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The Ohio State University, Ph.D., 1972
Theater

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POLITICS IN MODERN BRITISH DRAMA:
THE PLAYS OF ARNOLD WESKER AND JOHN ARDEN

DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
Grant Fletcher McKernie, B.A., M.A.

The Ohio State University
1972

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. John Morrow and Dr. Roy Bowen for supporting my doctoral candidacy in the Department of Theatre, for encouraging my pursuit of this subject and for guiding and assisting me throughout the preparation of this dissertation. I wish also to thank Dr. Konrad Zobel, Mr. Wayne Lawson and Ms. Francine Shuchat for their helpful comments on the text.
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CHAPTER I: THE HISTORICAL CLIMATE

Introduction

Critical interest in British drama since 1956 abounds. Already, over fifteen dissertations have been undertaken which deal with some facet of the contemporary British theatrical scene. The Tulane Drama Review devoted an entire issue to the subject on the tenth anniversary of its 'birthday,' the opening of John Osborne's Look Back in Anger. The bibliography of the subject reveals well over fifty books published, as well as hundreds of articles. While an important segment of this literature is concerned with theatre in Britain rather than drama (most notably, the attention given to the directorial work of Peter Brook), the weight of published material treats the drama of the period.

The dramatic explosion that followed John Osborne's success—journalistically tagged the 'New Wave' or the 'Angry Young Men' movement—is well documented. Of concern here is the focus, or orientation, much of this documentation has taken. Taking their cue from Osborne's initial play, critics have labeled the dramatists 'angry,' 'committed,' 'socialist,' 'political,' 'rebellious' and 'polemical.' All these are suitably prefaced with pejorative laudatory or condemnatory phrases, depending on the particular critic's predeliction for the politics of the playwrights. The dramatists were quickly
associated with the 'angry' novelists of England—John Wain, Doris Lessing and Bill Hopkins, and the committed philosophers of the period—Colin Wilson and Stuart Holroyd. A valiant, if scattered, attempt to provide the movement with a set of individual manifestoes appeared in 1957 with the publication of Declaration, artistic statements of faith from these novelists and philosophers, as well as from Osborne, drama critic Kenneth Tynan and (at that time) film director Lindsay Anderson. Because the writers "all shared a working-class origin," and expressed a passionate interest in that origin (curiously obvious given that new dramatists are always urged to write from their own experience), the 'protest' and 'angry' labels gained credence. That the new dramatists were developing this angry political profile primarily on the basis of the working-class setting of their plays is no doubt more a reflection of the middle-class bias of their critics than of the sincerity of their commitment.

By 1962, however, critics were in retreat from their original assessment. John Russell Taylor, in his seminal text, Anger and After, skirted deftly around the question of the extent of political commitment of the new writers. Raymond Williams' article in 1963 avoided the writers' politics altogether. And Gordon Rogoff in 1967 dared critics to revive the phrase "kitchen sink dramatists" by declaring, "... certainly journalists, hungry for copy, were only too quick to pick up the Court's claims and the Osborne play and turn them into a convenient label..." Today, the retreat is a stampede. Allardyce Nicoll has culled the annals of English drama since 1890 and concluded that the 'new' dramatists are rather traditional after all. Clifford Leech, avoiding pejorative political labels, discovers
Wesker to be a "romantic," while Laurence Kitchen describes Wesker's *The Kitchen* as "compressionist" drama. Finally, in a summary statement of the period 1957-1967, Charles Marowitz concludes, after almost completely dismissing the decade's drama, "What I don't want to be interpreted as saying is that there was no New Wave. . . ."\(^9\)

At just the time when critics have swung the pendulum full away from their concern for the writers' commitment, the 'movement,' if there ever was one, has apparently died. Not only did Marowitz use the past tense in referring to the new wave, but Laurence Kitchen has also commented, "No new dramatists of major quality has appeared [1969], and several of the post-1956 English group have been absorbed by the visual media. . . ."\(^10\) The playwrights themselves have lost their original anger. Osborne has had one play produced in four years;\(^11\) his *Time Present* and *Hotel in Amsterdam* created little critical excitement, undoubtedly because they were both little more than Jimmy Porter revisited. Wesker's newest play, *The Friends*, is apolitical even by the most flexible of critical standards. Harold Pinter was never considered a politically committed writer. David Storey, the newest success in the West End, writes in a style as firm as a rowboat in the English Channel on its way from Pinter to Beckett. Only John Arden continues to write plays which critics think flirt with politics. Like Arden's other works, they are attended less by the public than the critics.

