the very arrival of Mr Litvanov she expresses her displeasure, but she is highly pleased when he offers four £ 5 notes to buy hot drinks for the guests.

Daphne Dawson, Knocker White's new wife, is neither educated nor elegant. But she is interesting for her vivacity and her amusing (although to some extent vulgar) story of a field mouse which is all told in a tittering gesture. She knows how to create a situation by mere story-telling although she lacks the art of it. She is of working class origin, yet she has no prejudice about the class barrier. She behaves with Mr Litvanov, her employer, as if he is of her own status and snatches off her wedding-slipper in the shoe-game in order to hit him on the head, as if he is a close friend. She is a sort of fun-loving, unthinking woman.

Maureen Dawson, Daphne's sister, works in Mr. Litvanov's factory. She is one of the dramatic characters in the play. While almost all the women characters remain passive towards Mr Litvanov, she is the only one who thinks of him not essentially as an employer but primarily as a man with all the human weaknesses. So she tempts Mr Litvanov during the wedding dance. Her temptation of him is not only an example of dramatisation of an experience, but also is a proof of her deep knowledge of human psychology.

Apart from her bewitching personality she is a human character with an affectionate heart :

> Thank you Knocker. Treat her well, my sister, treat her well. 67

Mrs Dawson, Daphne's mother, is an ordinary woman without having any special quality in her. She is not incredulous like her husband about the progress of people. She is essentially a woman who likes to while away time with a smile and is not a critic of the time like her husband.

Chris Macintosh and Julian Gallagher, two characters in 'The Journalists', are typical journalists. While Chris likes to puff smoke, Julian likes to use slang. Thus they are, to some extent, individualised.

There are two more smokers in the play. They are Norman Hardcastle and Martin Cruikshank. Norman has a cancer in the throat. Martin, a news reporter, is more a shadow than a character.

Harry Lauriston, a news reporter, has no positive character at all although he is a shrewd type of journalist. He is a mere conventionality given a concrete shape.

Sebastian Herbert, an editor, is a vehement critic of Mary Mortimer and a sincere supporter of Morgan King. But it is his broadness of mind which makes him interesting. There are two other

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67. Ibid. III, III. 14

persons who work with Sebastian. They are John Prosser, the assistant editor, and Ernst Quest, a novelist and reviewer of the Sunday Paper. John and Ernst, like Sebastian, have no character at all. Yet they are introduced in the play as spice is added to a curry. What makes John interesting is his fine and original sentence which is — "the day of the newspaper mogul is over". In depicting Ernst, Wesker pays an eloquent tribute to the community of authors to which he himself belongs. He becomes almost identical with Wesker who like him says that writing a novel is more difficult than writing a play[68].

Ronnie Shapiro, sports editor of the Sunday Paper, is a union official who comes from the East End of London. He is one of those characters who always makes himself felt. This Jew is humane as well as balanced. Although he expresses his opinion rather openly, he is a very tactful man who knows how to crack a hard nut like Mac Smith. He has a particular philosophy of his own which does not harm others, but he has not a very good opinion of democracy. However, he invariably reminds us of Nannie Cohn who too is a Jew like him and also hails from the same part of London.

Mac Smith, a trade union official, is a shrewd type of union leader who does not support the cause of those who do not

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68. Interview between Wesker and Prof. Bigsby, BBC Tape No. BI 2004.

accept his leadership. Otherwise he is a man of principle when he himself upholds the cause of the union members. He is never a strong-willed man, he is a mean man too. He is a flat character who lacks glimpses of humanity. Although he is a leader, he has not those qualities that go to make a man a great leader. By his gross rudeness, he clearly offers a contrast to Ronnie Shapriro.

Marvin McKevin, assistant sports editor, is an enjoyable character in the play. He is one of the tender-hearted persons who delights others by his humourous disposition. He is a type who is born to make jokes without hurting others.

Gordon Fairchild, the foreign editor, is a successful journalist who has won the confidence of the management. Tamara Drasin calls him a demagogue although he has nothing to do with demagogy. He is rather a sick man of this modern age who thinks himself old at the age of thirty-two.

Pat Sterling, a freelance journalist, is a person who never develops. The only characteristic feature of his character is that he expresses his anxiety about abortions for unmarried girls.

Jonathan Mortimer, Mary Mortimer's eldest son, is a rash type of young man who calls a spade a spade. He comes to dine with his mother and picks a quarrel with her. He disapproves of her biased political view against the working people's leader Morgan King, M.P., who he staunchly supports. He is a type of angry youngster who delights in making his elders angry without being

angry himself.

Desmond Mortimer, Mary Mortimer's youngest son, is less rude and virulent than his eldest brother. He, too, like his brother does not always support his mother's views about Morgan King. He, who is not rude, knows that his mother can be badly hurt by sarcastic remarks.

Fink, a secret agent, is a peculiar person, and a type only really found in this one of Wesker's plays. This type of person is necessary in a class society where the people who are in power like to remain always in power with the help of these secret informers. However, Wesker has devised him mainly to caricature him and he is successful in doing it.

Jane Merryweather and Angela Gourney are two journalists and write women's pages in The Sunday Paper; they are depicted as shadows rather than characters. They are neither important for the drama proper, nor are they significant for their manners or personalities. They are to the Sunday Paper what nuts and bolts are to a machine.

Lamara Brazin, a foreign correspondent, and Cynthia Trevelyan, another journalist in the Sunday Paper, are minor characters. Both of them have become journalists not because they love it but because they are unfit for any other profession. And it is their professional dissatisfaction that has individualised them.

Next to Mary Mortimer, Agnes Mortimer is the most interesting woman character of the play. She is Mary's daughter, but in temperament she is diametrically opposite to her mother. She is a fearless and intelligent girl who stands against her outstanding mother. We know she is on the side of Morgan King and the working people. She is not only actively intelligent, but is able to rebel against the unwise stubbornness of her mother. She is a rebel who has the courage to stand against her mother on the grounds of principle. We, therefore, know what drives her to rebellion; we may not approve of what she does nor what she asserts, but she retains our sympathy for essentially she is a sincere character.

The two women Secretaries are there in the play in order to make it more systematic. They note down what the editors dictate and they obey them almost mechanically. Therefore, as characters they have hardly any separate entity of their own.

The characterisation in The Journalists is not elaborate although this play has the most characters. In The Kitchen there were thirty characters, whereas in this play there are thirty three. Yet we cannot say with certainty that Wesker has done justice to all of them. If we like to see the stiff-collared figures, or the larger-than-life comedy characters, or elemental men and women studied in detail we shall be disappointed. This play has many players, but few characters. Some characters Wesker draws carefully, but some he does not. He furnishes details about

their physical characteristics, and their habits but he seldom injects vivacity into them or shows much of their inner qualities. Most of the people are not properly characters at all, they are merely component parts of the Sunday Paper; they seem to have no separate identity of their own. They are types and are wholly of the surface almost always showing just the single aspect of their life. Sometimes they may have different parts of disposition or different phases of temperament, yet primarily they remain the same in their broad construction.

Nerissa is the only character in The Merchant who belongs to the poor working class. She is not only Portia's faithful maid but has some pleasing qualities of her own which have been praised by Portia. Her father committed her in marriage at the age of seven. Although she had no tutors, she has some education. She is also accomplished to such a degree that she can competently debate or argue with Portia, and sometimes she may differ from her mistress. Sometimes she speaks as if she is Portia's equal, and sometimes she is pleasingly ironical without being caustic at all. But it is not at all surprising when she, having neither father nor husband, speaks against men in general, yet she is not a misanthrope.

## CHAPTER SIX

## WESKER'S WIT HUMOUR AND IRONY

A study of Arnold Wesker will surely remain incomplete if we do not take account of his humour. It is quite natural that Wesker, who sees life widely as well as wisely, can love and laugh at the same time. Whichever political commitment he may have, he is in a position to recognise both human greatness and human imperfection.

His plays, therefore, are a fine display not only of mirth, pleasure and merriment, but of clever and quick wit and bright humour. One can discover innocent pleasure in his works for he is an artist without being a bore. We observe that some of his plays bear the stamp of satire or pathos. However, in the world of change and challenge he does not forget to treat people and their behaviour within their historical context without concealing his compassion and his social involvement; nevertheless he has the broadness of mind to favour the juxtaposition of the comic and the serious or to interpenetrate tragedy with comedy and comedy with the earnestness of tragedy. Wesker studies human life not only with reference to seriousness but with reference to its lighter vein. We shall, therefore, try to discover how far Wesker exercises a compelling power over wit which is primarily a matter of sense and understanding, and humour, which is according

to George Eliot[1], 'a matter of thinking in jest' but 'feeling in earnest'.

Prior to the proper study of Hesker we are to make a distinctive study of wit and humour. It is quite difficult to differentiate between the two, for these two often tend to encroach upon each other's territory. As both of them often intersect one another or as both of them may cause laughter, it is not so easy to differentiate between them in a convincing way. Despite that we like to try to identify them. Wit, which is derived from an old English word ('witan' = to know), now suggests intellectual brilliance and ingenuity and verbal deftness as is found in the epigram[2], or wit may be defined, according to a commentator, as a form of intellectual quickness, raillery and repartee, likely to be an upper-class manner of discourse, likely to be dangerous[3]. It may, however, be defined as 'the armour of wisdom' or as 'the demonstration of verbal skill'[4]; it may, according to the same commentator, depend on 'a skilful use of the incidental properties of words and syntax and reveals its hidden implication suddenly'[5], whereas humour is a kind of higher complacency and relies very largely on situations laughable in themselves or on a purely playful use of language[6]. These observations lead us to conclude that

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1. Harry Shaw : Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms, p. 136
2. J. A. Cuddon : A Dictionary of Literary Terms, p. 739
3. Encyclopedia Britannica, vol. XI, p. 840
4. Chamber's Encyclopedia, vol. XIV, p. 600
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.

wit is, in general, used in contradistinction to humour. We know that both wit and humour may dwell on incongruities or abnormalities. But while the former, that is wit, chiefly consists of an 'intellectual triumph' or 'verbal fencing', the latter tends to pass from 'the outer surface to the inner depth'. While the function of wit is to alienate one person from another, the function of humour is tolerant and participating. If wit is to maintain an intellectual distancing or prefers to play with words or preferably develops startling contrasts, humour, according to a critic, involves a sympathetic recognition of humanity and its incongruities[7]. Wit, therefore, has a sense of detachment, whereas humour takes great care to attach and it basically depends upon insight and sympathy. While wit appeals to head, humour appeals to heart. If wit cares to afford an intellectual pleasure, humour is prone to sentiment and intimacy. There is again a further distinguishing factor between humour and wit. If wit is the dazzling ray that is skin-deep, static and purely ephemeral, humour radiates a ray of hope and purposefulness driving away the age-old but inert inequalities and inconsistencies of life. While wit differentiates Jack from John, humour, which is essentially humane in nature, helps to discover affinity between Jack and John.

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7. H. Shaw : Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms, op. cit. pp. 283-90

The genius of Wesker does not absolutely lie in creating humorous situations or delineating the idiosyncrasies of characters only, as Charles Dickens did in his novels, or in mystifying the sentiments only or sometimes losing himself in fantasy as Charles Lamb did in his 'Essays'; while the humour in either of the two is weakened by their individual inhibitions, that of Wesker rises above personal inhibitions and has mostly become universal. Both Lamb and Dickens, who were essentially romantic at heart though in a different way, ridiculed the absurdities and contradictions of their respective ages humorously. Their works are suffused with the elements of exaggeration, gross caricatures, the riot of absurdities, little drops of sympathies and even the mild castigation of vices, but it is interesting to note that Lamb and Dickens unlike Wesker take life and society from the conventional or individual point of view. They know that the contradictions are the root cause of humour, but they unlike Wesker do not realise that the contradictions are mainly due to socio-economic inequality. If we strip this inequality, there is little of humour. This inequality, which is rather connived at by Lamb or Dickens, is given due importance in Wesker's plays though the humour of Lamb, Dickens and Wesker is commonly an outcome of their personal experiences. Lamb, who loved to chew the cud of a bygone vision, had to create humour in order to shut out personal tragedy; Dickens, who was in favour of preserving the frame of the social imperfections or inequalities, delighted more in uproarious fun

and quick sensibility which might result in social reforms and at the same time save the political structure from wreck.

But Wesker has recourse to humour with a purposeful determination. One thing should be mentioned here; while humour, to Lamb, was a mode of feeling, derived mainly from personal inhibition, that of Dickens mostly drums up sheer fun and frolic often 'recapturing the impression of childhood'[8]. To both Lamb and Dickens humour was a childlike or puerile affair where emotions always intrude, whereas humour to Wesker was an adult affair or an activity which would have aimed, according to Sigmund Freud (cf. in Freud's article "Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious" viii, P. Hogarth, London, 1930, p. 96), at deriving pleasure from mental processes, whether intellectual or otherwise[9]. Yet there is a common ground on which they meet together. This is of warmth and insight. All of them have injected warmth into humour which, as a result, becomes much more homely. Secondly, they have resorted to what, according to J. B. Priestley[10], may be called a humorous realism which is tolerant and affectionate dealing mostly with the ordinary life of their age.

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8. J. B. Priestley : English Humour, pp. 9-10

9. English Literature in Transition (1880-1920) Vol. 21, No. 2, P. 125

10. Priestley : English Humour, op. cit. p. 10

If we make a deeper study of Wesker's works we become very much aware of humour in them. He, who is never a shallow frivolous man, reviews life not in the super-structure only, but in its deeper structure. His business is not to condemn anybody nor are there grins of derision. He sees things not as isolated, static, one-sided and immutable, but he studies things in their relation with other things. That is why the pictures he presents before us are, in general, devoid of mere sentiment. As a realist he can visualise that humour is essentially lying in the relations between the dying side and the developing side of the society. The illustration may be found in his play - '<u>The Kitchen</u>'. Like an objective artist he draws portraits of either side which is in conflict with the other. Wesker can create an amusing scene where Peter, who embodies the developing side, dares confront Marango, the decaying side. It is Marango who has enough complacency to continue to be the master of the kitchen. He has let go even the charms of his personal life and has locked himself in, only in the hope of remaining the sole master of the kitchen where his authority, he hopes, can never be called in question. But his perfect self-composure is really perturbed when Peter at the end of Part Two of the play breaks the gas lead and stops the kitchen from functioning. In this play it is Peter who with bandaged wounds stands apparently triumphant and Marango, who ought to have punished 'the culprit', stands disconcertedly defeated. Marango frets and fumes :

> you have stopped my whole world. Did you
> get permission from God? Did you? 11

later on he rails —

> Why does everybody sabotage me, Frank? I give work,
> I pay well, yes? They eat what they want don't
> they? I don't know what more to give a man. He
> works, he eats, I give him money. This is life,
> isn't it? I haven't made a mistake, have I?
> I live in the right world, don't I? 12

Here it seems that the usual order of things is inverted. It is Ibrango who appears to defend himself rather than offending Peter. Ibrango, the employer, makes this episode really a specimen of humour. He asks Peter, the employed, whether he has permission from God to destroy his kitchen as if he himself did get permission from God to organise a kitchen where a man like Peter cannot even dream. We cannot but resist a smile when we read the above illustrations of his dialogue. It is Ibrango who elicits laughter in us. But the humour of the situation has given such an effect that we laugh more with Ibrango than at him. If humour is, according to a commentator[13], sympathetic and understanding, here is a fine example. The audience knows that at a certain stage of development, Capital, which is, during the twentieth century, in head-on collision with labour, brings forth the material agencies for its

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11. The Kitchen, Part Two

12. Ibid.

13. The Encyclopedia Americana, vol. 14, p. 364

own destruction. Harango may foolishly believe that he lives in 'the right world' without committing any mistake, but others are sure to enjoy his sad plight when they realise that life in 'the right world' does not necessarily consist in 'eating' and 'earning money' only but is something more than that. Harango may take pride in offering food and jobs for the employees of his kitchen though they may be disinclined to live there like slaves. What they substantially want is to proceed whereas Harango wants non-intervention in the status quo. Harango may contend that his kitchen can keep on repeating itself as the kind of thing that cannot change into anything different. As he is not aware of the starting of the contradiction inside the 'kitchen' he can neither expect nor differentiate Peter from the other employees. It is Peter who knows that time is ripe to explode the 'kitchen', but the irony is that Harango does not know it at all or he does not like to know. Here lies the mastery. Thus the reversal of expectation reveals a sense of humour.

