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.

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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.

* * *

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.