Whether the movement has in fact exhausted its exhortative energies, or has become middle-aged and middle-class, it is apropos to evaluate with the objectivity of time and distance the political commitment of those writers known as the "Angry Young Men." Critics
have uniformly and obediently noted the politics of these writers; the dramatists' *ex cathedra* essays have been published. Yet there has been no systematic attempt to discuss the political philosophy underlying their plays. Even with Arnold Wesker, the most politically involved of the playwrights, critics have done little more than label Wesker a "William Morris socialist." In pursuing this subject, it may be discovered that the pendulum should remain away from the politically charged atmosphere in which the plays were originally greeted. That the plays were received as social and political commentary in the 1950's, however, is sufficient justification to explore this facet of their content.

To assess the politics of modern British dramatists, it is necessary first to assess the political and historical climate in which Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* first appeared. Critics generally agree that the plays of the period drew much of their vitality and popularity from the political malaise existing in 1956. Charles Marowitz has even suggested, "Many of the works of the past eight or nine years already have the alienation of period about them, and rather than rekindling our interest, they merely perk our nostalgia." John Russell Taylor is to the point in noting this relationship between the new dramatists and the mood of the nation:

> Though Jimmy Porter and his milieu seem, even at this short distance of time, as inescapably 'period' as the characters in *The Vortex*, quintessentially 'mid-fifties,' it was precisely the quality of immediacy and topicality which makes them seem so now that had the electrifying effect in 1956.

Osborne's plays, and those that followed, were as closely linked to their historical context as the committed dramas of the 1930's were in America. Tynan's original review of *Look Back in Anger*
touched on this fact.

I agree that Look Back in Anger is likely to remain a minority taste. What matters, however, is the size of the minority. I estimate it at roughly 6,733,000, which is the number of people in this country between twenty and thirty. Gordon Rogoff believes that "the British theatre, pace Rattigan, had to change in the fifties because British life, British assumptions, and British positions were shifting mercurially, forcing responses from people who had made lack of response a condition of survival." In 1961, John Mander concluded, "The significance of the angry young men movement, then, is seen as sociological: the literary-dramatic break-through is taken to be the artistic expression of certain changes in English society in the years since the war." To emphasize his point, Mander cautions the director of Look Back in Anger:

To succeed, the play must counterpoint Jimmy against contemporary English society; and this society must be realised on the stage itself.

While the critics observed the relationship of the dramatic movement and its historical context, none have explicated that context. Few have even gone as far as John Russell Taylor, who at least devotes a sentence to the topic:

The time, obviously, was ripe: 1956 was the year of Suez and Hungary, protest was in the air, and the mood of the country, especially that of young 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.

Most critics have expressed platitudes similar to that of George Wellwarth:

John Osborne's timing was precisely right. A few years earlier or a few years later Look Back in Anger might well have been passed off by the critics as callow breast-beating, but in 1956 the critics and the public were ready for something new.
The remainder of this chapter, then, discusses in detail the political and social context in which the new wave of committed dramatists appeared. The roots of the psychological malaise among the artists are linked to what are believed to be the major causes of malaise in the nation: fear of the H-bomb, the terrible destruction in England during World War II, the psychological disappointment when the promised utopia of the Labour government failed to materialize, the frustrating inability of Britain to recover economically at a rate even approximate to the rate of her European neighbors, the loss of confidence in the leadership of the nation, which could not exert the power or influence in external affairs that former leaders had, the rise of a new type of leadership, the technocrat, who was free of public responsibility because of his low visibility, and fears of loss of freedom both because of the welfare state and the increased size of corporations and unions. Shortly after the opening of Look Back in Anger, world events seemed to conspire against Britain's efforts to remain great: Suez, Hungary, the independence of Ghana, the formation of the European Economic Community, Sputnik, and Mac-Millan's conference with Kennedy in Bermuda. The chapter is not intended as an historical essay, but rather seeks to correlate certain external evidence with the plays. Usually such an approach expects the external evidence to elucidate the meaning of the plays. Here, however, the purpose is to understand better the reasons for the plays' successes, and to provide the political context within which to assess the plays' politics.
Psychological Malaise

Both historians and critics of Britain in the twentieth century are agreed that the country's dominant historical feature in the 1950's was not a specific international or domestic event, but a mood—a feeling of anomie, of psychological disorientation, of sociological malaise. Writing in 1958, Kenneth Allsop asserted,

The important thing is that, with justification, the phrase [angry young men] illuminated for large numbers of people a new state of mind in Britain of the Nineteen-Fifties. Look Back in Anger, arriving at that particular moment, caught and crystallised a floating mood. It was as if the pin-table ball that many young people feel themselves to be today, ricocheting in lunatic movement, had hit the right peg. Lights flashed; Bells rang.22

Reynolds and Brasher note that "dissatisfaction with the mood of society was commonplace in post-war Britain.23 Although the standard of living had finally begun to rise, this only served to heighten the sense of unreality, for instead of the economy gradually returning Britain to pre-war conditions, it was moving her farther away in other spheres of activity. Traditional England, whatever the phrase meant, had quietly, unobtrusively been replaced; but the replacement was as elusive of identification as the causes of it. Marcus Cunliffe expressed the state of bewilderment of most English as they observed themselves in the 1950's.