The episode of Harango may closely be bound up with what is generally known as 'a comique de situation' or as 'a comique de caractere'. Besides this, there are, in Wesker's plays the manners which are, however, expressed through the medium of the situation and of the words. The manners of Mrs. Bryant in '<u>Roots</u>' derive not from her own character, nor from the author's own experience only, but from the society in which she is brought up. She may be hailed by her own son Frank as "the female head of the mighty

Bryant clan", but the irony is that she fails to see anything good in Beatie, her daughter, who, for the first time in the history of the family, brings the message of a new age. When Beatie Bryant tries to induce the members of her family to cultivate love for art and culture, it is Mrs Bryant who is not yet in a position to escape from the spirit of 'vestigial feudal values' which are, due to the impact of capitalistic growth, crumbling. Mrs Bryant can make a fuss of Stan Mann, but she is not a bit ashamed of 'turning the squit off' on hearing Mendelssohn's Fourth Symphony on the radio. She is in the incorrigible habit of switching off the radio just after the head lines. Moreover, she never keeps good books in her house to read at least to pose as a patron of culture. Beatie cannot but accuse her of, narrowness of outlook and culture :

> God in heaven Mother, you live in the country but you got no — no — no majesty. You spend your time among green fields. You grow flowers and you breathe fresh air and you got no majesty. Your mind's cluttered up with nothing and you shutout the world.14

We cannot, however, but check our smile at the following reply of Mrs Bryant —

> "I fed you : I clothed you. I took you out to the sea. What more d'you want. We're only country folk you know. 15

Mrs Bryant, although not a fool, has something ludicrous about her; and this, of course, is definitely due to her mechanical manners.

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14. Roots, II, ii
15. Ibid.

Being an uncultured woman she cannot see anything good in the newer age. To her, the world is, therefore, made of watertight compartments having no thoroughfare. She has almost the Kiplingite belief that "apple don't fall far from the tree". Thus, she appears to be an amusing as well as a ludicrous person as she becomes a machine. That she becomes a machine is due more to her surroundings than to her own feelings and manners. However, Wesker is here neither aggressive nor derisive. What we notice in him is the playfulness in the depiction of an ignorant and an innocent woman of the countryside.

There is another episode where Mrs Bryant amuses us. She has no knowledge of either anatomy or physiology, and like an apothecary, may thump with her fists and sneer at the sciences, when she makes others believe that uneasiness between the shoulder blades is due to severe indigestion that goes right through the stomach to the back. We may laugh like Beatie Bryant at such a sheer example of ignorance, but this ignorance is nothing but a common superstition that may be still rife in the country. Beatie may brand ignorance as the major enemy of people of her class, but we are sure to be amused at such an instance of ignorance. Here Wesker, the humorist, seems to remain adept at keeping a straight face while poking fun at people and he is believed to be a follower of Chaucer in this respect.

Sometimes the comic spirit finds a typical example in the following dialogue between Beatie and others.

Beatie : I can't Mother, you're right — the apple don't fall far from the tree do it? You're right, I'm like you. Stubborn, empty, wi' no tools for livin'. I got no roots in nothing. I come from a family o' farm labourers yet I ant go no roots — just like town people ...

Frank : Roots, gal ? What do you mean, roots ?

Beatie : Roots, roots, roots ! Christ, Frankie, you're in the field all day, you should know about growing things. Roots ! The things you come from, the things that feed you. The things that make you proud of yourself — roots !

Mrs Bryant: you got a family ant you?

Beatie : I am not talking about family roots — I mean — the — I mean —

Jimmy : What is she on about?

Beatie : I'm telling you that we don't know what we are or where we come from. I'm telling you something's cut us off from the beginning ...

Mrs Bryant: Oh hell, I had enough of her — let her talk a while she'll soon get fed up.

[The others join her at the table and proceed to eat and murmur]

Beatie : .... God in heaven, Ronnie ! It does work ...

[The murmur of the family sitting down to eat grows as Beatie's last cry is heard. Whatever she will do they will continue to live as before] 16

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16. Ibid. III

The above illustration is not only a fine example of irony, wit or innuendo, but also explains and intensifies the ridiculousness of the situation. The character of Beatie Bryant gets adequate revelation here although others look rather blurred. But the whole thing seems laughable when we become conscious of the ridiculous situation in which Beatie has fallen. The introduction of a new idea in a company of prejudiced countryfolk creates an incongruous effect — incongruous in the sense that the persons assembled together in one place fail to understand one another especially Beatie. The guests, who have chiefly come to celebrate the occasion in honour of Beatie on the eve of her proposed engagement to Jamie, her fiance, who never arrives, eat to their hearts' content without taking much notice of Beatie herself, while Beatie, for the first time in her life, begins a new chapter. Incongruity is, of course, evident between the complete devotion to the food on the part of the guests and the apparent pathos of Beatie. If humour be "a union of unconscious with conscious laughter"[17] as says Professor Nicoll, here is enough of it. Here is an instance of humour that not only stirs the depths of the mind, but is closely allied to pathos. If humour may be, according to the commentator of Encyclopedia Britannica[18], a guise to hide tender

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17. A. Nicoll: The Theory of Drama, p. 199

18. The Encyclopedia Britannica, vol. XI, p. 840

feelings, Wesker is in the fullness of his powers here.

Physical attributes may cause laughter although that kind of laughter may be regarded as the lowest possible kind. This sort of coarse laughter is generally resorted to by the music-hall comedian or the clown in the circus. People, in general, do not laugh at those who are physically handicapped, but the fact is that sometimes physical deformities may cause laughter. For example one is sure to laugh at the Monk (in Chaucer's 'Prologue') whose head was bald and whose head shone like a shining glass. Physical deformities are, however, not always laughter-provoking. One is commonly apt to laugh more at the deformities brought about by mental action by foolish habit or by foolish belief. Three youths may find cause to mimic Millie[19] who as an eccentric person walks round in circles in the street. Perhaps the logic of the youths is that they mimic Millie only when they find that an old woman like her mimics the order of the street. They think that a street is a public thoroughfare which is only to be trodden straight instead of being walked round in circles. Millie violates the norms of the street and the youths, therefore, mock at her although they do it at the expense of the general decorum. Here the humour is wholly dependent upon the unusual and the unexpected.

There may be another instance of crude merriment which is derived from the physical incongruity of imaginative nature. Millie,

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19. cf. The Old Ones, I, xii

a Jewess, had to evacuate to Wales during the war with her five daughters. When these girls were admitted into a school, the teacher, who was unexpectedly a prejudiced one, used to tell them that their noses would get longer and horns would come out of their heads because they were Jews. The girls believed the teacher as young girls are apt to believe. These growing girls had restless hours to wait for the offshoot of horns when they, being taken by surprise, saw that their noses got bigger. This episode provokes nothing but innocent laughter because of the incongruity that lies with the false belief of the teacher: a teacher who is expected to be free from prejudices, is himself a victim of such. The humour lies between the orthodox idea of a teacher and his personal prejudice. It is a rare type of humour where fantasy surrenders to reality. Here Tesker amuses us by making a joke while in essence he is definitely not a joker.

A deformity of manners may be instanced by a lack of 'savoir faire', the oversmartness of a certain type of sophisticated character in a circle of pseudo-educated trainees is equally amusing. Just as the awkward presence of a lady is almost insulting as well as amusing in a circle of working class women, the lack of intimacy displayed either by a group of WAAFI officers who are addressing the trainee conscripts or by Rosa, a Ministry of Education careers-advisory officer[20], who is addressing a rowdy

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20. Cf. Chips With Everything

group of school-leavers from a tough neighbourhood, have all in them something of the ludicrous. When the Wing Commander, in his inaugural lecture, says the following to the conscripts —

> you think we are at peace. Not true. We are never at peace. The human being is in a constant state of war and we must be prepared, each against the other. History has taught us this and we must learn. 21

Then Smiler, a trainee, who claims to have been born with a natural smile, is sure to smile along with other trainees. Any sensible man is, of course, able to understand that it is not history which teaches enmity between nations, but either the interpreters of bourgeois history or the incorrigible jingoists or the military junta who propagate the possibility as well as the inevitability of war between nations. Thus whenever the real motive of war is discovered, all the NAAFI Officers including the Wing Commander become genuine objects of ridicule. The classroom episode of Rosa with the trainee boys is another ludicrous example. None can blame the students who indulge in mocking laughter when they find incongruity between Rosa's following lecture and her job which is supposed to be responsible.

> Rosa : .... Society isn't very good at that yet, is it? It's a bit of a monster actually. Eats up everything, indiscriminately. And so, my task is all the more important and what I propose to do is outline the kinds of jobs that are open to you .... 22

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21. Ibid. scene four
22. The Old Ones. I, iv

The manners of Rosa and the Wing Commander are not what we may exactly call examples of deformity, although they are out of line with that particular part of society. Both the Education careers — advisory officer and the RAAF officer touch the surface of life; but they, it is evident, do not sound the depths below. The introduction of these characters may be cited as the instances of humour which is bound up with irony too. Humour is resplendent here so far as their manners are tinged with and mellowed by a certain melancholy of spirit; and the irony is to be traced here when they pretend to harbour an idea that they do not believe in.

There is an occasion which sets Wesker's wit to work. He is well aware of the graver realities of human life, but he sometimes refuses to remain under the controlling influence of those. Then he steps down from high spirits and creates fun pure, simple and innocent. Through such comical surprise or incident Wesker's laughter becomes audible to us. In Chicken Soup with Barley there is a serious underlying intention. The following illustration of a critic may, however, be recovered to give a comprehensive idea of that :

> The Kahns are busy with anti-fascist marches, their friends are setting off for the Spanish Civil War, there is general excitement about the future of socialism. The atmosphere is of optimistic political bustle.23

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23. Bamber Gascoigne : Twentieth Century Drama, p. 53

But Keeker, by the way, takes an opportunity to refer to a comical incident when the Cable Street heroes, in course of their demonstration, gave cigarettes and mugs of tea to the surrendered policemen and called them 'comrade policemen'. A person, who is arrested, can never expect such treatment even from policemen. This is the Keekerian device to provoke laughter of an innocent type. It is remarkable that his laughter does neither cackle nor roar although there is the subtle suggestion of a contrast between the coercion of a state organ and humanism.

Humour is believed to be mellow and generally refined. It may sometimes be compared to an aroma that smells sweet, or a breath of air that refreshes. But humour may, according to Henri Bergson[24] (cf. Le Rire, 1911 Translated by C. Brereton and F. Rothwell as Laughter, London 1935 pp. 137-8), be the rigid, the ready-made, the mechanical, in contrast with the living; automatism in contrast with free activity.

In some cases it may be protean in its variety while it becomes semi-farcical, coarse or rough although it then may lack gall and wormwood. There may be some occasions when the doors of intellect are, for the time being, shut and the dramatis personae

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24. Critical Quarterly, vol. 24, no. 1 Spring 1982, Manchester University Press, p. 130

become rather sentimental or easy preys to primitive instinct. There are, of course, some touches of coarseness or roughness in his 'Trilogy'. The following illustrations will bear testimony to that.

1. Cissie : Paving stones? [She hoists the back of her skirt to warm her behind in front of the fire.]

   Monty : We pulled out the railings from a near-by church and the stones from the gutter. I'll get some more coal for the fire. [Goes to kitchen, pinching Cissie's behind on the way.]
   We turned over a lorry. 25

2. Bentie : I know men as'ould pay to see me in my dicky suit. [Posing her plump outline] Don't you think I got a nice dicky suit?
   [Mr Bryant makes a dive and pinches her bottom.] Ow ! Stoppit Bryants, stoppit ! [He persists.]
   Paddy, stop it now ! 26

3. Pearl [to Bentie] : Hev his sister got any children?

   Bentie : Two boys.

   Jimmy : She wanna get on top one night then they'll hev girls.

   Jenny : Oh shut you up Jimmy Beales[27].

4. Mrs Bryant : Be you a-drinkin' on your tea look. Don't you worry about no naked gals. The gal won't get cold but the tea will. 28

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25. Chicken Soup with Barley, I, 11

26. Roots, II, 11

27. Roots, III

28. Ibid.

5. Cissie : so I bloody can't. The good lord gave me hands and I like using them.

Father : The good lord gave you an arse but you don't have to be sh ...

Cissie : Father ! 29

The above illustrations may be cited as instances of coarse humour, but they are never vulgar, for vulgarity, as William Hazlitt observes, does not necessarily consist of grossness, ignorance or awkwardness[30]. As long as the manners of these common folk are natural, spontaneous or unavoidable, there is no touch of vulgarity, although a man of polished society may find a lack of the traditional norms of decency and decorum in their manners. However, it is remarkable that such illustrations are apt to occur more in 'The Trilogy' than in any of Dunker's other plays. This type of reference to coarseness is rare in his later plays. Shakespeare introduced some comic incidents and situations not only to please the groundlings but to answer their needs. Dunker perhaps introduces these as comic relief and secondly he discovers unseen ways to amuse the working people in the handling of materials which definitely bear the touch of reality. The manners and behaviours of the working people are not expected to be analogous to those of the polished and refined town dwellers, but are not unbecoming to the persons referred to. What is important

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29. I'm Talking about Jerusalem III, i

30. W. Hazlitt : Table Talk, p. 161

here to note is that Wesker finds an opportunity to make contact with reality. Humour, we know, deals with the reality that depends upon the common life on this earth. All that is important here to note is that Wesker gives us the semblance of reality, but he never shows perversion. Even a purist may feel assured that the image of time-honoured standards of sex is maintained here nor is its collapse even hinted at. The indulgence of coarse humour may not necessarily contribute to aesthetic satisfaction but we are sure that the above illustrations have nothing to do with pornography.

Wesker discovers the elements of humour in the theme of the male-female relationship too. Here he resorts to a superior kind of humour in comparison with the above illustrations. It is Sarah Kahn who finds opportunity to complain to her son about Harry, her husband, who on one serious occasion was excessively indifferent to his pregnant wife :

> Sarah : you think I didn't love your father enough don't you? I'll tell you something. When Ada had diphtheria and I was pregnant I asked Daddy to carry her to the hospital. He wouldn't. We didn't have money because he didn't care to work and I didn't know what to do. He disappeared. It was Mrs Bernstein who saved her ... Not even my brothers had money in those days,and a bit of dry crust with a cup of tea ... But Daddy had the relief money. Someone told me they saw him eating salt-beef sandwiches in Bloom's. He didn't care. 31

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31. Chicken Soup op. cit. III, ii

If we care to look from the point of view of Sarah, who stands here as a persecuted wife, we cannot but find fault with her husband, who in a carefree manner eats salt-beef sandwiches while his daughter is dying of diphtheria in the very lap of his wife who is still big with his unborn son. According to Harry the family may be an artificial institution, and as such he may not find any reason to adjust himself fully to its tyranny. He may represent the proletariat, destitute of property and the sole bread-winner of the family, but he, in fact, may be defined as a bourgeois so long as he believes in the 'disguised domestic enslavement of the woman'.[32] No matter whether he is a professed proletarint or a disguised bourgeois, he, by his behaviour, becomes responsible for creating an incongruity. The incongruity arises when Harry, as a member of a society, where conjugal order prevails, becomes an object of derision, while Sarah wins a measure of praise. However, the introduction of an irresponsible father beside a responsible mother is, like a plain and unvarnished thing, incongruous, and most of our merriment arises from the sense of this incongruity. Nevertheless Venkar's humour and pathos may not be sharply differentiated here; we do laugh at the inconsistency of the character of Harry Kahn as we tend to shed tears for those poverty-stricken millions who often play hide and seek with a view to stemming the tide of bitter reality.

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32. Marx and Engels : Selected Works, p. 510

It would be unjust to conclude, if it is discerned, that Wesker's humour lies in laughter-producing power only. He may take a person or an event which he examines from many sides and make it a pivotal point connected or associated with other objects or places in its environment and finally discover the light as well as the darkness around it. He is in favour of a change, but when that is not easily achieved, he goes from the matter of fact to the very depths of it. Esther's death[33] may seem to be pathetic, but the pathos, which holds us in thrall, is not at all redundant here. He does not try to wring an extra tear from the situation, nor does he try to overstate it. The situation is poignant indeed although detail is not heaped upon detail here. Wesker sees the fact of Esther's death from Roland's point of view, and from Chicky's, from the points of view of Manfred, Crispin, Simone and Jessa. Precisely, Wesker sees the fact from every point of view and makes the pathos of Esther's death inevitable although it does not mean for her a complete wreck of her concrete hopes. The abiding truth of this situation is that Wesker puts life by the side of what is called death, and invites us to perceive the meaning between the two, but not to make humourous jests in the court of death.

Let us now focus our attention on Wesker's play The Journalists, the latest play in book form. The elements of wit,

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33. cf. The Friends

humour and irony are amply illustrated in this play. Truly speaking, the older and more experienced Wesker becomes, the more the elements of wit or humour become finer. It is also a matter for consideration that these elements, of late, do not in general smack of coarseness as they did before. Wesker has introduced these elements, with the fine touch of his chisel, more sharp and refined; and we can observe that these elements have warmth, if not heat. Let us make our observations concrete with the following illustration:

Mary : Do you children rehearse your pieces before coming to dine with me?

Agnes : This is a very fine stew, mother.

Mary : There speaks the diplomat of the family. 34

It is Mary, the mother of Agnes, who has the job of a journalist the aim of which is to investigate everything from the democratic point of view. She pretends to be witty and overbearing with others even when she drinks with the Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. But this woman, who is very successfully influential in her career, has least influence on her children. Moreover, she has to listen with dignity to the witty sayings of her own daughter. Agnes knows not only how to wield her wit with quickness of mind but attempts to ward off the filial bitterness of her mind but expresses her own character although in an

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34. The Journalists, the centre space, p. 34

indirect way. When her mother is on the side of heat, she is on that of warmth; when her mother is on the sour side, she makes the atmosphere cheerful and enjoyable, and again when her mother drags herself to the side of seriousness, she, with economy makes the situation essentially comical. The above illustration, therefore, is an instance of wit which is a mixture of a flash of lightning and a soothing balm at the same time. Here is wit the role of which is to maintain, let us quote Miriam Allen Chaikin in this regard, "an intellectual distancing"[35] — that is to amuse or entertain and to provide scope for an appreciation of cleverness of the person concerned. Moreover, the wit used here transcends personal boundaries and emits the flavour of humour.

However, gentle, genial and genuine kinds of humour are available in The Journalists. The following illustration, which consists of the above qualities, is also flavoured with the oddities and eccentricities of Mary, the principal character of the play, but nevertheless it is an example of a delightful creation of humour.

Jonathan : Mother, don't be so damned bourgeois.

.... ....

Mary : I AM NOT BOURGEOIS !
Bourgeois is a state of mind not of wealth.

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35. English Literature in Transition, op. cit. p. 126

Jonathan : Not in the classic sense it's not.

Mary : To hell with the classic sense. Words acquire new meanings ... I love and care for my children. That's natural, an old cycle, tested long before men began exploiting men. If I'd forced you into professions you'd've been miserable with, if I'd have given you luxuries to soften the spirit of your spine that would have been bourgeois. But I've given you a home to dig your personalities in: security ! Not to seclude you but to help you face an insecure world. That's not bourgeois — well is it? I'm not bourgeois if I enjoy the best that men have fought to preserve from the past — only if I allow that past to cripple the future. I'm not bourgeois if I enjoy comfort — only if comfort diffuses my anger against injustice. I'm not bourgeois if I acknowledge a debt to dead men and if I'm fearful of the future. That's human. To enjoy being helpless about evil that's bourgeois, but to feel, to just simply feel helpless about evil that's human. To have loves and hates and failures and regrets and nostalgias, that's human. If I pretend order exists when it doesn't that's bourgeois, but if I try to create order out of the chaos of my miserable life that's human, bloody human, bloody bloody human.

Agnes : you see, mother, he also talks about order out of chaos. 36

The more Mary becomes eloquent, the more she helps create a space for the benefit of doubt about her statement. The oddity and eccentricity lie deeply rooted in her self-revelation. Here she

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36. The Journalists, the Centrespace, op. cit. pp. 34-36

appears to be neither a loving mother with all her human frailties as such, nor a veteran professional journalist. What she really appears to be is an accused and accursed one in the people's court of justice where she likes to make a clear statement about her self-defence before she is finally lynched. But we know for certain that her self-defence even before her own children is in no way a defence at all, and her exceedingly long speech does not seem to refute the charge seemingly lodged against her. The net result, therefore, is that she, when we make a complete survey of her statement, becomes more and more ridiculous. Thus in this play the world of tragedy and the world of comedy are interwoven.

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Let us now examine whether some farcical elements are there in his play '<u>The Journalists</u>'. If farce is a type of drama that claims to be "stuffed with low humour and extravagant wit"[37], this play has definitely got some elements of farce. Farce may, in general, be effectively used in a short play where there is little or no scope for elaboration of plot or character; farce may deal with exaggerated comic incidents that may border between belief and disbelief, or it, according to a commentator[38], may deal with 'some absurd situation' that reveals 'the inherent

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37. A. Nicoll : <u>The Theory of Drama</u>, op. cit. pp. 87-88

38. P. Hartnoll : <u>The Oxford Companion to the Theatre</u>, p. 308

stupidity of man at odds with his environment'. Our proposition would be clear with the following illustration :

Mary : we'll try the scientist then

Desmond : Three Soviet scientists — G.I. Beridge, G. R. Macharashvili and L. M. Mosulishvili have discovered gold in wine.

Mary : I beg your pardon?

Desmond : Flowers and plants, you see, contain in their tissues residues of the metals contained in the soil where they grow. Hence bio-chemistry can trace deposits of nickel, silver, copper, cobalt, uranium, lead and other metals by pursuing, picking and analysing flowers and fruit.
And so three Soviet scientists called L. M. Mosulishvili have discovered gold in wine. (Pause) which comes from grapes. (Pause) which grows in soils. 39

In the above illustrations importance is given more to mere situation than to either character or plot proper; and the situation depends more upon exaggeration and disbelief; the situation here is not poignant as it has little or no connection with the plot itself, but it is much more subtle because the son appears to have been completely successful in forcing his highly sophisticated mother to reach an equally sophisticated verisimilitude of truth. The point of amusement here depends not upon what we may call burlesque, but upon the subtle use of wit

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39. The Journalists, Op. cit. p. 34

which, at the same time, produces the semblance of a joke which has some connection with intellectual pleasure. Still there is great relief when we come to learn that the situation is not made effective at the expense of the general atmosphere of the play. Wesker does not seem to put any trust in science either in its present or in its future. He derides equally the erudite inferences of the scientists or their theories when most of the people of the world are naked or ill-fed. When the millions are in dire need of chicken soup with barley what is the utility of extracting gold from wine or minerals from vegetables? Wesker like Desmond believes that the idle ventures of such scientists are the playthings of thought; fashion upholds them and then they pass away. Here he reveals the hidden springs of power of the autocratic state that goes far away from the attitude to welfare of mankind. A friend of order, Wesker throws the light of a superior and destructive irony upon the smallness of the means, the vanity of the motives through which the politicians retain their positions and scientists build their career. What Wesker wants to show is that human civilisation is mostly unintelligible for perversity surpasses all understanding. He is ready to accept science as a reality provided that it fulfils the needs of man , but he condemns it as a reality when the scientists fail to act according to the needs of the humane society. His verdict on life is of the sociological and moral order. His aim is, therefore, to satirise the scientists, who have no clear purpose and no sound knowledge of moral anatomy. But Wesker

does not definitely make a lampoon nor an invective in the above illustration.

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Wesker has endowed many of his working class characters with so much life; we know that he has sympathy for them. But as an artist he does not always express his own subjectivity through his plays while he depicts his characters; he sometimes feels the need of detachment from them too. This is the way he creates irony and maintains his ironic position. As a member of a particular class he is bound to incorporate himself into his working class characters, but as an artist he keeps himself aloof from his work. Thus he becomes creative and critical at the same time, and his dual role is well displayed through the device of irony. The following illustration will give us an idea of Wesker's sense of irony :

Monty : Hello, Harry boy, how you going?
All fighting fit for the dance?

Harry : I'm fit, like a Trojan I'm fit !

Sarah : You won't see him at any dance.
In the pictures you'll find him[40].

Irony lies in there where the author seems to be saying one thing while he is really saying something quite different[41]. Here Wesker gives us the example of a striking irony, and it is the contrast

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40. Chicken Soup, op. cit. I, i

41. D.C. Muecke : Irony, p. 30

which makes it striking. The contrast is being made between the apparent meaning of Harry's words and their real implication, between the pretension of the speaker and the confirmed supposition of the persons addressed. It is Harry who states that he is prepared to face the demonstration as though he is a Trojan solider. But the Trojans lost the battle with the Greeks, who won. However Harry pretends to be brave, but we accept him as one of those who are defeated. On the surface level, therefore, Harry's plain statement seems to be either an affirmation of bravery or an assertion of bravado; but if we delve deep into it there is another meaning. It is this division of meaning which makes effective irony here.

The above illustration may be cited as an example of situational irony. Situational irony, according to a critic[42], tends to be purely comic, tragic or philosophic. The apparent picture of Harry that is presented to us is a comic one, but on the deeper level he appears to be a philosopher who is indifferent to the fate of a vanquished Trojan. To him life may be a peculiar combination of victory and defeat. However, the art of irony used here resembles the art of wit. Harry, the witty man, makes the situation ironical.

Let us now look at another kind of irony in Keeker's early play

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42. Ibid.

Monty : ... How is Hymie ? ...

Sarah : Hymie is all right. He's got a business. His children are married and he stays at home all the time. Prince works in a second-hand shop.

Monty : A second-hand shop? But I thought — and Cissie?

Sarah : The union members retired her. She lives on a pension, visits the relatives — you know —

Monty : It's all broken up, then?

Sarah : What's broken up about it? They couldn't keep up with the Party — so? The 'fight' still goes on.

.... .... ....

Cissie : Listen, Sarah. Monty's got a nice little greengrocer's business in Manchester, no one knows he was ever a member of the Party and we're all happy. It's better he forgets it. 43

The above illustration is a superb example of verbal irony. The irony is striking when Sarah can differentiate between Monty, the party member, and Monty, the petty businessman, or Monty, the bachelor socialist-fighter, and Monty, the goody goody male-head of a 'happy' family. Monty is unhappy due to his deviation from socialism which is supposed to be a wrecked ship to him. So he wants to console himself when he is informed of the deviation of other comrades too from the same faith. But it is Sarah who

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43. Chicken Soup Op. cit. III, 1

dexterously pricks the balloon of his vanity and makes his hidden desire stark naked. Sarah reminds him that the fight is still going on although some once-faithful comrades have of late withdrawn their allegiance. The above illustration may, however, be cited as an instance of sarcasm which adds much pungency to an observation and exposes the vice of the renegade.

Irony appears in Wesker's later play too. The following are the instances of irony :

1. Agnes : But no quarrels, Jonathan?

   Jonathan : Yes, elder sister.

   Agnes : We only have dinner with her once a month so no more dreary taunts about her being bourgeois. Yes?

   Desmond : Yes, elder sister.

   Agnes : We don't think much of her column but we love her. Understood?

   Together : Yes, elder sister[44].

2. Mary : Good God ! We've started with agreements. [45]

3. Mary : You are rather cruel children, aren't you?

   Desmond : Yes, we are, you're right. I'm sorry.
   ..... .....

   Mary : I AM NOT BOURGEOIS ! [46]

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44. The Journalists op. cit. p. 34

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

The essence of all the three examples must be considered together if we are to discover some relation between them. Mary's three young children have come to dine with her after a month and they do promise not to have a row either with their mother or with regard to her column in the journal. But practically they say one thing when they positively mean another; all that is important to note here is that they pretend to love their mother but what they really want is to expose her or to ridicule her; they are supposed to begin with agreements with their mother, but soon they start to disagree with her. Mary, who perhaps is aware of the intention of her children, shamefacedly declares that she is not a bourgeois. She becomes an object of ridicule with her denial which is rather taken for granted as an approval. Her attempt of concealment becomes an object of revelation. Here lies irony which gives us the semblance of humour.

Before we make a study of The Wedding Feast we have observed that Wesker has affectionately been caressing human imperfection and human folly in his previous plays. But for the first time we behold him caressing class imperfection and class folly here in this play. While we discern gracious gaiety or jubilant ecstasy in his previous plays, we have here something which may seem to be entirely disconcerting, and this he does even with the help of comic portraiture as well as 'the bacchanalia of benevolence'. Wesker had previously been dealing with humour, wit or irony in a limited way; but this is the first play in which is seen the complete

juxtaposition of the serious and comic. This play might have been a tragedy if Wesker the dramatist could have held himself aloof from Wesker the artist. To some this play may appear to be an averted tragedy, for according to them Mr Louis Litvanov is a tragic personage, because in him the fashion of humanity has grown supremely great, and under its influence his external life or the life with his employees is almost wrecked and ruined. But the very motif of this play is quite different. That is why Mr Litvanov is comic and his fashion of humanity proves fainter than the typical pride of his class. Does he feel the impulse of humanity? It is quite explicit from the following extracts :

1. Louis : What, what if he knew that outside, at this very moment, I, his boss, someone he felt was his superior, was toying with thoughts of coming in? What would he say? What would he deal if suddenly I did walk in? Ha ! Dumb ! He'd be dumb with embarrassment... How I'd transform that embarrassment into a sweet pleasure, a real human moment. What would happen? I'd go in. Silence. They're amazed. Anxious. Dancing steps. They back away. Understandable. But I go straight up to the groom. A smile. Simple words. Tell him about the puncture, the voices going for crates of beer, the sounds of music I heard, the coincidence. 'I don't suppose you'll turn me out', I say. Turn me out ! Ha ! He'll be ecstatic ! He'll take my coat — rush to get me an armchair — trremble with delight. And one by one I'll make the acquaintance of the guests, the bride, compliment her, tell jokes — about coming again in nine months to be Godfather. I'll beg them not to stand on ceremony. But not for self-honour, I won't be looking for special attention, laurels, flattery, servile humbleness.

> so ! My actions will evoke nobler feelings. Our conversation will be modest, natural, men feeling men in a human situation ... Two sides ! They'll see two sides of me. And when they're old they'll tell their children and I'll be spoken of with affection, honoured, remembered. 47

After such a meditation from Mr Louis Litvanov let us give elaborate illustrations that may be put forward as studies in contrast. The illustrations will amply prove the contradiction between what he really is and what he pretends to be or between what he expects and what he actually sees happen. Hence the irony in between the illustrations .

2. (a) Knocker : Well go t'hell ! The master !
Louis : Knocker White, don't you recognise me?
Knocker : I'm sorry, Mr Liftoff — er — Litvanov. Sit you on a chair, look. 48

(b) Kate : Well, well, well ! Mr Litvanov, how unexpected. 49

(c) Mr Dawson : Who is that?
Mrs Dawson: Thass Liftsnoff, what own the factory[50].

(d) Emily : Did we invite the owner?
Louis : I'll stay for half an hour or so —
Emily : Why didn't you tell me we invited the owner? 51

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47. The Wedding Feast, Prologue, scene four

48. Ibid. II, I

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid. II, 3

51. Ibid.

(e) "In the confusion Knocker hands Louis an empty glass". 52

(f) Louis : Thinks the class-struggle goes on all the time.
Kate : Stop deceiving yourself and go home.
Louis : (Hurt) I'm not deceiving myself and I won't go home till respects have been paid and you're proved wrong.
Kate : Louis, I'm warning you. You're a dear man, but don't depend on my affection to see you safely through social experiments with my family. 53

(g) Stephen : Excuse me, Mr Litvanov, I'm Stephen Bullock, friend of Kate's, reporter on the local press. Mind if I mention that you came to Knocker's wedding?
Louis : Mind? Of course I don't mind. I'd like you to. Tell them — Louis Litvanov came to drink the health of one of his workers, uninvited, unprompted, came and sat among the guests, like one of them. 54

(h) Stephen : How long has he been here?
Knocker : Come about half'n hour ago.
Stephen : And wasn't he invited? 55
Knocker : No ! That he weren't ! Invited !

(i) Tinker : Daphne ! You shouldn't be leaving your employer to drink beer — that's for the proles. Whisky ! Get the man some whisky as befits his station in life.
Louis : I didn't come here to drink you know. It wasn't my intention to —
Tinker : Thass alright, thass alright, my manzie. 56

(j) Martin : We all choose once, then we can't choose no more. We give ourselves upto discipline. In factories, offices, everywhere.

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52. Ibid.

53. Ibid. II. 10
54. Ibid. II. 12
55. Ibid. II. 14-15
56. Ibid. II. 19

Louis : Don't make it sound like God, young man. Employers have their disciplines as well. Employers, unions ! Balance of forces !