'Our' England is more truly ours than a generation ago, yet we are disappointed rather than gratified. Something has collapsed, or we think it has. We have lost, or mislaid, our sense of direction. Nationally we are in a mild state of shock.24

When Britain emerged from the war, she was thoroughly exhausted. The resuscitation process began, but what resulted was not the resurrection of pre-war British standards, but the creation of
a newer value system with little of the old to remind one of Victoria and Edward VII. As David Thomson has chronicled, "The most important cultural and intellectual phenomenon of the years after 1945 was the upheaval (and extensive abandonment) of traditional values, and the quest for new values felt to be more appropriate to life in a rapidly changing, materialistic and scientific civilization." Reynolds and Brasher, too, comment on the lack of a solid value system by which the average Englishman (and his nation) could function.

One of the most alarming developments in post-war Britain has been the rejection by so many young people of standards of behaviour which were generally paid lip service at least, and often much more, by those of older generations.

These traditional values included a strong sense of Victorian morality, class consciousness, trust in political leadership, stoic acceptance of all difficulties, an acceptance of one's place in the economic and social structure, and a belief in a national purpose and direction. The last effort to salvage these values came during the coronation of Elizabeth II, when the press cheerfully acknowledged the entrance of a new Elizabethan era equivalent in dynamism and national success to the last one—in the sixteenth century.

Newspapers and periodicals made play with the fact that a second Elizabeth was now on the throne to encourage notions of a new Elizabethan age. This somewhat spurious nostalgia began to have a little reality when Sir John Hunt's expedition succeeded in reaching the summit of Mount Everest on the eve of Coronation Day 1953. Soon, however, the less heroic issues of a balance of payment crisis, and the problems posed by Nasser in the Middle East, relegated new Elizabethanism firmly into the background.

John Mander, whose book Great Britain or Little England? summarizes the dilemma of Britain in the 1950's, candidly concludes,
Britain is said to lack national purpose. But national purpose is a paradoxical thing. Nations that have it do not speak of it; nations that speak of it do not have it. That was Britain's case for the greater part of her history. If we speak of it now, the inference is plain: we speak of what we do not have.

To this sense of loss Osborne's Jimmy Porter directed the thrust of his many diatribes. His most famous speech spoke directly to the absence of national purpose,

There aren't any good, brave causes left. If the big bang does come, and we all get killed off, it won't be in aid of the old-fashioned, grand design. It'll just be for the Brave New-nothing-very-much-thank-you. About as pointless and inglorious as stepping in front of a bus.

Like a fish out of water, struggling to find an environment he can understand, accept and live in, he cried out,

Oh heavens, how I long for a little ordinary human enthusiasm. Just enthusiasm—that's all. I want to hear a warm, thrilling voice cry out Hallelujah! (He bangs his breast theatrically.) Hallelujah! I'm alive! I've an idea. Why don't we have a little game? Let's pretend that we're human beings, and that we're actually alive. Just for a while. What do you say? Let's pretend we're human.

His feelings, such as they were, were all the more thunderous because they were the first to catch national attention.

The new wave authors also give descriptions of the psychological climate of Britain. Novelist Bill Hopkins uses two stunning images to express his attitude toward Britain.

Altogether they [news reports] amount to the exhaustion of a man with asthma having run a marathon race and found there were no trophies or glory at the end of it. That is exactly our own position. With every decade since the turn of the century we have intensified our endeavours while our condition has deteriorated. Now it seems that despite all our efforts, knowledge and hopes, besides the lives jettisoned in their millions, we have achieved nothing. The dry taste of futility lingers in the mouth of all.

The nation was suffering from a sociological upheaval, changing the
lifestyle of the average Englishman, but not providing him a neatly
codified guide to his new way of life. Arnold Wesker summarizes the
philosophical questions plaguing many of the artists, and at the same
time expresses the mood of his nation.

The world is confused, the people in Great Britain are con­
 fused, I am confused. Where exactly does the cause of such lunacy lay? In leaders? In the people who are led? In the very nature of the human condition? What is revolution about? Better houses or better human beings? Do better houses produce better human beings? Is revolution about making other people beautiful or making one's self beautiful? Is the world beautiful only when one is happy or when other people are happy? And when there are no more revolutions to be fought will we be left with just pure good and evil? And if an egalitarian society will take the passion out of evil will it also takes [sic] the passion from goodness? These are some of my thoughts, echoes of the same questions asked by a dozen generations before me, perhaps they are also the thoughts of the British people.32

What had caused this loss of purpose, this absence of values, this feeling of frustration? While the tracing of historical antecedents for the mood of a nation is a dangerous task, the effort is pertinent, for some of the antecedents appear in the drama of the new wave, most others greatly inform it.