Ringo : Here bluebottle, bluebottle. Here bluebottle. 57

(k) Maureen : You know what I'm called?
Louis : No, what're you called?
Maureen : Skirts.
Louis : Skirts?
Maureen : Skirts Dawson, on account I like showin' my legs (To a slow 'woosh' she draws up her skirt to show a leg. Louis is embarrassed.) 58

(l) Maureen : Wanna dance? Come on, Mr Litvanc. I'll show you how.
Louis : I'm not very good at this you know.
Maureen : ... Just hop, jump, sway, twist — anythin' anyhow.
Smile, tho, there not a funeral.
Louis : I'm concentrating.
Maureen : Relax, loosen up, flop (He tries to do just that. Then to his horror he realises that Maureen is swaying seductively and slowly sliding her skirt up to reveal a suggestively rotating pelvis). There right. Very good. Good boy. Yes. Mmmm !
Louis : Stop that. No. Really. That's not nice. Stop it. Stop doing that.
Kate : THE FOOD IS READY ! 59

(m) Bonny : (incredulous to see Litvanov there) never ! Never touched a brick in my life, Mr Litvanov. 60

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57. Ibid. II. 21

58. Ibid. II. 23-25

59. Ibid. II. 25-26

60. Ibid. II. 25

(n) "Knocker whose agitation never really subsides, rises to reach for a sauce bottle and knocks a glass of champagne over Louis, who jumps up. Kate, Mrs Dawson and Emily, all jump up with him".
Mrs Dawson: Knocker, you clumsy oaf, Mr Liftoff's expensive suit ruined. I'm sorry Mr Liftoff.
Louis : Litvunov ?
Mrs Dawson: Liftonoff, yes. Now don't you fret .... 61

(o) "Stephen and Louis stumble through from the kitchen. To Knocker's consternation they're quarrelling violently. Both are very drunk". 62

(p) Louis : No respect.
Stephen : I knew you'd give yourself away if I just let you carry on, Mr Liftoff ...
Stephen : You came here to court popularity, didn't you? Good ole Liftoff ...
Louis : I said remember who you're talking to, young man.
Stephen : I'm talking to you and I'm not a young man. You spoilt everyone's enjoyment. Do you know that? You came, they had to buy champagne, and then you humiliated them by buying not one but six bottles yourself. Good ole Liftoff yes ... 63

(q) Kate : Ah, our guest of honour. We bin neglectin' him. Louis, come here.
Tinker : Louis ? Ah ! Leeeeeouis ! Welcome back, Louis.
"Everyone mockingly picks up the name and calls it out at varying levels of the harmonic scale". 64

(r) "Stephen retakes the soda syphon and fires his weapon in a swinging circle at every one ... But Kate and David have to reach for their coats which leaves Stephen still on Knocker's shoulders, free to pick up the syphon again and squirt it on Knocker's backside. Knocker staggers so far back into the room that he's even able to squirt it, finally, over Louis, before he's dumped in the street and wanders off, chanting". 65

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61. 1914. II. 29-30
62. 1914. III. 1
63. 1914. III. 4
64. 1914. III. 5
65. 1914. III. 7

(e) Louis : .... not one of you love me, do you? Not one. Whereas me — I — I — love you all — and

Bonky : The food you eat in some shape or form, the bricks you use, the tools you use, the wood you use, the match you use, the chairs you sit on — they all come from the earth. Don't they ? 66

(t) "They begin to blindfold in the chess-game ... There is a heightening of tension and excitement. Maureen with a nervous laugh takes off her shoe and taps Louis. Then Tinker takes off his shoe and taps Louis. What's happening? Tinker raises his shoe like a triumphant sword above his head. The other three follow. Defiance, however futile, is contagious in a crowd, and so the remaining ones take off their shoes and all stand with shoes poised high. Louis is alert. Something's in the wind. One by one they each step forward to tap him. He's confused. They become intoxicated. The beating grows. It's no longer a game. A mob mentality takes over and each tap becomes more malevolent, the sound of the whack more frequent, until all control is lost and they simply crowd in and beat him about the body. (Not the face) Louis realises he's being beaten. He wrenches off the blindfold with a profound howl of great rage". 67

We presume that the above segments arranged in the order of a montage have not only made a composite picture of Mr Louis Litvanov, but have exposed his class character. While he goes to attend the feast in order to "evoke nobler feelings" (vide the illustration no. 1 above) we notice him welcomed with derision [vide the illustration nos. (a), (b), (c), (d), (g), (h) and (s)] and well-beaten by shoes at the end [vide the illustration no. (t)] He tries his best to hide his real intention with the

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66. Ibid. III. 8-9

67. Ibid. III. 11-12

varnish of humanitarian zeal, but all his efforts are in vain especially to Stephen [vide the illustration no. (b)]. While he attempts to innoculate himself against any attack from the other side of his class, they discover the very virus of his class character. Thus, he falls below our conception and becomes a comic and a humorous figure. He proceeds like a gallant in order to win a meed of praise as well as respect from those who in fact 'honour' him with shoes. Possibly he is slow to admit that there is a difference between what one desires and what one actually attains. Secondly, he does not perhaps know that there is in him a boisterous vitality inherent within the garb of an imperious employer. Thirdly, he is not perhaps aware that the 'servile humble persons' will really be able to discover in his the glimmer of silliness and imbecility. Mr Louis Litvanov, with his high status as well as ineptitude excites a smile which carries with it something of contempt and derision. Yet the humour here ripples delicately over the surface of the play. Here lies incongruity and here he becomes a comic personage. Here Wesker, as a humorist, is very much more than a jester or a fun-maker. On the contrary he is much more subtle in the presentation of a character as well as being prolific in subject matter. He in this way chooses to amuse the public and at the same time to induce them to think seriously. Step by step he unfolds his art. First he depicts Louis as a respected (though not respectable ) employer with all sorts of humanitarian and munificent activities for the welfare and 'love' of his employees,

than he portrays him as a hateful husband as well as a father, thirdly, as a humbug, fourthly as a veritable fool and a knave, and finally as a depraved person. And this he does with the chiselled touch of his art.

Thus The Wedding Feast is not only a play of fun, humour or irony (the play itself depends upon irony), but it is also a play of satire. It is almost a satire on the upper class people whose flesh really starves [Louis telephones from his bathroom to his wife in London, and Maureen's attempt to seduce Louis at the wedding place, vide the illustration nos. (k) and (l)] while they do live with the consolation of an idea only. In the case of Louis he lives with the idea of looking after the welfare of his employees only. But is he a sincere humanitarian ? The answer will definitely be in the negative [cf. the illustration no. (p) above]. He expected to be honoured and respected by the wedding party; but it should be noted that he is being deliberately addressed as 'Liftoff' or 'Liftsoff' more often than not. This is an honourable treatment indeed !

Now let us take the account of the other side. Does he care to do something that can be counted as honourable or respectable? It is Bonky, one of his employees, who attends the wedding feast with a present which is a work of art by himself. But what does Louis do? He attends the wedding feast uninvited with no present, neither a work of art nor flowers. But instead what he really does is to bribe those working people with the bottles of whisky which will be most befitting his own status and class. The reason by

does not want them to bring bottles of beer is that beer is fit for the proletariats only [vide illustration no. (i) above.]. Moreover, he expresses his desire to stay in Knocker White's house for an hour or so [vide illustration no. (d) above], but it is an irony, that he stays all night there, and he does it to mar the wedding night which may have exclusively been for the bride and the groom. Therefore, his stay, however forced it may be, in the house of his employee on his wedding night can no longer be considered as a token of honour. Moreover, what we call bestiality is the attributes of this employer who is no less a ludicrous hypocrite.

In this play the irony is the vanity of the motive of the employer and the illusion of his humanity. Litvanov's way is also the way of the persons in power and authority who endeavour to retain their powers and offices. Thus through the texture of the play Wesker does not rail at a particular individual only, but the whole class, that is, the ruling class. His weapon is obviously the corrosive satire and the pungent irony. He discovers the littleness of that class and puts up a seathing indictment against it. And yet Wesker has not done anything bitter, nor does he evince any scorn. This he does when he fuses irony and satire into his play which has in it a wealth of invention, a fund of thought revealed by way of an explicit action. All that is important to note is that Wesker as an artist is never a propagandist here. Through the portraiture of Litvanov, Wesker gives us an idea of topsyturvydom. Litvanov came to pose for the ruled while the mark

of his class character is thoroughly exposed.

The above discussion may help one to observe that humour and wit, ironic and farcical, fill Wesker's works with a white light. And, in this regard, we should bear in mind that Wesker never writes with a pen dipped in acid; if there be drops of acid, they are used to assist realism and to make his plays more interesting; they add force to the descriptions too. We should not, however, forget the fact that Wesker neither confines himself essentially to an exhibition of intellectual gymnastics as did Congreve, Oscar Wilde or Bernard Shaw, nor does he live chiefly in his comic characters as did Dickens, nor does he put stress on the absurd characters who put forward all their follies to the world. We cannot expect to find characters like a Mrs Malaprop, a Mirabel, a Mr Pickwick or a Micawber in his plays. His dramatic works may be found weak in basic humorous characters the types of which are mentioned above; but that does not mean that he is an inferior or insignificant artist. There are occasions where he makes a fine admixture of wit and humour, fun and farcical elements which assuredly present the distinguishing qualities of Wesker as an artist. Great depths, as we find in Shakespeare's mature works, may not be obtainable in his plays, but for artistic quality along with progressive outlook he has perhaps few peers, and no superior among the modern English dramatists. Nobody will think that he is essentially a humorous writer who mainly deals with the roly-poly kind of humour; he is more than that; despite the fact that almost all his plays radiate some sparkles of brilliant humour and a zest for life as well — here lies Wesker's unique quality.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## WESKER THE SHORT STORY WRITER

The short story, as a notable literary form, has become a favourite form of present-day writing. The popularity of this branch of literature is, according to some critics[1], due to the spread of education, the increased purchasing power of the people and their leisure for enjoyment of literature. However, many eminent novelists and dramatists have tried their hands at short story writing and have become successful. That they have recourse to this art form does not necessarily mean that they have chosen it as a sideline, but, on the contrary, they have explored and have been exploring newer possibilities in this form of literature.

Arnold Wesker has become more famous in the domain of drama than in this narrative art. It may equally be safe to assume that Wesker the short story writer will perhaps never surpass the excellence achieved by Wesker the dramatist for he has already been acclaimed as one of the major dramatists of Europe in the second half of the twentieth century.

But it should, however, be borne in mind that Wesker never treats the short story as a sideline nor has he taken it as the obvious medium for an unsuccessful dramatist. On the contrary he

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1. Legouis and Cazamian : A History of English Literature, p. 1366

began his literary career as a short story writer with Pools which he started writing in 1956 before he was actually known as a dramatist. Up till now he has had nine short stories published, and these show a definite gift for story writing. His main activities have been concentrated both inside and outside the theatre and he has attempted "to bring culture to the workers through his Centre 42, with its base at the Roundhouse in North London"[2]. The handful of stories, which he has written, were published for the first time in 'The Jewish Quarterly magazine' which has a small circulation. Consequently they are not widely known. He has also lost wide popularity owing to his commitment to his principles. Had he been able to believe in laissez-faire (as in economics, so in art) within a capitalist economy practising "all the wiles of salesmanship — mass appeal, sex appeal, adulteration, and the sacrifice of quality of cheapness"[3], he might have been a best-seller. He could not, for he considered modern vulgar art to be a feat of the capitalist society. He wanted to remain an artist of and for the working class. Finally, the paucity of his stories denotes that he most probably preferred the technique of drama to that of the short story.

There is a difference between a drama and a short story although these may be compounded of the same raw materials. One may be of the opinion that anyone can write a short story if he "has

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2. Peter Roberts : Theatre in Britain, p. 18

3. Wimsatt and Brooks : Literary Criticism, p. 473

pens, ink and paper at command, and a certain amount of leisure and patience"[4], but these requisites are not enough for a dramatist. Again the drama is not pure literature as is a short story; it is a compound art which is organically bound up with the elements of stage setting and histrionic interpretation. Moreover, drama interprets "man's experience as though it were happening at that very instant. By this means the theatre approximates life as it is lived and felt moment by moment. Like life, each episode is experienced and then immediately becomes part of the past[5]. A short story owes its existence to the interest and invites a reader to imagine a panorama of human passion and action but it never allows an audience to be moved by a living spectacle enacted before their eyes as does a drama. The actors and actresses attempt to arrest the attention of the audience through a succession of moving scenes, and these are not available in a short story. While a short story builds a moment's monument, a drama is 'a selection of dazzling scenes' which can hold the audience. Aesker's first short story was Regis and it was beautifully conceived. Within limitations he was able to breathe into the story the spirit of life — life that he had seen and experienced in the East End slums of London after the scourge of the Second World War.

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4. W. H. Hudson : Introduction to the Study of Literature, p. 130
5. Oscar J. Brockett : The Theatre, p. 3

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Roots is a succession of dramatic scenes. Without dawdling over much details Wesker unfolds the plot bit by bit. This story is remarkably striking one from the point of view of economy. There is not a single word which is superfluous. Wesker neither piles on too many details nor does he resort to too many characters or incidents. On the other hand he focuses his attention mainly on a single character, Mrs Hyams, through whom we see the condition of the working class in England in the middle of the twentieth century. There is not a single unnecessary description or a digression that spoils either the interest or the suspense of the story. So far as the structure of the story is concerned it gives us an impression of Freytag's Triangle[6] that gives us a graphic illustration of the epitasis or rising action, a climax, or turning-point and a falling action, in which the implication of the climax is explored and brought to a conclusion. With a few masterly touches Wesker not only sketches his characters but he paints the considerable poverty of the London slums; he depicts retrogression amidst so-called progress.

The story is not just the psychological study of Mrs Hyams who is the central character round whom all the others revolve. It is a social story that deals with a few working people who have been reduced to poverty by exploitation. It depicts a bourgeois society that is rotten at the core.

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6. Lee T. Lemon : A Glossary for the Study of English, pp. 40-41

Mrs Hyams, a Jewish widow of sixty, lives at Fashion Street in the East End of London. Her husband was killed in the war. She has a daughter and a son who do not live at home. Stephen, her son, visits her once a week. She finds it hard to be separated from him and her daughter, so she hopes in vain to buy a house large enough for them and their families. She is friendly too with her neighbours and visits a neighbour like Mrs Levy who is so poor that she cannot even greet her guest for want of adequate clothing, nor can she warm her room for want of fuel.

Mrs Hyams always feels lonely and just to avoid loneliness she pays visits to other neighbours or helps them as much as she can. Neither her son's weekly visits with his wife and son nor her daughter's letters can cure her of loneliness. At last she finds interest in the weekly football pools and eventually plans to obtain £ 75,000 by it, which, she hopes, will finally solve her problems.

One day Mrs Hyams, who was offered £ 20 by some neighbours, goes out to a seaside village on the north coast of East Anglia to spend a couple of days. But on the Sunday, when the results of the pools are generally out, she being impatient for the results, hastens to London, concealing her holiday programmes, and finally discovers through a newspaper that all her dreams are gone for ever.

Pools is a tender but pathetic story that makes us all aware of the grim conditions of the working people of war-tossed Britain. Wesker wrote this story at the age of twenty three and looked for

the characters among the old almost deserted women of a London society which he thoroughly knew. He finds not only the finest of character in the struggling old widow but splendour also in such people.

The ending of Roots may have an element of surprise. But if we are one with the feelings and aspirations of Mrs Hyams, we may feel with her when she walks out of the toilet into the huge dome of the London Station allowing the 'wretched' newspaper to flutter on the floor. The subtle hint that lies hidden is that all working people are used by a capitalist society that fosters, according to Marx[7] "greed, cruelty and hypocrisy" or develops "a break between man and man"[8]. Then being exploited and denuded from all possible sectors a man becomes an abstraction or is alienated and loses faith and becomes conspicuously unimportant in society. The final impression is one of a malign capitalist system that functions in Mrs Hyams' life, corrupting her possibilities of happiness and beckoning her towards her final doom.

2

Eleven years later Wesker wrote Six Sundays in January which was written between January 1966 and July 1967. It is a long

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7. Bertell Ollman : Alienation. p. 156

8. Ibid. p. 134

short story, a novelette, perhaps, so far as the plot and the characterization are concerned. This story is not only shorter and less elaborate than any novel but is designed to be read at a single sitting and to produce a single, concentrated effect.

On a certain January day in 1966 a great sense of sexuality comes upon Marcia when in a cafe she beholds a waitress's leg that gives a vibrant sheen. On the following Sunday she begins the day by playing a Bach toccata on her record player. She gets no encouragement, nor sympathy with her activities from her architect husband, but on the third Sunday she performs the duties of a housewife. For three weeks her feelings and emotions are subdued, but on the following, fourth Sunday she meets Crispin Peterson who understands her better than her husband. Consequently she is drawn towards him, becomes intimate with him and finally loves him. Emotionally she prefers Crispin, but she cannot disentangle herself from her husband.

Gradually Marcia feels that her marriage is breaking down and she is on the point of being attracted by 'free-love'. She not only loses control over herself sexually but loses her temper also. She is now emotionally overwrought and is guided by unreason. When she feels relegated to the position of a mere housekeeper, and when the new passion for Crispin has control over her, Marcia is shocked to learn that Katherina Levinson, a married but deserted woman of her acquaintance, has finally committed suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills. The sight of dark and dried mascara

on the face of the dead Kate Levinson offers Marcia an opportunity to ponder over her own affairs. It is Kate's gross mistake that makes Marcia wiser. She barely eats, speaks to no one and chastises herself whenever possible. Through this self-mortification she learns that for her children's sake it would not be wise for her to leave her husband as Kate did. Moreover, she realises that without conventional love nothing is important. When the period of trance is over, she is reconciled to her family. Thus the suspense touches the finishing line.

The first three Sundays show the dreariness of Marcia's life, the fourth one offers her solace, but during the last two Sundays she, in a trance, becomes able to brush aside her obsession with sex. It is the reality of life which demands that she be rid of this obsession through a sort of dream. Only on Sundays does she resort to such dreaming. It was a Sunday that created trouble and again it was another Sunday that restored her balance. The author confined the plot within a month, say January, giving importance to Sundays only, to keep it in the form of a story. The possibility of the sixth Sunday owes more to emotion than the calendar.

'Six Sundays in January' is quite different in tone and temper from 'Pools'. While the latter narrates the desperate struggle of a might-have-been elderly widow in a world that is hostile to her, the former describes the suppression of sex in a woman, who suddenly, at the age of thirty five, feels that her life

is unfulfilled. Mrs Hyams and Marcia are familiar characters to the author who must have observed them closely. Both his stories function as a mirror of the life of his characters.

Still the point of view of the author is different in each of the short stories. In 'Locks', Wesker is capable of giving unity to the story and dexterously produces a feeling of 'immediacy'; he makes this story believable, and readers easily share the sincere feelings of Mrs Hyams. Here Wesker plays the part of an observer, who like an expert cameraman with the zoom lens, follows her from her flat to the crowded London station. He, in an objective manner, fulfils the demands of art here, which is, in fact, failing in 'Six Sundays'. In this long short story Wesker shows how a great sense of sexuality comes upon Marcia and how it withers.