Contributing inestimably to this mood of anxiety was the existence of the hydrogen bomb, "that enormous umbrella fact at which hardly anyone does more than sneak an occasional glance."33 Bill Hopkins does glance at it when he says, "...the supineness of the intelligent is the tragic paradox of the Atomic Age. Only the insulated specialists, bafflingly capable of drawing the blinds against all other realities, remain enthusiastic about tomorrow."34 Jimmy Porter, too, recognizes the presence of the bomb.

If the big bang does come, and we all get killed off, it won't be in aid of the old-fashioned, grand design. It'll just be
for the Brave New-nothing-very-much-thank-you. About as pointless and inglorious as stepping in front of a bus.\textsuperscript{35}

While it is difficult to specify the importance of the bomb as a contributing factor to disorientation, many of the playwrights of the period involved themselves in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, suggesting their awareness of the bomb as an issue and its influence on them.

Without doubt, the initial shift in the position of Britain in the world, and her concomitant internal decline began with World War II. As John Mander has suggested, "In 1939 British power was the shield behind which America took shelter from the world; by 1942 it was American power which was the shield for Britain and her Empire."\textsuperscript{36} The destruction in Britain during the war is well-chronicled, and will not be itemized here. Suffice it to say that not only had Britain lost great numbers of her youth, and suffered inestimable losses from the bombing, but her financial status was that of a drained economy.

The war's cost depleted the country's foreign investments, leaving its balance of payments heavily dependent on a sharp increase in exports and immediately vulnerable to the strains of expenditure abroad. The growth of nationalism increased the problem of imperial security, and decreased the availability of bases from which that security could be maintained.\textsuperscript{37}

Victory, however, failed to improve her economic situation. "The unexpected ending of Lend-Lease in August 1945 came as a shock to Britain and other countries. Apparently Truman signed the order without realising what it really meant, and at first even ships at sea were ordered back to port. The ending of Lend-Lease so abruptly has been called 'a financial Dunkirk'."\textsuperscript{38} The continuing war in Greece further reduced the country's gold reserves. "In August 1945,
the Treasury's view was that Britain faced total economic ruin.\textsuperscript{39}

While the nation was exhilarated by victory and the release of tension, the celebration mood did not ease the financial situation.

The general mood of the country was one of exhilaration: the war was over, victory won, and a new government pledged to make a social revolution and with enough power to do so. Not even today, after all that has been said and written about 1945, has the nature of Britain's financial crisis in 1945 become part of the popular story of Britain's war effort.\textsuperscript{40}

The horrendous financial position abroad was reflected at home. Sissons and French, editors of Age of Austerity, introduce their book with the comment, "Nearly every contributor stressed the importance of the grim winter of 1946-7, not only because of its severity and its crises, but as a turning-point in the political fortunes of the Government.\textsuperscript{41} David Thomson summarizes the difficulties facing post-war Britain.

The problems of post-war Britain were to a large extent the endemic problems of twentieth-century Britain—of old and famous industries struggling for survival in unfavourable conditions, of new industries demanding urgent adjustments of capital, skills and markets, of a commercial nation, still convalescent from war, compelled to trade in a world of crowding competition and rapid, bewildering change.\textsuperscript{42}

The country began to develop new equipment, and production increased. "Yet consumption was kept down by 'austerity' and the high level of taxation scarcely encouraged enterprise."\textsuperscript{43} The outbreak of war in Korea only exacerbated the situation. The Government's inability to match economically the expectations of a victorious nation eventually caused it to fall. Returned by a small margin in 1950, the Labour Government was defeated by the Conservatives the following year. At a time when people sought at least the feeling of victory,
they had been disappointedly led through another five years of economic unhappiness.

The outstanding opportunity missed, however, has been the conspicuous failure of post-war governments to give a constructive lead to the nation's economic development. 44

The war's destruction and the inability of the Labour Government to solve the economic dilemma with which it was confronted are two reasons why the British began to feel a sense of despair regarding their direction as a nation. Liberal disappointment with the Government, however, was far more pervasive than just with the international economic situation; to the left-wing, the failure to enact a truly socialist platform was ultimately more despairing than either of the first reasons. Because many of the political writers of the 1950's were themselves socialists, this factor carries increased significance. Commenting on the social welfare legislation of the Labour Government, Francis Boyd has suggested that the Government's reforms were expected by the more idealistic Labour supporters to lead to the establishment of virtually a new society in which the bulk of the nation would at last find an outlet for energies of body and mind which had hitherto been cramped by the rigours and inequalities of the capitalist system. 45 Britain had never been ruled by a Socialist party, except in two coalition governments, and the expectations were raised for a new style of government and a new society. The country wanted to look forward. The pre-war world seemed so insecure and blame-worthy that there was little nostalgia for the past. To look back at all was to look back in anger—and in grief. 46

During 1946 alone, the Government passed no less than eight
major pieces of social legislation, which have since become the hallmarks of the nation's welfare system, notably the National Insurance Act and the National Health Service Act. To some socialists, however, it was not enough. "That 'the Labour Party is a Socialist party' was splendid; but its Socialist purpose was 'ultimate'. That Socialism 'cannot come overnight' was perfectly true, but to many that was no reason for not making a quicker and bolder start on the journey."

When Labour failed to construct a socialist society, but rather concerned itself with the passage of individual pieces of socialist legislation, the result was bitter disappointment on the left. "For Labour the high hopes of 1945 ended on a sour note of frustration and discord."

Francis Boyd is more cautious:

Some of this [Labour] dream was realised but, for a variety of reasons, by no means all. As a result, some social frustrations were left when Labour was driven out of office.

The communist historian, D. N. Pritt, reveals the despair of the left:

What went wrong? Why were our great hopes and opportunities frustrated and lost? Why was so little achieved, so little changed, so much left intact? Why was there no real advance towards socialism?

The disappointment of the angry young men in the 1950's stems, in part, from their disappointment with the Labour Government. Alison Porter, in Look Back in Anger, is accurate when she suggests that her husband is disappointed because nothing has changed. The Wesker Trilogy is one man's effort to explain to himself why the socialist experiment failed. Dave's comment to Sarah in I'm Talking About Jerusalem speaks to a generation of socialists. "Nothing's wrong with socialism, Sarah, only we want to live--not talk about it."
In part, this disappointment was reflected in the feeling that there was no difference between the two political parties—a common feeling in the United States, but relatively new in Britain. Traditionally, the two parties stood for opposing political philosophies (different lifestyles, to the Labourites) as well as different sets of leadership. As long as Labour remained out of power, the myth could sustain itself. Once on Downing Street, however, Labour's differences from the Conservatives paled next to the similarities. The similarities were confirmed when the Labour Government opted for support of the United Nations in Korea as against reduction of the austerity program at home, followed by the Conservative Government's support of existing welfare legislation.

Where Gaitskill as Labour Chancellor had found money for guns by imposing charges on patients under the Health Service, Butler as Conservative Chancellor found it by cutting food subsidies: a lack of fundamental difference which made people talk about 'Butskellism'. . . .

D. E. Butler, in his extensive study of the 1955 election, which the Conservatives won handily, theorized,

People are likely to indulge in the luxury of abstaining, or of voting for the candidate they like best as a person, when they do feel that they are taking part in a plebiscite between two ways of life.

That people did not regard the 1955 election as of such fundamental importance as its predecessors seems beyond question.53

The recognition that the two sets of party leaders did not provide the nation with a true choice of policies was only one cause, however, of a much greater ailment: the loss of confidence in the leadership of the nation. The leadership's refusal to present the realities of Britain's economic situation, and the refusal to give up
the 'Britain is great' theme led in part to this British version of
the credibility gap. In his first broadcast as Prime Minister, Harold
MacMillan struck a patriotic, if unrealistic pose.

Every now and again since the war I have heard people say:
'Isn't Britain only a second-or third-class power now? Isn't
she on the way out?' What nonsense! This is a great country,
and do not let us be ashamed to say so. . . . Twice in my
lifetime I have heard the same old tale about our being a
second-rate power, and I have lived to see the answer. . . .
So do not let us have any more defeatist talk of second-
class powers and of dreadful things to come. Britain has
been great, is great, and will stay great, provided we
close our ranks and get on with the job.54

Said Malcolm Muggeridge of the speech, "A more ludicrous performance
could scarcely be imagined. MacMillan seemed, in his very person, to
embody the national decay he supposed himself to be confuting. He
exuded a flavour of moth balls."55 As late as 1963, the Etonians were
still holding to their image of the country. Accepting United States
citizenship, Winston Churchill remarked to President Kennedy,

Our past is the key to our future, which I firmly believe
will be no less fertile and glorious. Let no man underrate
our energies, our potentialities and our abiding power for
good.56

Churchill's statement was not one of a man out of office, free to say
what he pleases. His posture was the same during his second term as
Prime Minister (1951-1955). "The Government was haunted by a curious
air of unreality, arising from the disparity between the Churchillian
ferocity of its utterances and the tepidity of its deeds, dictated
by inherent limitations."57 The extent to which a nation's leaders
should inform the people of the truth of a crisis or of a recurring
problem has always been an arguable political issue. Silence was the
key to diplomacy up to World War I, while emphasis on letting the
people know more information has increased since the end of World War
II. While public discussion of issues was on the upswing, however, Britain's leadership held to a more austere caretaker philosophy.

The public posture of the leadership in the 1950's contributed another factor which served to disaffect the artists from them—the patriotic, almost xenophobic, references to the greatness of Britain. Again, the need for such sentiments is commonly recognized, but their extent is often questionable. The Churchillian phrases used to help get the country through the economic crisis were no doubt necessary. But their flaccidity eventually sounded a hollow note in a country in need of a clear sound to follow.