Wesker does not study sex with meticulous care nor does he probe deeply into Marcia's character and illustrate his findings through her in her emotional tone. The accent of the author, in this story, falls on sex, but it is not a story of deep sexual conflict. Here the immediacy of the emotion is baulked by the external interest, for instance, the emotional approach of Marcia towards Crispin is thwarted by the conventional husband-image and by the affection of her own children. Wesker does not wish to delineate the relationship between Marcia and Crispin, but he does regularise the extra-marital lover in Marcia into a traditional mother.

However, the author deals with the sex obsession without having recourse to vulgar or unsocial sexuality. This story may neither be called a dirty sexual novel, nor even a sexual story, for sex, according to D. H. Lawrence, is a thing that exists in the head, its reactions are cerebral, and its processes mental[9]. The pains of both Marcia and Mrs Levinson are depicted with sympathy, their dissatisfaction with their husbands are also the author's concern, but he likes to see that their sexual tendency remains confined to the psychological level only, instead of the social level. Wesker would not allow them to project their sex to any other person than their husbands, because he, as a social critic, fears the annihilation of the social relationship.

Wesker knows in the light of Caudwell that art must play a social function. He also knows that in a capitalist society social relations are denied in the form of relations between husband and wife. Here Wesker makes a sexual case a hyper sexual one. Here Wesker, the social critic, orders Wesker, the artist, to recoil. Thus he forges a link between form and content far away from being formless, personal, and individualistic.

Wesker depicted how an old widow on one Sunday (cf. Roots) became the victim of a gamble, and again on another Sunday the author studied the case of a young woman being saved from the gamble of free-love which was not sanctioned by traditional morality. It is interesting indeed that Wesker in both the stories makes a woman the principal character, and the female characters

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9. Christopher Caudwell : Studies and Further Studies in a Dying Culture, p. 57

become more lively than the male.

Reading Wesker's both stories one is sure to feel as if the author depicts Sunday as the sad or tormenting day. Both Mrs Hyams and Marcia, two Jewish women, wait earnestly for Sunday which, in fact, disillusions them: their dreams shatter on Sunday. Everything becomes strange, lonely, and noticeless as well as powerless to these two women. Though different in age, both these women gasp out their lives in boredom and breathe a dreary cold. Both are lovable and are capable of loving, but they submit patiently to their own whims. Both of them dream of the good life to come on Sundays, but when those indeed come, they notice that everything around them falls to pieces. Mrs Hyams, who dreams of the happy life to come after winning the pools, suddenly discovers that there is no place for her in the present; it is Marcia, who, through a series of soliloquies, discovers her importance as mother rather than as a free-lover. It is society that disappoints Mrs Hyams who wants a happy family, but it is the author who disapproves of Marcia's wantonness and makes her responsible and dutiful towards her family.

Although Wesker reveals the 'otherness' of Marcia's personality, he deals, in general, with social and sociable characters. While we observe him dealing with the psychic material of the inner mechanism of a character, his mastery lies in the fact that he never studies the females from the point of view of their femaleness only, but he succeeds in making them social beings first and last.

The characterisation in 'Six Sundays' may not be too deep but it is an elaborate process. The characters like Mrs Newman, Crispin Peterson, Buddy, Kate Levinson or Harry Levinson are short, but they give the feeling of fine bold-lined sketches. Wesker places only Marcia under a very detailed scrutiny. We are being constantly dazzled, if not puzzled, at her gradual psychic revelation in the course of her soliloquies. Others may be intensely drawn figures, but none, except Marcia, not even Kate Levinson, reveals her inner depths. But it is not the psyche only which interests Wesker, he takes the social life too into consideration.

Besides the waitresses in the East End cafe, there are in all nine characters of whom three, such as — Marcia, Crispin and Kate, are of great importance. All his characters even Marcia, are types, not individuals, although they are not caricatures. On the other hand, they are not only living and lively but also their idiosyncrasies are emphatically insisted upon. Most of these characters who were known to the author, belong to the working class, a few only to the middle class, for example, Marcia, whose mother Mrs Newman was working class is now middle class.

Wesker has created three types of women characters — typical mother characters, such as — Sarah Kahn, Mrs Bryant, Ada Simmonds and Sarah; typical women lover characters, such as — Beatie Bryant, Harriet, and last of all unconventional women lover characters who are prone to little or no scruples, such as —

Monique, Kate Ramsay or Beatrice. But in "Six Sundays" Wesker presents before us another kind of woman character who has, in particular, no similarity to his previous ones. Marcia may be the direct successor of Monique, Kate, and Beatrice, but she is not a carbon-copy of those predecessors. Monique, Kate and Beatrice were lovers only, but not mothers. On the other hand, Marcia is a mother — she has some social responsibility. So whatever similarity she may have with Monique, Kate and Beatrice, she has no fundamental affinity with them, for she is essentially a mother, whereas they are essentially lovers. If Beatrice is first and last a lover, it is Marcia who at last comes back to her role as mother.

The male characters of this story remain as shadows in comparison with the females. There are, in all, five male characters — three adults and two children, Mark and Jacob the two sons of Marcia and Buddy. The three male characters are Buddy, Marcia's husband, Crispin Peterson, Marcia's new found lover and Harry Levinson, Kate's husband. Buddy has given his three children a car, and has given other material comforts to his family, but he has not bestowed love on his wife. He is affectionate to his children and he offers his wife immense freedom even to spending almost a whole day with another man, but it is his indifference which affects Marcia most.

Crispin is a widely-known and respected architect and a great benefactor to many rising architects. We do not know much about his personal life. He has passed his prime and likes Marcia's

company, but wants no emotional ties. That is why he wanders aimlessly with Marcia along the winding lanes and mazes of the East End where Marcia spent her youth. He shares a few moments in a cafe with Marcia and Kate, but feels uneasy with the two women. He commands attraction owing to his virility and sophistication and he is every inch a gentleman. He is no hypocrite and makes it plain to Marcia that with her he wants only a bright but casual relationship.

Just one short paragraph has been devoted to Harry Levinson, Kate's husband. He is a busy man who has to be away from his family. When his wife dies he does not behave well. Yet he attracts, for with all his faults he is a recognisable type, often encountered.

There are two children Mark and Jacob in '<u>Six Sundays</u>'. They are the children of a middle class family. They are the privileged sons of privileged parents and the parents dote on them. They care more for individual gains than for high ideals. They are ease-loving and easy-going children quite ignorant of their surroundings.

Wesker, in his plays, was mostly controlled by an idea — an idea of an organic disturbance in the relationships of man and society, but in '<u>Six Sundays</u>', he has been controlled by an organic disturbance in the relationships of man and woman — 'a disturbance of sexual polarities'. Wesker, in most of his plays, seems to be a champion of his age, loathing the inequalities among men of different strata — he draws a brilliant picture of the

British working class either in London or the provinces in the post-war period, but in this story, he draws the picture of how these people face a new problem when they are elevated to the middle-class, how their conjugal sense is disturbed due to emotional upheavals which are perhaps inevitable in an affluent society. Wesker thus with meticulous care unearths the deeply rooted instinctive life hitherto unexplored by him, and he plays expertly with these hidden instincts. He has not composed an elegy on free-love but built an edifice on married love.

3

The Man who Became Afraid deals with the experiences of Sheridan Brewster who was by profession an aerodynamics engineer. He was a resourceful young man, very interested in left-wing student politics and he took part in a guerrilla war in Africa. His father had been an engineer with the British army in India, but Sheridan began to build his career as a partner in a firm that had a worldwide business. He became managing director and chief engineer of the firm as the world moved through different phases of the so-called 'angry' writers, the nationalists movements in various states, the rise of autocratic rulers, the assassination of liberal statesman, cultural or socialist revolution, the insane cruelties of imperialistic wars, epoch-making landings on the moon, hi-jacking in the Middle East, and the birth of Bangladesh etc.

Sheridan met and finally married Mildred, a girl from New England and they had two daughters. But he considered the marriage a mistake and during his world-wide tour he met many other women.

But as time passed on and he grew older, Sheridan took no interest in work abroad. He yearned for the renewal of the relationship with his wife. So long as he was young and agile he could maintain a confident external manner; it would appear that nothing frightened him. But as his hair turned grey he began to feel more insecure and he was frightened at the slightest affair. Therefore, the man who once subscribed liberally to the Labour Party fund to win General Elections, began to buy fire appliances, citrus fruits and effervescent vitamin C tablets either to avoid accidents or to fight diseases; sometimes he would have a thorough and costly check-up on pathological grounds to ensure that he was in a good, if not perfect, state of health.

Yet there was no denying the fact that he was getting, inch by inch, more a victim of increasing age than of hypochondria. The more he thought about the future, the more he was appalled. He began to feel that what he had done for the possible security of his dependents was inadequate. The cost of living was soaring, and chaos, he believed, was looming large all over Europe where competition was becoming keen. He, therefore, felt that his daughters ought to be provided with more money for their university education. It was a curious sensation about the future which he had never felt before.

Therefore, haunted by the iniquities of the capitalist system that fosters hoarding, Sheridan began accumulating various kinds of consumer goods hoping that these would bring him profits in time. Thus the man, who was once a staunch supporter of socialism, became an avid speculator, and the man, who pretended to be afraid of nothing by pretending he was afraid of everything, became really afraid of everything.

To Sheridan marriage had been a failure, but through their joint hoarding ventures he and his wife became closer together. He, at fifty, with utter surprise discovered as if the second bloom of love and he found his wife responsive. They tried to get back to the feeling of their early days of marriage and with a view to remaining closer together they aimed at avoiding domestic responsibilities, which were transferred to a Philipino au-pair girl. Thus Sheridan had enough leisure to entertain like-minded guests. Socially, therefore, he was insulated, economically he proved himself a vain speculator, philosophically he was away from socialism, and physically he discovered he was impotent. Thus he finally descended into real fear.

This is a short story of an episodic nature although the plot evolves round one single person. The story marches to a climax of horror or fear with almost stark brevity and there is no piling up of details. It is not a story of incidents although some peculiar incidents are dexterously dealt with. It is not a story of character proper although the details of Sheridan Brewster

have been meticulously depicted. It is the depiction of a maniacal man in an unhealthy background; Wesker is concerned with the predicament of a middle-class man in a capitalist country. Here he exposes not only the weakness of men in such a country but also the rottenness of their culture. He also portrays the forces of defeatism and despair which accentuate the decay of a dying world. Thus through the study of Sheridan he makes a study of a pursuit of liberty and individualism that ultimately swamp him into the mire making him a pathetic rather than a tragic figure.

4

A Line Of Print is strictly a part of Arnold Wesker's autobiography. Although this 'sort of story' focuses its attention mainly on the deaths of the author's old Aunt Sarah and old Aunty Rae, many other relatives come into it. Perhaps there is not a single relative of the author who has not come within the orbit of this story. Besides the author himself, his wife Dusty, his children, his parents, his Aunt Sarah, Aunty Rae, Uncle Jolly, Uncle Sammy and Poppy Bicker, all appear on the scene. But the interest lies neither in characterisation nor in dialogue nor even in situation, but in an impression.

The story that usually deals with the death of two women and the paralysis of Poppy Bicker is not essentially a story of pessimism, nor of despair, but of the desperate attempt towards life. It is the paralysed Bicker who throws the masculine challenge

of life to the feminine challenge of death posed by the deaths of Aunt Sarah and Aunty Mae. The atmosphere of death withers with the entrance of the virile Bicker. He spends most of his time tending the author's neglected garden, plays cricket with the children despite his paralysed arm, starts riding a bike again, and, thus, he brings a robust zeal for life into the house of death. It is he who makes others feel the necessity of living during a time of dying. Here Walker, the artist, makes a study of antithesis between Eros, the life-instinct, and Thanatos, the death-instinct which are closely united and ultimately points to the former in the background of the latter. It is the theme of the story, and the irony is hidden in its title.

The story begins with the sentence : "It became a time of dying" and ended with : "he've started to ride a bike again". Here the suggestion of a paradox is easily discernible — a paradox that generally slips past the ordinary reader. It is the skill in creating atmosphere or the dramatic presentation of the story that helps the reader forget the paradox. However, there is very little plot in this story. There are three episodes — the episode of Aunt Sarah, the episode of Aunty Mae and the episode of Poppy Bicker. These episodes dominate the story, but out of the three episodes the last one is obviously the most important.

The skeleton of the story chiefly rests on the existence of the episode of Aunt Sarah. It is through her dying that some Jewish families gather together. A Jewish family that lived in

the Ukraine in Russia emigrated to England. There were four dark-skinned and dark-eyed sisters named Rae, Sarah, Billie and Ann and their only brother Joe. They grew up in England and gradually became integrated with the people there. These socialist Jewish refugees became part of the middle class in London.

However, it is the precarious condition of Aunt Sarah that assembled most of the relatives. The idiosyncrasies of these people are, therefore, given due attention and sometimes the special customs of the Jews are also depicted, for example, shiva. (cf. the word 'shiva' has got some philological affinity with the Sanskrit word 'Shiva'. Shiva is one broadly worshipped Hindu god who spends most of his time in meditation.) This is a peculiar ritual for a man who sits on a low stool for seven days without shaving, cooking or working, when anybody dies in a family. The episode of Aunt Sarah ends with her death in a hospital and her cremation in the Golden Green Cemetary.

Then Aunty Rae died of cancer. On the point of death she behaved like a child, as she did when the author once offered her a box of chocolates. Hairs grew on her chin when she was given hormone injections, and her daughters had to shave her. But the importance of this episode lies not in her eccentricities, peculiarities or hypersensitiveness but elsewhere. It was she who used to make plans of life even on her death-bed. Death was sure to come, but she did not despair. The episode of Aunt Sarah stated that death is an inevitable phenomenon of life to which one must surrender, whereas this episode reiterates the aspirations for

life over death.

The third and the last episode, that of Poppy Bicker completely denies death. He has had a stroke and one of his hands is paralysed, yet his frail body does not yield either to disease or to death. It is he who completely dispels the atmosphere of gloom that hangs over the story. In the first episode there was complete gloom, in the second episode there was hope amidst gloom, but in the last there is buoyant optimism. Thus the story is in the nature of a fable.

The author has, however, created an atmosphere of humour through some incidents which are often commonplace, for example :-

a) It was cold. I felt her face and neck. They were warm. It confused me. The nurse asked us if we'd like supper and brought us a tray of veal and ham pie with salad and potatoes and tea.
While we were eating the doctor returned and we felt suddenly the incongruity of sitting there eating while watching our aunt die. 10

b) But on the way out, 'en route', with Tanya Joe and my eldest son, Lindsay Joe (the youngest had a party to go and could not be persuaded to give it up, nor could we press a child of seven to measure priorities involving death), on the way we felt we must call in on Uncle Harry. Daisy entered the flat and immediately burst into tears on Thelma's shoulder. We had tea and I went in to see my dead aunt. 11

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10. Wesker : Love Letters on Blue Paper, p. 58

11. Ibid. p. 67

> o) My eldest son's amusement suddenly found voice. 'What an extraordinary family this is ! It's so close. And we've got so much spirit. I mean Aunty Rae's body ( = deadbody ) is in one room and you cry and laugh in the other room. And Penny lying were paralysed and crying and talking of the garden and the tatties he's put aside for you' ! 12

5

Lesker perhaps knows that most people avoid a story that contains a moral unless the moral is skilfully disguised. Love letters on Blue Paper is a long short story that shows utmost simplicity in construction combined with a depth of meaning. The story is in the nature of a parable that represents an idea or an abstraction rather than an explanation or qualification. Didacticism is the dominant motive of the story that says — 'be ready with a pint of love and a few slices of praise for him who is on the point of death'.

Victor, an ex-trade union leader, is a Yorkshire man who is suffering from myloid leuknemia. He is bed-ridden and knows that he cannot live much longer. Sonia, his wife, who is also from Yorkshire was a tall girl with dark dramatic features when he married her thirty years ago, but now she is large, heavy and lacks enthusiasm.

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12. Ibid. p. 69

Victor and Sonia have one son Graeme who is doing research, and one daughter Hilda who has a son Jake. Despite the fatal disease, failing eyesight and disintegrating health Victor goes on writing a book on art. This he finishes at last and hands it over to Professor Maurice Stapleton to have printed.