Another element in this lack of confidence in the nation's leadership was the recognition that a new type of individual had taken over the reigns of control: the technocrat. In matters of public policy, the civil service—because it dealt daily with the myriad situations confronting the Government—had wrested effective policy control from Parliament.

The pretence that all the decisions that matter are made in Parliament in full public view is essential to preserve the independence of the civil servants, while they get on with the real job of looking after the country from day to day.\(^58\)

Just as the United States Congress has found it nearly impossible to monitor the activities of the huge bureaucracy it created, so Parliament gradually abdicated decision-making to the bureaucrats who knew—or claimed to know—the facts surrounding each decision.

Parliament can still play a useful part in protecting the citizen against hardships imposed by administrative action, but it long ago accepted the principle that in most circumstances public interest matters more than private interest; moreover, its effectiveness as a watchdog has been reduced by the growing complexity of modern administration so that there is a marked tendency to delegate power to the expert. . . .\(^59\)
Recognition of this abdication eventually lends an air of unimportance to the proceedings of Parliament.

When the decision-makers in a society have a low visibility, it becomes all the easier for individuals in that society to condemn their ability and quality. They attribute the failures in policy to these faceless men, but assume successes to have been a priori guaranteed. Powerless to change the leadership, an individual can only rebuke feebly the leaders he cannot name. Democracy rests on the responsibility of the people to follow public affairs, and the responsibility of the leaders to accept the consequences of their decisions and to stand by them. When the real decision-maker is not identified, both of these requisites falter. There is no one to eject from office because of mistakes made; thus eventually the people, knowing they cannot control anything anyway, lose interest in public decisions. While the situation in Britain was by no means anti-democratic or apathetic, an element of this political dissatisfaction persisted.

Too much of our money has been invested in the wrong things in the wrong way, often at the wrong time. Why? The first, simple answer is that the quality of the people who direct our economy—in industry and in Whitehall—is simply not high enough, and until we can improve it we will not get anywhere.60

Britain's post-war hesitations spring from the dilemmas that confront her in the world. Britain has been allowed to become the passive victim of these dilemmas, and lost much of her self-confidence. In this situation, the cry is for the man who can master dilemmas and not be mastered by them.61

This lack of confidence in the leadership is one of the hallmarks of the angry young men. Not only does Jimmy Porter attack the Tories, but he vents his spleen on the posh papers, religion and the
Queen as well. Osborne off the stage is equally condemning of the leadership of his nation.

I can't go on laughing at the idiocies of the people who rule our lives... They are no longer funny, because they are not merely dangerous, they are murderous.

Colin Wilson links this attitude with the pervasive mood of the new wave movement. "The superficiality of our leaders brings us nearer every year to the inevitable end." Doris Lessing combines the incapacity of the leadership for effective action with its capacity for total destruction.

... we are haunted, all of us, by the threat that even if some madman does not destroy us all, our children may be born deformed or mad.

Arnold Wesker, in an article on his visit to Cuba, reflected,

Living in England, an enfeebled country that is neither making history nor affecting it, it is difficult to remember that history is the graph of failure and achievement man leaves behind of his efforts to find the most just society... And so, experiencing Cuba is a shock because she is making history and one realises that Europe, indeed most of the world, is filled with grey, political leaders who are either pathetic—as in England, or dangerous—as in the United States.

The people's loss of confidence in the leadership occurred in good measure because of their loss of control of the leadership. In the public sector, they could elect Parliament, but Parliament was at the mercy of the civil service. In the economic sector, they had organized into unions, but the increasing size of the industrial concerns offset their gains. For some, the unions were too large, making it difficult to hold their leadership accountable. While conservatives blamed the welfare-state for the increase in the bureaucracy, the complexities of post-war economic and international problems were
equally a cause. New management and production techniques, developed primarily in the United States, also played a role. Whatever the causes, the consequence is certain:

For the idea of 'the Establishment', working blindly but instinctively towards its own secret ends, we should substitute the idea of a vast and unwieldy committee of management, something rather like the Polish Seym, in which each member exercises an effective vote on the activities of the others. . . . It is almost impossible to discover where responsibility among them actually lies; and that in fact by today most of them do not know what they are supposed to be doing, to such an extent indeed that it is only the exceptionable ability of a few of their outstanding members which enables the system to function at all. We are in the hands of a committee of management that has ceased to manage. . . .

Reynolds and Brasher approach the issue more philosophically.

At the heart of so many of the political and social problems which have agitated Britain since 1945 lies the perpetual conflict between authority and freedom. Acceptance of an extensive degree of State control has become commonplace. 67

The welfare state, while it brought many benefits to the people, gave coinage to the notion that the individual would benefit from increased participation by the State in his life. For some, this participation gives the feeling of loss of control over the direction of one's own life.

A further explanation [for the angry young men movement] must be--a favourite catchphrase of the Right--the 'decline in individualism.' By this, I mean the declining ability of any given individual to influence events--in the nation, the factory or the parish--and the consequent frustration. 68

This uneasy sense of impotence pervades the literature of the new wave. The hero of John Wain's Hurry on Down "had been equipped with an upbringing devised to meet the needs of a more fortunate age, and then thrust into the jungle of the nineteen-fifties." 69 Colin
Wilson's *The Outsider* and Osborne's Jimmy Porter are obvious reflections on this same theme. Wesker's characters are struggling to prove potency of their political philosophy, Arden's to achieve a goal in spite of the hostility of the society. The absurdists also identify this impotence, but find as much futility in the act of anger as in the object. The theme of homosexuality, appearing in the early 1960's, is a metaphor reflective of this mood. Alan Sillitoe's anti-hero in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* captures and summarizes the sentiments of most of his literary contemporaries when he muses to himself,

And trouble for me it'll be, fighting every day until I die. Why do they make soldiers out of us when we're fighting up to the hilt as it is? Fighting with mothers and wives, landlords and gaffers, coppers, army, government. If it's not one thing it's another, apart from the work we have to do and the way we spend our wages. There's bound to be trouble in store for me every day of my life, because trouble it's always been and always will be. Born drunk and married blind, misbegotten into a strange and crazy world, dragged-up through the dole and into the war with a gas-mask on your clock, and the sirens rattling into you every night while you rot with scabies in an air-raid shelter. Slung into khaki at eighteen, and when they let you out, you sweat again in a factory, grabbing for an extra pint, doing women at the weekend and getting to know whose husbands are on the night-shift, working with rotten guts and an aching spine, and nothing for it but money to drag you back there every Monday morning. 70

**Events After 1956**

Shortly after the appearance of *Look Back in Anger*, a series of unrelated world events seemed to confirm the psychological malaise that had been building from the end of World War II: Suez, Hungary, the independence of Ghana, the formation of the European Economic Community, Sputnik and MacMillan's conference with Kennedy in Bermuda. Despite growing economic security and well-being at home, "it was a
time of troubled national conscience and moral doubts: doubts about industrial strife at home, colonial repression, nuclear power and finally Suez.71 No other single event since 1945 has so deeply shaken Britain's faith in herself nor so greatly affected her position in the world as the debacle of Suez. "Both Eden and Gaitskill were prisoners of an illusion--the illusion of Britain's special mission to preserve peace, law and stability in the world."72 This judgment gains further credence when it is realized that some of the opposition to the Government's action derived from the desire for a quicker military victory, rather than a pull-out and admission of failure.

In the Conservative party resentment against Nasser had blinded political judgment. . . . The main Conservative criticism in fact came from a group within the party who would have liked to have seen preventive action against Nasser taken much more quickly and forcefully. This nostalgia for nineteenth-century political methods was curiously out of touch with Britain's position in the post-war world.73

As The Times editorialized, "... nations do not live by circuses alone. The people, in their silent way, know this better than the critics. They still want Britain great."74 Suez was, finally, proof that the roar of the British lion would no longer be heard round the world. As Robert Skidelsky suggests,

The post-imperial British policeman not only lacked credibility. . . . but perhaps, more importantly, lacked the old faith in his mission. He no longer believed that he had right overwhelmingly on his side.75

Into the atmosphere of the Suez defeat came John Osborne's The Entertainer. "Osborne grafted the furious political atmosphere at the moment of Suez. And. . . . he struck exactly the right surly, sour defeatism with which the mid-Fifties Britain seethed."76 Through the characters of Jimmy Porter in Look Back in Anger and Archie Rice
in *The Entertainer*, John Osborne launched the angry young man movement. He crystallised in the minds of critic and theatre-goer alike the impression that his plays were a commentary on the politics of Britain. He gave to the theatre a contemporaneity and immediacy it previously lacked.

If Suez left the conservatives with a sense of despair, the repression of Hungary by the Soviet Union was no less disturbing to the socialists.

Another period of confusion for communist sympathisers followed the suppression by the Russians of the nationalist rising in Hungary in November 1957. These and other incidents, including the communist blockade of West Berlin in 1948, the communist suppression of workers' rising in East Berlin and East Germany in 1953, and the building of a wall to seal off West Berlin in August 1961, had the effect of lessening the hold of communism on some of its supporters in Britain. Stalin, through his policy of socialism in one country, had made the Soviet Union the example to be followed by communists in all countries. That Stalin fought on the same side as the British helped English socialists to overlook the purges of 1936-1938. With Stalin's death and the presumed literary thaw that followed, the English socialists could refer easily and proudly to the work of the Russians in building a new society. Hungary was, then, a rude reminder of the limits of socialist benevolence. In *Chicken Soup with Barley*, Ronnie picks up this theme.

RONNIE (suddenly). I don't suppose you've bothered to read what happened in Hungary.

SARAH. Hungary?