He is something of an idealist and has not bothered to invest money for his family or even buy a house for himself out of union funds like other trade union secretaries. He has been a devoted husband to Sonia and a conscientious father to his children. He has paid for his son to continue research work at university and has seen him happily married. His friendship with Professor Maurice Stapleton has grown and matured over the years. Although he is suffering from leukaemia he is cool and forbearing on the one hand, but desperate on the other; he is in no position to believe that death finishes all. As a man he is a robust optimist of a rare calibre; he always believes in the achievements of man, who is never insignificant :

> of course there are some people to whom it makes ecstatic sense, but they're a type, the put-downers I call them. Know who I mean? Any bloody opportunity they get they enjoy putting man down. They have a special tone of voice, the kind of voice that rubs its hands together. 'Look at the ocean', they cry, 'see what a little thing is man in all that sea' ! and when space rockets come they had a real ball. 'Look at all those stars ! How insignificant is man now ! ' Instead of marvelling that man could make it to the bloody moon they found it another opportunity to put him down. And there's those stupid computers. Oh how they do love putting man down because they can't store up facts mechanically. 13

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13. Ibid. pp. 115-116

It is this masculine ardour that makes Victor not only the principal character of the story but the author's spokesman too. It is Victor who remains the conqueror of human destiny. He may die in a hospital bed, but he dies an unyielding death winning love from all. Even the theme of the story is expressed in its title that rouses our curiosity by an allusion to a hidden world beneath Sonia's love letters on blue paper. Thus the author under the mask of a narrable writes with brevity and directness about human achievement, which enumerated the plight of man in an irrational world of capitalist state.

The author, however, tells one short story within another. Victor dies, but he dies with the assurance of Sonia's love. Sonia loves her husband, but she too discovers her identity. Her character seems to be rooted in unreality with motives resting upon letters only. But this is not so; we glimpse her emotions through her letters and this enlivens the atmosphere of the story. It is the letters that transform Victor's sadness into the joy of a human being. The land of sorrow withers and man's nobility comes forth. Here is neither completion nor rounding off proper, but an opening out. The victory is won, and Victor and Sonia win in their own way. It is, therefore, the picture of peace and tranquility which needs no end but a beginning.

In this story Hasker does not pay attention to the plot which is weak. There are but three characters, and all of these are sketchily portrayed. The function of the characters is either to

submit please or to formulate confessions. Here is the keenness of the fatal disease, the performance of the dance of death, or a fettered human happiness, but all these do not conceal the fact that there is complete absence of denouement.

So far as the themes of The Man who Becomes Afraid, A Time of Dying and Love Letters on Blue Paper are concerned, they are not difficult for Wesker to control; but the plots of the respective stories are not carefully devised. He registers his skill in individual scenes and characters or even becomes more delicate in the portrayal of sentiment, but as an artist he shows here little or no consistent development in any of these short stories. The nightmare of Sheridan Brewster, the virility of Poppy Bicker, and the peaceful submission of either Victor or Louie may move us but do not, in fact, give a broad and powerful development of narrative; hence they form a trilogy of loosely written plots.

These three stories may form a trilogy in other respects too. The incidents, situations or episodes in them are arranged so as to create the impression that they are reports of past events but not the real events that are happening now at this very moment. Here Wesker adopts a device of 'distancing' or alienation that does not lend enchantment to these incidents or events, and the readers of these stories are as if separated, estranged or alienated from the actions. Wesker, therefore, becomes more Brechtian in technique or form.

6

Arnold Wesker has talent for story writing, and his talent may aim high although it does not court popularity. He is sensitive and humane, but he is never tired of communicating art through different forms. This is particularly true when we discuss The Man Who Would Never Write Like Balzac. Here he is not tormented by a social conscience as he has been in some other stories. He does not 'exteriorize' the drama of life nor does he try to mirror the broad image of a period as he has done in 'The Man who Became Afraid'. But he makes a humorous, charming study of a young writer who really cares much for fame and renown. Constantine Lander or Connie, who has been writing for fifteen years, has two plays on the radio and a story in a magazine; yet his distinction as a writer is not generally acknowledged, and if he has any admirer it is Mr Lander, his own father. He devotes himself to writing not to while away the time, but to reach a goal. Therefore, his inspiration and indeed his whole vision of life are suffused with a profound sense of faith.

Wesker never insists that this story is a symbol of life, nor does he present an imposing man of tragic stature. The world he presents may, to some extent, be unfavourable to the young writer, but it is never a world of brutality and violence in which life is cheap and suffering is general. We, on the other hand, are held fast by a humorous picture of an imperishable artist. A few examples will suffice:

a) But Constantine's father, the cause of his and- according to Mrs Lander — much other trouble in the family, had declared : 'A man ought to have a distinctive name, somethinghe can stand up in' '. 'Boots' ! she hurried back. 'Give him boots to stand up in. But a name covers his all his life. You know what they'll call him at school', she continued, 'Connie ! Connie, and I won't be responsible. Give him the name of Martin. He'll be a silversmith, like you, it's a good name'. 14

b) 'God in heaven, Con. They'd have called me Alec at school. A boy's name. I was called Connie as a boy and as a girl I'd have been called Alec. You were determined to make a mess of me !
'Constantine the Great I was thinking of'.
'And Alexandria the Great also, I suppose. Why did you think I was a girl anyway? You couldn't tell?'
'I could tell; but I wasn't there. When I rang through to the hospital the nurse said you were a girl and by the time I'd phoned round the family and said we had an Alexandria they rang back and said they had made a mistake, you were a Constantine'. 15

c) 'Idiot' ! said his father. 'You look like me, don't you?!
'No, I don't', said his son. 'Look at us. Your hair is reddish brown, mine's jet blakish. You've got large pop eyes, I've got narrow Mongol eyes. You've got a fine Roman nose, mine's hooked. You're small and fat, I'm tall and lean. Where's the resemblance?'
'You're tall because you had milk and I didn't'. 16

This short story deals with the characters of the Lander family. There are in all three characters — Mr Lander, Mrs Lander and their only son Constantine Lander who yearns for literary fame.

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14. Hooker : Said the Old Man to the Young Man, p. 15

15. Ibid. p. 17

16. Ibid. p. 18

Although with a few strokes of his brush Wesker convincingly portrays Mr and Mrs Xander, he is focusing only on their son in the interest of the story. Yet Wesker's purpose is not to portray a one-man show. His purpose is rather different. He, as a writer, maintains an aesthetic distance through humour and irony; he uses 'a third person point of view', and sees everything through the mind of a single character and follows him throughout the action. He uses dialogue to a great extent in this story and although it is effective it distracts the reader's critical attention, and conceals the weakness of construction and feebleness of the plot. The detailed settings, minute descriptions, and analyses of such dominating passions as social climbing and money-making like Balzac, the French novelist, appear as the striking features of this story.

Again the story is weak if didacticism in a work of art is a weakness. It is Constantine Xander who learns that he will never be able to write like Balzac or any other eminent writer of the past. He has published a handful of works, but is far from being a great artist. Then why does he cry? Is it a cry of failure or despair? Probably not. As a socialist writer he is confused about the direction he should follow. He is probably aware that a writer, who lives in the world of a particular age, may change his opinion, or take sides or even change his colours like a chameleon with the change of taste and time, and he wonders if great writers do this, or if they can accept people, things or even ideas without any question. His debate with his father does not however help him much

ne the author helps him. It is the author who, only at the end of the story, not only satisfies the younger Lander but also christens him with the following words :

> A writer, he thought, mustering what he secretly knew to be dead ashes of consolation, a really great writer must not be afraid to change or edit his ideas. 17

Therefore, Lander learns that great writers, who are not at all afraid, do change with the change of time and taste. This moral teaching is not, however, as important for the character of Lander as it is for Wesker himself. Wesker is here expressing his own attitude towards some questions of his day, for like Lander he is a socialist writer and has been writing for decades, yet he has not been adequately recognised presumably owing to his fidelity to some left-wing ideas. Is this then a warning that he is going to create altogether a different world far away from the range of his commitment?

7

The concentration and the economy that we have seen in Wesker's previous story is hardly traceable in <u>Said The Old Man to The Young Man</u> which is three-times longer than the former. The subject, that has been dealt with, might have been developed

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17. <u>Ibid</u>. 25

significantly in a brief narrative or stress might have been laid on the main situations. On the other hand the author uses a broad span, his art here seems to be deliberate and impersonal, and he is apparently bent on intensifying every effect by use of a disinterested manner. Humour and irony are to be found here as they are in Wesker's other mature works; but the rich satirical flavour of the story closely resembles the most sardonic humour. Yet the author is not always able to maintain complete self-effacement, for pathos is sure to intrude on humour or irony here.

The characters he deals with are few and they belong either to the lower-middle class or just above it. The author himself in his early life belonged to this class, and might therefore have described his own experiences vividly. But he, as an artist, never does this. On the contrary this story is resolutely unsentimental.

The author's class feeling demanded sentiment whereas his age demanded reticence. Therefore, Wesker, who has been appalled by the cruelty of his time, feels that he must convey a message through the story to his hard-hearted younger generation. The author is determined to tell the story of old Martin who, having tried his best to communicate with the old as well as the younger generation, is finally thrown into peril. Miranda too is thrown into the same predicament when she suffers from a malignant cancer and is waiting for the day when she is to have a breast operation. Martin knows for certain that being old he has drifted away from many acquaintances. But his entire existence is in jeopardy when his close relatives and friends abandon him. His very existence, as an individual, loses its lustre when he is lost among the teeming

enemies in a large city. His 'lostness' is complete not because he is completely jettisoned, but because he realises that he has become unnecessarily a burden to the world of reality. That he is a burdensome old man is neither due to his own mistake nor his own weakness. Similarly Miranda does not feel lonely because she is a victim of cancer, but she loses her identity and feels abandoned when Amos, her fiance, treats her, not as a delicate human being, but as 'an industrial problem'.

The strength of the story, therefore, lies less in the humour and satire than in the pathos. The author's own nature is never involved in any emotionalism, yet this story never reaches the threshold of a superb tragedy, nor does the story give us the full vision of life. It has a cruel reality and shows a passing mood of bitterness and hatred of mankind, but it is not a melodrama.

Wesker based the story on social and contemporary problems, the problems of the Jews, the problems of Britain that has lost her empire, the problems of communication between the old persons or between the old and the young or between the young persons. The author's characterisation is simple and seldom does he attempt to present subtle characters; in a few firm strokes he places his people into the narrative. Yet the three central characters, particularly Martin, are among the best observed and most realistic in Wesker's work. A few examples will suffice :

(a) As old Martin and his sister walked down the stone stairs of the council estate, their aged steps echoing heavily, he spoke in the loud voice of the deaf :
'That was a woman what once could read the classics in Yiddish', he cried.
'Ahh ! cautioned his sister. 'Lower your voice'.
'That was a woman what once could make a whole sentence', he carried on.
'You're shouting ! ' she shouted at him.
'I'm shouting ! I'm shouting' ! he defied, angrily.
'That was a woman what once baked and washed for her children and played solo with us and had big political arguments' ! 18

(b) Amos rushed to tell Miranda. Miranda, too, had news for him. She had cancer. ...
After almost an hour of sitting in a room that gradually became dark Miranda rose, switched on a lamp in the next room so that where they were was not crudely brought into focus, and poured out two glasses of wine saying :
'They could be wrong'.
'Don't be ridiculous', he threw back with deliberate harshness, 'experts are never wrong. But what is reassuring is that they haven't said it's taken a hopeless grip'.
'They haven't said anything, except that it's almost certain I must lose a breast'. At which she began to cry again.
'Which does not mean', he said very loudly over her crying, 'that you're going to die of cancer'.
'Oh Amos ! ' she protested at his bluntness. 'I'm not an industrial problem to be smoked, or a legal one to be solved. Don't talk to me so violently. I know you're not violent, but straightforward talk doesn't work every time. There's moments when it grates, offends. Don't be boorish please. My point remains', he continued, but more gently, 'women are being urged to take tests early on because then most cases can be contained. That's why I urged you. Now, they haven't yet operated on you and when they do they'll almost certainly discover they've caught it in time. You're a young woman, there's absolutely no reason ___' 'But I'll lose a breast ! '
He was held. 'I know', was all he could say. And again they entered a long period of silence. 19

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18. Ibid. p. 46

19. Ibid. pp. 56-59

(c) At half-past seven, when the service was over, his great-nephew was not there to pick him up. The congregation filed out of the synagogue to their waiting cars — some had cars waiting on them because it was raining. ... One by one the lights of the synagogue went out. The shamos came to him and again the old man explained :
'My niece's son, he should be here. I made an arrangement'.
'Have you got the phone number?' the shamos was concerned. 'I'll phone for you'.
'Phone number? Addresses? What for? What did I need anything for? He is a young man, very reliable, in business, educated and all that. He knows I'm here, that he's got to come. Why should I need addresses, phone numbers?
He couldn't understand it. I told him ! seven O'clock I told him. Half past seven at the latest. He heard me. He said all right, don't worry, I'll be there. What could have gone wrong? To leave an old man standing in the rain, while they're at home eating, in the warm ! What ! they don't know? Why shouldn't they know? They're not children any longer, they're grown, responsible, they understand these things, arrangements and things. They'd been brought up to be thoughtful, considerate. What was a person if he was not thoughtful and considerate and serious? ... But was this being serious? To leave an old man standing in the rain for so long? An old man could catch cold standing about in such weather. What could've gone wrong? Where was the young man, the educated young man? While they're at home, in the warm, eating, an old man could die. Funny thing ! an old man could die. Funny thing !
He could understand none of it. 20

This story is based on much knowledge and a genuine affection for the characters the author creates. He uses contemporary scenes, and his own experience. The form and texture of the story reflect his creative imagination, but the spirit that animates the

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20. Ibid. 77

story is surely something born of experience. Here is a sense of the vanity of life, its triviality and frustration with a magnificent cry of anguish of an old man in conflict with himself who relives the past. Therefore, what the author shows is not the romance of a group of people, but actual people and the difficulty they have in mutual understanding. Moreover, it is remarkable to note that Wesker's character is far from being the two bums[21] who simply wait being incapable of understanding the meaning of waiting.

e

It is true that Wesker has discovered new and refreshing sources of fiction in a countryside which is remote from the industrialized cities. In "The Visit" there are two couples who meet together in such countryside for a couple of days and then depart. Against the rural background the author examines the problems of a modern complex life along with the analysis of individual souls. He does not see the countryside as offering consolation to man — in any way, neither does he concern himself with its different aspects, but it appears to him to be part of a cancerous organic whole; it has no separate identity. The cities too do not enjoy perfect peace. The author feels that there is a sense of disruption and unrest in the world and the countryside also has entered upon a cycle of social change.

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21. Cf. Samuel Beckett : Waiting for Godot.

Yet we must admit that the author has a powerful pen through which he records those changes. With simple sentences and short pithy incidents he creates a lasting impression. He knows how to put the characters in the whirlpool of events in the context of a world that alternates between faith and reality. The countryside is no longer away from the centre of activity, and the characters, who are more or less connected with world events, are thrown into the atmosphere of wide-spread disorder. The tender feelings of these characters like love, friendliness and sympathy have throbbed with this aspect of disorder, or have been acted out on the stage of individual life without affording the possibility of a happy ending.

Thus in "The Visit" two aspects are given due importance — the life of the individuals with their strong feelings and emotions, and the world-wide background. But it is difficult to deal with both the aspects. When the background expands, the individual feelings and emotions are, in fact, diluted; when the objective aspect of the story is given more importance, the subjective appeal of the plot becomes duller. Love and friendship seek a corner for better nourishment and they seldom border upon logic or rationality. That is why when the characters like Raphael, Maddenu, Karl-Olaf and Janika come into contact with the hypocrisy or heartlessness of society, what is revealed is the surface level of themselves but not the inner level; they almost appear to us as rational beings but primarily as human beings with their shortcomings and weaknesses. Truly on several occasions Raphael and Janika or Karl and Maddenu have come into close contact with each other, but they have been so

tormented either with the untoward incidents of the world or the conventional morality that they have not managed to emerge from their marital bondage. Here lies both the strength and weakness of the author. He succeeds as a social artist but fails to discover the subconscious souls of his characters.

In this story there are some other artistic defects. The characterization is not always true-to-life; the characters do not always influence the incidents which, in fact, steer the characters. Obviously the incidents are more important. The characters are few in number, yet they are never developed, nor do they feel 'real'. They are cold and passive and oddly childlike, seeming not to know what they really want. Karl-Raf is an understanding portrayal of modern youth; Maddenu is a study of a conventional type of housewife; Raphael is a professional scholar who feels the usefulness of extra-marital love and Janika is the representative of the modern woman. Yet the characters are barely individualized and Hasker seldom attempts to present any subtlety. They are not impressive and seem to be but robots attacking a shrewd politician, or discussing the inhuman cruelty of the American soldiers in Vietnam or criticising the state ownership in the Soviet Union. Thus this story occasionally deals with some modern problems, making vital use in its treatment of the concrete knowledge gathered from observation and documents.

The story is fragmentary, and has the cold accuracy of reportage; it is continuous and purposeful, but not dynamic. The matter-of-fact style gives us the impression of an impartial statement.

However, the language has life, imagery and rhythm. Sometimes moments of poetry relieve its monotony. There is a racy humour too and a touching pathos. This tale has human substance and the author can describe landscapes or the more immediate environment in a lively fashion. Wesker is not only a realist, but also a student of society and the heart; from his artistic culture he preserves a sensitiveness of eye which lends striking gifts of colour and suggestion to his language. There are the successful description of the Cambridgeshire countryside where the ash tree is imagined as "Venus of the Woods" or the oak is called "King of the Forest". Thus nature is vividly evoked, with all its picturesqueness, and here Wesker's imagination is that of a poet. Nature, to him, seems to be stimulating and benign and somewhat Wordsworthian :

> This was a walking track, maybe, but not for cycling; a track for rabbits, squirrels, birds in search of June's insects. 'Listen' ! said Maldon. 'A wood-pecker, tapping for the poor old wood-hewers'. She named them many sounds: the screech martin prying the dog-rose and swooping down upon the unsuspecting earwigs and by the pond the drone of the bright golden-green dragonfly. 'Now there's an insensitive, macabre insect. They say it can eat its own tail and still fly on, totally indifferent to its self-immolation'. 22

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22. Wesker : Said the Old Man to the Young Man, p. 111

For Wesker, this short story is perhaps for more than mere story-telling. He shows up the dangers that beset humanity although he does not show danger for danger's sake. He portrays the realities of modern life and its problems of their mating life [illegible] and he does not, at the same time, forget to show the importance of human relationships which are seen to be in a state of flux. Two couples meet together, live together for a few days, come very close together, but the stronger their feelings, the farther they cut themselves adrift from the moorings of life and love. Thus the harmony of plot is restored, whereas the poetry of life is completely ignored; the story reaches the summit of a pause, but the theme leaves us unsatisfied.

9

Wesker had hitherto been engaged in depicting the adult world either in his plays or in his stories, but he never wrote exclusively for children although their presence is conspicuous in some of his previous works. With Chips Wesker, however, enters an altogether different world — a world of children. This story may, at first reading, seem to be totally unpolitical or apolitical, an innocent story of platonic friendship where the friends seem reluctant to meet but sometimes it appears as a romance that produces a work of art dominated by a high ethical ideal and sometimes it borders on fantasy that has close connections with magic, superstition, supernaturalism and witchcraft — the elements that appeal to children most.

With the gradual progress of the story the question that torments us is whether it is really for children only. True it resounds with tales of wonders, superstition, omen, and witchcraft where explanations are whittled down to a minimum. In this world the children never find out who the emigrants are or anything about them (except that they are told that they are going to [illegible] or what happens to Amula or to the primitive islanders when she teaches them how to build a dam and a water reservoir; or why Antlips, after a lapse of many years, decides at last to meet [illegible], his pen-friend. We only come to learn a little about the previous connection between Antlips and Amula — Antlips as a confirmed bachelor and Amula who had contracted two love-less marriages.

Suspense is successfully sustained and the story holds the children's interest through a series of surprises over the way in which things are expected to happen. The emigrants make a six-day journey with Antlips' and Amula's stories told in flashback. All the action takes place in flashback only.

As this story is especially for children it has no plot proper, but fragments of incidents that consist of three principal episodes — that of the Hardys, the Smarshams, and Antlips. The first episode mirrors the irresponsible disillusioned world. The world of the Hardys is relatively small. It is the world of those who are always desperately complaining against something. They are the sort of people who seek relief in cynical gaiety and grow up to find all the old values questioned and finally take advantage of that questioning.

The portrayal of the Amarhams is done with a purpose. The author introduces this with a view to making a contrast with the former episode. Here Seeker appears as a puritan preacher for he hints at an ethical order by means of making a contrast between domestic order represented by the Amarhams and the domestic disorder represented by the Hardys. The following extract from Amula's narrative will show the nature of such domestic disorder :

> I don't know why people are the way they are, honestly I don't, do you? Does anyone? It seems to me they're just frightened. You wouldn't think they would be after all this time, would you, but they still are. Trust no one ! Ask no favours ! And be frightened of everybody ! Parents hand it down to their children's children; on and on, even when what there was to be afeared of is past. 23

Upto the fifth-day of the six-day journey the plot evolves through incidents and situations. We, too, follow these with varied interest. But when Patlips sits down to tell his story with the insertion of Amula's (which is actually an in-set of another one), the plot does not move at all for Patlips' tale is primarily in the shape of a flashback. Amula's 'in-set' story though reverberates with the defiance of fate, extols the power and unforgettable courage of the people. These people, fearlessly struggle to use nature to help in their own development and happiness. Thus in this episode fate or destiny is dealt a fatal

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23. Seeker : Patlips a story for children, p. 62

blow; the episode is optimistic not because a tangible victory is achieved, but because it arouses a sense of security, integrity and above all makes the individuals face any problem collectively. This episode does not undermine man's energies, but it fosters his courage, heroic spirit, and strength of character as well as spiritual fortitude, and upholds an embodiment of the purpose of life.

This episode too gives us an impression of a plot planned before the story began. It is important because it blends the plot of reality with the (planned) plot of fantasy. Secondly, it introduces love, friendship, co-operation and concerted effort, instead of dissent, distrust and enmity. Thirdly, it provides the reader with a welcome relaxation from the main narrative, and gives Wesker the opportunity to pour forth the treasures of his mind. Finally, it reveals the alienating effect of modern life with a study of contrast. The author points out how the Hardys are cut-off from all other members of the ship (which is the prototype of a society); and he again depicts how a group of primitive people with the help of advanced people make a concerted effort to build a dam in an un erdeveloped area for the preservation of a whole community rather than showing an isolated picture of modern life. Thus the author obviously replaces hate, despair and disorder by love, hope, endurance and above all philanthropy. There is no doubt about it that Wesker takes us to a world of fantasy, of magic and of romance, but his motive is, above all, that of a moral teacher; to convey a moral message.

Wesker began writing this story for children, but finished it for adults. Secondly, what Wesker himself could not perform through Centre 42, or what Andy Jobham (cf. "Their Very Own and Golden City") could not achieve, Amula achieves easily in this story although she has to go to a group of primitive people residing in an island far away from modern sophisticated society. Thus Wesker still has a desire 'to improve the material conditions of human existence', to tackle social evils directly and find the appropriate social remedy. This story can, therefore, never be called a short story, but a fable. It is, of course, not only for children, but for their matured parents also. It is for children who are expected to attain sufficient maturity — the maturity not for the world of fancy, fantasy, romance or 'inventive absurdity' as we find in Lewis Carroll, but its aim is to give the children a comprehensive and mature idea of man who is the outcome of economic and social forces. If art, according to Tolstoy[24], is one of the means of intercourse between man and man, this story is then surely a grand work of art.

There is little attempt at characterisation; of the dozen characters in the story, very few of them impress us. All other characters, even including Amula are subordinate to Patlips. Patlips Harrington attracts the attention of children for his shortness, his lumpish body, his baldness, his bulbous nose,

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24. Leo Tolstoy : What is Art, p. 120

and his thick, blubbery, wet lips, but he attracts the attention of the elders also for his sadness and strange smile. However, it is not Patlips the philanthropic recluse, but Patlips the magician, who appeals primarily to the children. But what attracts them most is his art of story-telling; his is an art that creates effectively an atmosphere of truth and reality and he himself becomes a living illustration that creates a convincing impression of reality in the background of fantasy. With the creation of this character Wesker obviously refutes orthodox wisdom, and the rules of logic and withdraws rational principles. Here he creates an atmosphere that does not need pure intellectualism, and he brings home to the English readers the delightful relief of a myth of fantasy that cares neither for logical rules nor the sovereignty of reason.

Apart from the creation of this type character the author shows us some persons; these persons are of two types — the rational and the emotional. While the Amershams belong to the former and less impressive group, the Hardys to the latter. Wesker has put in more incidents and moral teaching to compensate for the absence of vital characterization.

The matter of Wesker's work is necessarily limited to its interest and significance, but he does not fail to give it grace without making it vapid. One may not find in this story the passages of long and elaborately fine descriptive writing, but if poetry consists in using words with the strictest economy and precision in order to gain the desired effects, this story does not lack such passages. The author's sensitivity to the sound as

well as the sense of words shows his awareness of the range of possibilities in their choice. Let us have a look at the passage near the opening of the story where he describes with brevity the man who is its pivotal point :

> Who was this strange old man? Was he going to join his family in the new land? What kind of profession could such a small and lumpish man bring to a young country? He didn't look like a labourer, nor like a doctor, nor like a professor or artist. He looked — well, they hated to say it — just nondescript. 25

Here the use of the adjectives like 'small', 'lumpish', 'nondescript' is very effective. The words themselves are not elaborate, but simple, direct, and forceful and they convey to us the total idea of the man.

Again there is another passage where we see at work the poet's keen eye for concrete detail :

> The old man turned abruptly. Anger whipped from his eyes and flailed the red-haired adolescent. No sadness now, but a mesmerising fury which held the offender in a state of petrifaction. It was an electric moment. The man stared at the boy. The boy froze, waiting for punishment. The other children waited wide-eyed to see what the punishment would be. Nothing seemed to be happening. The man's eyes were clear and piercing as though through them anger could burn justice. 26

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25. Hooker : Antipa — a story for children, p. 13

26. Ibid. p. 20

Here the atmosphere of crime, anger and justice is vividly brought alive. All the hard 't' sounds like 'abruptly', 'adolescent', 'petrifaction', 'electric', 'moment', 'punishment', 'justice' add up to a sense of the metallic noises and the fierceness of the scene.

Let us have another glimpse of a passage where Patlips' presence is all-pervasive and he is as if endowed with the qualities of a human dynamo in the human drama :

> Mr. Amersham experienced, with great clarity, confirmation that his decision to move to this new land was the wisest decision he'd made in his life. Mrs. Amersham experienced, like a hot flush flowing through her body, the need to have another baby, a third in the family. Susan, for no reason she could later explain, vividly saw that her future vocation was that of a doctor. All these flashes of truth came in the instant of Patlips' smile. So strong were they, that in after years, moments of revelation were referred to by the family as 'moments smiled upon by Patlips' 27

Still the story has some blemishes and inconsistencies. We must admit that its title is somewhat misleading for the plot does not necessarily give importance to Patlips only, but the onus of the plot rests on the theme of Amula too. The two themes — the theme of Patlips and the theme of Amula — are never rationally linked up. The planes of reality and fancy are hardly integrated although the author tries his best to tear the veil of magic and fantasy from the

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27. Ibid. p. 41

face of reality. Atlina, who could fly, did not exercise his power to reach Amula. He remained passive for long years. Magic is one of the most important elements in the plot but its use shows an inconsistency which weakens the plot and affects the rational value of the pattern. Secondly, the strength of the story is its moral approach; its weakness lies in the pattern of incidents and characters.

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## A Summing up

As Arnold Wesker is in his fifties and as his works have yet to stand the test of time, it is too early to make their final assessment. All that we expect from him now is that he will have the alertness and agility of mind to produce many more plays not only to entertain but also to inspire the world. It is worth noting here that however versatile he may be, he has written just more than a dozen plays although some contemporary dramatists like John Osborne, John Arden and Harold Pinter have far outnumbered him. So far as his numerical output is concerned Wesker is definitely lagging behind. Yet it is impossible for us to find a yardstick with which to consider his works because he is 'too near'.

Critics of the bourgeois school have often said that Wesker is not capable of divorcing art from propaganda. His success, they allege, depends largely upon conforming to the spirit of the age rather than being in opposition to it, and he is so steeped in the spirit of his age that he is unable to use any historical theme in his works. Shakespeare, they say, went even to pre-historic Britain to use the myth of King Lear in a sixteenth-century perspective, to the Egyptian myth of Cleopatra to produce a wanton queen-despot of his time, or to pre-Christian Rome to take up the myth of Caesar and Brutus in order to put the republican spirit in conflict with the personality cult and so on. We admit that Shakespeare's art

chiefly depends upon the successful use of the myths of a bygone age in conjunction with the main problems of his day. Wesker has seldom tried his hand in this way. His Peter — the German cook, Sarah Kahn — the Jewish immigrant, Beatie Bryant — the enlightened country girl, Pip Thompson — the upper-class conscript, Andrew Cobham — the progressive architect all are without parallel, and they have no connections with any myth of bygone times. Therefore, Wesker, according to the bourgeois school of critics, has trodden the highways of propaganda rather than reaching some bye-ways of pure art.

It would undoubtedly be unjust to expect from Wesker what Shakespeare, who is so important in English literature, did for art. The mixture of life between 1580 and 1620 was not as complex as in the 1960s or 1970s. It was possible for Shakespeare to sweep away the various aspects of thought and experience in his plays[1], whereas for Wesker it is quite a job. While Shakespeare was the representative artist of his period, Wesker is the representative artist of a particular class — that is, the working class although both of them wrote for the public theatre. Still there is a similarity between the two. Both could not but respond to the catastrophes which shook England at their respective times. Both have passed through transitional phases. While Shakespeare's feudal England of landowners was perishing under the onslaught of

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1. M. Anderson : Anger and Detachment, p. 117

capitalism, Wesker's bourgeois England has come to a perilous point. Both of them have revolted against the insufficiency of their respective ages. Neither of them has had the least desire to surrender nor has been, above all, ready to sign a treaty of alliance with the reactionary forces. Both of them have stood head and shoulder above their emergent contemporaries. Both of them have stood between two worlds and between two sets of principles — the dying side and the emerging side.

Yet it is remarkable to note that while Shakespeare's revolt against the world increased in energy and comprehensiveness, as he advanced in years, Wesker is fast losing his identity in the morass of the middle class, although in his twenties and thirties he was familiarising a middle-class audience with the lives of the lower working class[2]. Shakespeare was absorbed in dealing with power of money or both, but Wesker has been much more concerned with socio-cultural change if not political change proper.

'Change the world ; it needs to be changed ! ' was an exhortation that ran through Brecht's[3] plays like a refrain. Though it may be a matter of surprise that he never succeeded in convincingly demonstrating what he wanted the world to be changed into and how it could be changed. Wesker, too, like Brecht, has wanted to change the world. He has lived through unemployment,

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2. Myron Matlaw : Modern world drama, an encyclopedia, p. 813

3. Martin Esslin : Brecht, a choice of evils, p. 232

elections and social change. The world around him has moved through many political upheavals, the so-called 'angry' writers, the Cuban Revolution, civil rights marches in the States, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the cruelties in Vietnam, the Chinese cultural revolution, the Israeli/Arab war, the Russian occupation of Prague, the murder of Martin Luther King, the first landing on the moon etc. Wesker was arrested and sentenced to prison in 1961 after the Ban-the-Bomb demonstrations. In 1960 he launched Centre 42, an organisation with the double purpose of bringing the arts to a wider (in practice, working class) audience and of placing the means of production within the control of the producing artists.

There is no doubt that he never skims over the problems of his time. But on the contrary, he has penetrated the English (in a narrow sense Jewish) working-class milieu in the welfare state, and if his directness of social purpose and total sincerity of statement is concerned he is above criticism. There are political idealists as well as social pessimists in Wesker's plays as we find them in Shakespeare. He, too, like Shakespeare, is able to translate the processes of ordinary work into theatrical life although he has an abhorrence of a working-class art. He has never presented a concrete picture of the whole world, nor has he always posed as the protagonist for class consciousness. Dave Simmonds, Ronnie Kahn, Bertie Bryant, or Andrew Cobham might have been well aware of the class structure, but how many of them did endeavour to change the world is a matter of conjecture. Therefore, there has been a divergence between their aspirations and their deeds.

So far as Wesker's early works are concerned he almost played the role of a political missionary although in the garb of an artist. Then he was punctiliously successful in bridging 'art' with 'mission' as if he was about to arrange a happy cohabitation between them. This was due to the fact that he drew directly from life and that he started from objective facts but not from abstract imagination. At that time he was not only truer to life but also replaced the convention of the drawing-room with the convention of the kitchen which actually gives us the idea of the symmetrical form between the forces of production and the relations of productions. Then he dealt with the specific emotions mostly of the East End Jewish working people but these emotions could be those of the working people of any country of the world. The situations in '<u>The Kitchen</u>', '<u>Roots</u>', and '<u>Chips with Everything</u>' are treated with such documentary truthfulness and are given such an artistic structure that working people of any country will have no difficulty in identifying with Peter, Sarah, Ronnie, Dave, Monty Blatt, Libby Dobson, Andrew Cobham, Smiler, Harry etc. Besides, he represents the contemporary English theatre illustrating the diversity as well as the strength of the post war theatre as his contemporaries like Osborne, Arden and Pinter[4] have done.

So far so good. It seems to be convincing that Wesker is successful in dedicating himself to the pursuit of his political

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4. M. Anderson : <u>Anger and Detachment</u>, Op. cit. p. 2

and artistic aims. But still a pertinent question arises — whether Wesker as an artist appears really to be an idealist living in the cloud-cuckoo land or a prescriber of a radical change. We may feel tempted to show that Wesker is never in favour of a change if we take the following extracts into account.

1. Mrs. Bryant : The apple don't fall far from the tree — that it don't. 5

2. Corporal Hill : I want to see them all pointing one way, together — unity, unity. Slam those feet, slam, slam, you're men of the Queen, her own darlings ... forget the sweat, forget the cold, together in time. I want you to look beautiful, I want you to move as one man, as one ship, as one solid gliding ship. 6

The interpretation may go thus — the apple (that is, the working people who are supposed to be the favourites of the English Queen) does not go far away from the tree (that is, the queen or the titular representative of the establishment). Therefore, if the people really want to move 'as one man', 'as one ship', 'as one solid gliding ship', there is no question of bringing about a change. In this way one may conclude that Wesker cannot envisage the creation of a new society.

But the criterion of an artist does not definitely depend upon whether he brings or heralds a change or not. If that is so,

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5. Roots.

6. Chips with Everything, II, xii

Shakespeare also is an artist below standard, for he too substituted a tyrant for another, or an exploiting organisation for another. For argument's sake, we are bound to point out that at least one of Wesker's plays was intended to set one thinking of change: the play is 'The Kitchen'. Here Peter as one of the 'cogs in the wheel' of world-wide capitalistic monopoly, really exploded the kitchen — the symbol of the capitalistic monopoly, because he felt that all the finer values in such depressing and debilitating conditions were crumbling. Still one can blame Wesker for not writing a full-fledged play dealing with armed revolution and/or a liberation movement although he has dedicated one of his plays (cf. 'The Four Seasons') to the revolutionaries of Cuba. Notwithstanding one may think that he has perhaps passed the responsibility of bringing about a change to some one else.

That an artist is a social being does not mean that he wages war against all evils in the fashion of a medieval knight, nor should he be one like Lenin or Mao who would batter the reactionary palaces to pieces. An artist, on the other hand, knows that art, which itself is a weapon, ought to be used in its own way. Milton, who knew it well, protested through a sonnet[7] instead of inducing the Commonwealth Army to retaliate against the Duke of Savoy who, in 1655, carried on the Vaudois persecution. That an artist prefers art to wielding a sword is no mean argument. Since

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7. cf. John Milton : On the Late Massacre in Piedmont (in F. T. Palgrave's the Golden Treasury, O. U. P. 1967, p. 61)

art can stir the whole human spirit, it is the duty of an artist not to talk much about art but simply to make it happen or to prepare the ground for cultural rejuvenation. Perhaps in pursuance of the above idea Wesker founded Centre 42 which was intended to pave the way for art by staging plays there.

Wesker, who experienced poverty in his childhood, refused to know and accept life in the abstract. His work, therefore, does not give the flavour of any 'idea' but of 'life' — life that does not in general show the past or future in a new shape but with a newer meaning. That is why each of his plays is different from the other, one character is never the prototype of the other. Even some characters that appear in more than one play are not the carbon-copy of the other. Sarah Kahn of 'Chicken Soup with Barley' is almost poles apart from her namesake in 'I'm Talking About Jerusalem' ; it would be difficult to find a similarity between Ronnie, and Dave in the first play and those of the last play of Wesker's 'Trilogy'. Many of his characters are the dregs of society, but there are no villains, thugs, rascals or vagabonds or real cynics either in speech or in action in his plays. Even Shakespeare's Shylock, the sole avenger of Antonio, has been transformed by Wesker into a humanitarian who not only talks with Antonio but also drinks with him inside his own study (cf. 'The Merchant'). Again Wesker can display his craftsmanship in creating a dramatic effect with only two characters (cf. 'The Four Seasons') or he equally proves his excellent dramatic technique with as many as thirty characters (cf. 'The Kitchen'). Still it should be borne in mind that almost

all the characters, however disappointed or frustrated, stick to humanity although some of them are rebels or revolutionaries.

So far as his style, treatment and skill are concerned he almost always succeeds in amalgamating them in his plays for a deeper and greater comprehension of literary art. Most of the action of his plays right down from 'The Kitchen' to 'The Merchant' takes place under one roof within the confines of four walls, in compliance with the Aristotelian unity of place but still there is a central urge — always there is someone who with the ambition of a working man wants to turn anger into a realisation of something worthwhile as a revolutionary wants to turn the sword into a ploughshare. When social contradictions are exacerbated during the period of transition from capitalism to socialism the class nature of Wesker's art emerges even more clearly, if not blatantly. Thus through art he asserts the noble principles of morality, promoting the advance of socialist culture and improving the aesthetic tastes of the masses.

He wonders whether the words and sentence constructions he allows his characters to use are really those of the working-class. Wesker himself worked in circumstances where he might well have heard or used the language of the working people. The language of his two best-written plays (cf. 'The Kitchen' and 'Roots' does really give us the smell and taste of 'the real language of the people'. But does the credit go absolutely to Wesker alone? For it is known that he was indebted to Dusty Wesker, his wife, for

the Norfolk dialect which he used in '*Roots*'. And perhaps for the language of '*The Kitchen*' he would have been indebted to a restaurant or restaurants where such language was in general use. We notice that the language used by working people in his plays mostly resembles the language of the educated people. It is interesting to note that the Kahns of '*Chicken Soup with Barley*' and Sonny or Emanuel of '*The Old Lady*' are speaking almost from the same platform though in social status there is a difference between the two. The characters of Wesker's later plays may be of working class origin, but in tone and temperament they belong to an educated and cultured (though not always sophisticated) class and the language they use may not always be that of the working class.

But every true work of art is not characterised by the use of language only but by organic unity of content and form. Certain things can best be represented in the framework of a specific genre, contemporary life is best depicted in a contemporary artistic language creating an artistic picture of reality. But this is not possible if there is no unity of content and form and the correlation of form to content. Both the lack of feeling and the profusion of feeling are to be condemned, on the other hand ideas expressed through adequate words are to be advocated. The result may be unconvincing if the topical and important issues bereft of a profound content are treated. We know that content and form are equally necessary in a work of art, but this does not imply that content and form are of equal significance in art. Wesker never

resorts to formalist art which has little or no content, nor does he resort to fashionable form bereft of content. His form absorbs the audience's attention, but he never fails to pinpoint content. Here lies his mastery.

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As we have reached the end of our discussion it needs a summing up. We have already noticed that Wesker was a committed artist so far as his early plays are concerned. We have also noticed that he has some soft corner in his heart for the Jews. He was a committed artist as well as the representative of a particular class, that is, the working class. His world-wide popularity is due to the fact that he is a representative artist of that class. The people he saw most, the near ones with whom he was brought up, the tradesmen or craftsmen he worked with — are all those who belong to that class, and Wesker, as an artist, was their true representative. In spite of being a representative of his class he is free from narrowness of mind and pessimism. He neither confines himself to an exceedingly narrow world of egotism nor is involved in his own neuroses.

Their true representative, he is progressive, and his success rests here. Therefore, he is a rebel as well as a revolutionary. But again the question of ambiguity arises when we see him portraying the familiar life of the Jews who are mostly led by what is called Yiddish — a tradition that has been transmitted

to them down the ages. In considering both sides of his significant contribution to the exploration of contemporary sensibility, we may perhaps come to the conclusion that he is not only a progressive artist but is a conservative also. It is British socialism that made him progressive as well as secular in the profound study of reality. But it is Judaism that has made him conservative as well as ritualistic in the study of illusion. But in each case he is far away from decadence. If socialism has made his plays dynamic successful and popular, Judaism has made him static, sectarian and doubtful. The former inspires him to move forward, whereas the latter offers him an opportunity to move backwards. With one he teaches man to have faith in the working class who ought to have no illusion about reality, and with the other, he resorts to Jewish rituals which summon illusion rather than reality. While socialism bears the stamp of class antagonism, Judaism bears the stamp of prayer, propitiation and humanism defending human integrity against degradation and distortion. Yet there is a marked limitation. While he, to a great extent, reflects the lives and sensibility of working people, the other class of people mostly remain untouched by him.

To bridge the gulf between the illusion and reality is a difficult task for Wesker, for the two seldom go together. If Wesker, the socialist, has to shake hands with Wesker, the Semite, one may expect to find a humanist in him. The artist who had hitherto been the representative of the working class now goes on to make a trip to the desert of Israel which was once the Hebraic seat of

culture and wisdom, and before the trip is made, he buries the wand of class antagonism and forgets the structure of class society. That is why the characters of his later plays are more liberal humanists than anything else.

It is quite evident that Wesker, the young artist, sees the world in terms of the bourgeoisie and the working class, and there his role as a social realist is not only to give voice to the aspirations of the people, but to increase man's happiness with the redemption of the oppressed. But Wesker the mature artist sees the world in terms of Jews and non-Jews. It may be relevant to add that the existence of the different communist platforms and the dearth of unanimity among them, and the existence of a welfare state with the monarch at its head in Britain may be held responsible for making Wesker discover the platform of humanity. Yet it should never be forgotten that Wesker tries to teach the working class how to stand erect instead of remaining as marginal figures in the history of modern civilisation. In a word, what he endeavours to bring about is a synthesis of humanism and socialism as Gorky in Soviet Russia tried to do. So the human world of Wesker that consists of those multitudes, the dregs of society and the true rebels enter into his later plays with a positive ethos. This is one of the principal reasons why Wesker's works of art produce so indelible an impression on readers in many politico-economically emerging countries. In the nuclear age when the very existence of man is at stake and when there is the absence of stability of culture and human heritage of the past, when there is change and challenge everywhere,

when all sorts of values are undermined by hypocritical commercialism causing damage to solidity and equilibrium, we may enter the Wesker arena with some doubt and disbelief. But soon we find that Wesker is neither a typical 'bull in a china shop' nor one who aims at demolishing the structure of human civilisation. His art is not to have us swallow a bitter pill nor to pour rose water into the gall and vitriol but to prescribe the values of beauty, truth and goodness, nay to embrace the best of socialism and the best of Hebraism imbued with faith and hope and love. This is what are the claims of his vision and the claims of his art.

Wesker depicts life as he knows it and he depicts this life so as to make it a vehicle for a positive, a constructive, and a forward-looking faith. And this faith in Man that inspires thousands of readers beyond the boundaries of England, emanates from his works of art. A great artist that he is not for Britain alone but for all countries.

he is

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APPENDIX - I

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** The typewritten copy sent by Arnold Wesker has always been used by me. (vide chapter five (A) and (B) and chapter six .)

# I. Letters from Arnold Wesker

## Letter No. one.

27 Bishops Road London N6 4HR

22 January 1979

Dear Mr Chakraborty

Thank you for your essay on me. I'll come to that in a moment.

Enclosed are photostat copies of the articles for which you asked. I checked with Bookshop 85 and they assured me the two books: Fatlips & Said The Old Man were sent off in December. Perhaps you have received them by now. The mail takes a long time. They report that books have taken seven weeks to get to Italy!

The mistake on page 47 of ADAM is as follows: Shylock's line "I must hear this nonsense through I suppose" comes after Rivka's line "I know you know the meanings that I mean. You're wrigling so." Therefore Rivka's is one long speech: "Don't be rude to me Shylock! You have a friend. Good. A gentile and a gentlemen ...." etc. The RIVKA (contd) is a mistake. The printer carried it over from the next page of the typed manuscript. I think there are many such careless errors. For the best and definitive version you'll have to wait till Penguin bring out the collected plays. End of the year.

Your essay is very interesting to me as it's the first time anyone has acknowledged the humour in my plays which is strong and intentional and very much part of my tone. Unfortunately each period selects what it needs and wants from a work. Critics and accademics have mostly tended to ignore the comic and the ironic in my work.

Getting the essay published is another matter. I certainly don't have the time to offer it around. But more to the point I must say in all frankness that the style of English reads very strangely to our current use of the language. I'm not quite sure what it is, can't quite place my finger on it. But why don't you try it out yourself. You can offer it to ENGLISH STUDIES, a Journal of English Language and Literature published by Swets & Zeitlinger B.V. Amsterdam, Holland. That gets around to accademics and is by them. Vol 56 No. 1 Feb 1975 had a very interesting piece on THE FRIENDS by Prof. Monica Mannheimer. Or you could try Performing Arts Journal, P.O. Box 858, Peter Stuyvesant Station, New York, NY 10009, USA. Or there's a magazine called Modern Drama, Graduate Centre for Study of Drama, University of Toronto, TORONTO, Ontario, Canada.

Good luck,

Yours sincerely

Arnold Wesker

**Letter No. two**

27 Bishops Road London N6 4HR

24 February 1979

Dear Mr Chakrabarti

It is not really my place to correct your prose style now, forgive me, as I have the time. Quite a number of people send me their thesis, essays and questionairus. I try to be helpful but it is very time consuming.

I'm sorry if that sounds harsh it certainly feels very churlish to be writing it to someone who cares [illegible] work. But you did ask, and without going on any further I hope what I've written indicates what I mean. You would do much better to discuss this further with someone from England who works in the university. I feel very presumptious writing this to a prof. in the Dept of English especially since my own prose style is not the greatest, nor does it come to me easily.

Yours sincerely

Arnold Wesker

513

**Letter No. three**

27 Bishops Road London N6 4HP

16 November 1978

Dear Mr Chakrabarti

I'm sorry you've have problems receiving my books. I've just checked with Bookshop 85 and they say that they've sent off a number of things to you - they hadn't their list to hand but would be ringing me back. They tell me post is impossible and that some books sent airmail to Italy took eleven weeks. It was quicker by boat in the nineteenth century!

They are, however, going to sent off SAID THE OLD MAN TO THE YOUNG MAN and FATLIPS which, I guess, they were waiting to be published and then forgot to send them. But, as I say, they're checking.

Copies of THE WEDDING FEAST published by Plays & Players are out of print and so I've asked The Nottingham Playhouse to send you a manuscript copy. They are going to present the play next spring.

I've also ~~written~~ rung Theatre Quarterly and asked them to send you a copy of CHECKLIST No. 14. which is the one on me. But I don't know what Theatrefacts volumen IV No. 2 is.

~~AND~~ THE BRITISH CLASS CONSCIOUS has been sent to you by Bookshop 85.

ART IS NOT ENOUGH printed in The Twentieth Century magazine in 1961 - well, Bookshop 85 is looking into that though they think they already did so and sent you an address for you to chase them up yourself.

Meanwhile I'm sending you a copy of ADAM magazine which was devoted to me and in which is published the penultimate version of THE MERCHANT. The final version, made after the recent production in Birmingham will not appear until the collected plays are brought out by Penguin Books, which will be over the next eighteen months.

I hope this is of some help to you.

Yours sincerely

Arnold Wesker

APPENDIX - II

## A. Biographical Notes

1932 Born in East End of London : father, Joseph Wesker, a Russian-Jewish tailor; mother, Leah Wesker, Hungarian-Jewish.

1939 Evacuated briefly to various parts of England and Wales, but spent most of the war period at home. Lived with parents when in London until his marriage.

1943 Failed eleven plus, and went to Upton House Central School which emphasised clerical studies. Enjoyed amateur acting outside school.

1948 Left School and worked at many jobs, including carpenter's mate, bookseller's assistant and plumber's mate.

1950-52 Two years National Service in the Royal Air Force. Formed drama group for enlisted airmen. Wrote a series of diary-style letters intending to reshape them as a novel, but which were actually used as the raw material for Chips with Everything.

1952-56 Several jobs in Norfolk — seed sorter, farm labourer, kitchen porter — then returned to London, where he spent two years as a pastry cook.

1956 Worked in Paris for nine months as a chef, saving money to enter the London School of Film Technique.

1957 Met Lindsay Anderson by chance and asked him to read his short story Four, as possible subject for a film. Although this came to nothing, Anderson read Chicken Soup with Barley and The Kitchen and sent them to George Devine at the Royal Court Theatre.

1958 First production of Chicken Soup with Barley directed by John Dexter at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry. This transferred to London to the Royal Court for a second week. Awarded Arts Council grant of £300, which he used to marry Doreen Bicker, whom he had met while both were working in a Norfolk hotel.

1959 Roots first produced. Evening Standard's Most Promising Playwright Award.

1960 Chicken Soup with Barley, Roots and I'm Talking about Jerusalem produced as 'The Wesker Trilogy' at the Royal Court, opening on 7 June, 23 June, and 27 July respectively.

1961 Roots was Wesker's first play to be produced in the USA : the off-Broadway production received mixed notices. Film version of The Kitchen released. Demonstrated against use of nuclear weapons along with other writers, and sentenced to one month in prison. Accepted directorship of Centre 42, a cultural movement for making the arts more widely accessible, primarily through trade union support and involvement.

1962 Chips with Everything opened and voted Best Play of 1962. Wesker inaugurated simultaneous production in the provinces, with openings in Glasgow and Sheffield a few days after the London premiere.

1963 Chips with Everything opened on Broadway to good notices.

1964 Their Very Own and Golden City won Italian Premio Marzotto drama award.

1965 Off-Broadway production of The Kitchen achieved a six-moth run to good notices.

1967 Off-Broadway production of The Four Seasons : badly received.

1970 After directing his own The Friends at the Round House, Wesker resigned from the Round House Trust and on 20 December persuaded the Council for Centre 42 to pass a resolution dissolving itself.

1973 The Kitchen won gold medal in Spain.

1974 The Old Ones well received in a workshop production off-Broadway.

1976 Sales of the Penguin edition of the 'Trilogy' reached quarter of a million. BBC 1 TV presentation of Love Letters on Blue Paper, 2 March. Stage version of the same play written end of March, commissioned by the National Theatre; scheduled for production in the Cottesloe under the direction of the author, Jan. 1978. World premiere of The Merchant at the Stockholm Royal Dramaten, 8 Oct.

1977 British premiere of The Wedding Feast, Leeds Playhouse, 20 Jan. World premiere of The Journalists at the Criterion Theatre, Coventry (amateur production), 25 March.

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