RONNIE. Look at me, Mother. Talk to me. Take me by the hand and show me who was right and who was wrong. Point them out. Do it for me...
In 1957, Ghana achieved independence, and the final disintegration of the British Empire began. Within five years, only the southern one-third of Africa remained under colonial tutelage. No longer could Britain rely on her status as an imperial power to wield influence in international circles. The transition to Little England was not easy. "The British do not resent the belated arrival of the Africans on the world scene but it is too recent to have become an accepted fact of life. (Some of the British have scarcely accepted Egypt as a nation yet.)"\textsuperscript{79} The British—at least their leadership—still clung to the notion of the Commonwealth. "As the years passed, the Commonwealth idea became more mythical, but it did not lose its appeal."\textsuperscript{80} As late as 1963, the Bishop of Coventry could preach in St. Paul's Cathedral that

> ... we had lost an empire, or rather given it away, and it had been an act of moral greatness without parallel in the history of the world to train our daughter nations for self-government. ... Patriotism ... did not depend upon outward greatness, but would assuredly lead to real greatness.\textsuperscript{81}

Colonel Redfern, in \textit{Look Back in Anger}, expressed the sentiments of many (perhaps of Osborne?) when he recalled,

> It was March, 1914, when I left England, and, apart from leaves every ten years or so, I didn't see much of my own country until we all came back in 1947. Oh, I knew things had changed, of course. People told you all the time the way it was going—going to the dogs, as the Blimps are supposed to say. But it seemed very unreal to me, out there. The England I remembered was the one I left in 1914, and I was happy to go on remembering it that way. Besides, I had the Maharajah's army to command—that was my world. And I loved it, all of it. At the time, it looked like going on forever. When I think of it now, it seems like a dream. If only it could have gone on forever.\textsuperscript{82}

At the same time that Britain was struggling effectively, but slowly, to recover economically, the other governments of Europe
were advancing rapidly, led by the nation that had lost the war, West Germany.

Few people had any illusions about the economic difficulties which would follow the war, but the post-war recovery of allies, neutrals, and enemies alike, has led to disquieting comparisons. Since they were facing difficulties which were often greater than our own this has naturally led to a self-critical spirit in Britain. 83

The psychological effect of Europe's rapid recovery and Britain's refusal to join the European Economic Community (Common Market) is also noted by Bentley Gilbert.

Nevertheless, by this time also [1958], Macmillan had allowed to slip from him perhaps the best opportunity Britain had had since the war to re-establish genuine economic viability and to bring to an end the agonizing triennial exchange crises that symptomized the unhealthy state of the British productive plant. The lost opportunity was Britain's determination—one can hardly call it a decision--not to enter the European Common Market at the time of its formation in 1957. . . . The impact of this rejection, both on Britain's prestige in Europe and upon her self-confidence at home, was far more pervasive and important than the result of the dramatic failure at Suez. 84

To protect her Commonwealth partners and to protect her political institutions from the eventual integration implicit in the formation of the Common Market, Britain opted for a policy of go-it-alone. She was thus unable to share the initial economic advantages which accrued to the leading nations of Europe. Recognizing the improvement in the standard of living in Britain, Geoffrey McDermott observes the "economic miracles" in West Germany, France and Japan, and concludes, "We were going better than before but still slipping back in the race." 85 To realize that the nation she had defeated only twelve years before had forged ahead of her was a disquieting recognition for
Britain.

Not only had the nations of West Germany, France, and Japan started out in 1945 on an economic basis roughly similar to that of Britain—only to move ahead of her, but Britain found herself unable to keep pace with the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. Sputnik introduced the space age, and eliminated Great Britain from the 'Big Three' because she did not have the resources to apply to the space race. C. P. Snow's novel, *Corridors of Power*, chronicles a debate in Britain over whether to attempt to build a nuclear defense system of her own, or to accept economic realities and rely on the American nuclear shield. MacMillan's conference with Kennedy in Bermuda in 1961 illustrated the untenability of her position—Britain's policy was one of independence of both Europe and America, but her economic situation undermined that policy. Not until 1969, when Roy Jenkins addressed the nation as Chancellor of the Exchequer, did a member of the Government admit to the nation that Britain could not afford to sustain an independent nuclear force.

**Theatrical Conditions in 1956**

Historically, then, 'the stage was set.' The atmosphere in Britain was one of disenchantment with politics at home, confusion about the economy, frustration with politics abroad, and disorientation about the direction of society. The cluster of events in Britain and the world arranged themselves in a configuration admirably suited to the emergence not only of John Osborne, but of a fleet of authors, philosophers and playwrights who expressed their disenchantment with the disparity between the illusion of Great Britain and the reality
of Little England. These writers, however, were working within a literary context as well as an historical one, and the importance of their break with the contemporary literary traditions deserves attention.

"If we are to understand the enthusiasm for John Osborne's Look Back in Anger, we cannot ignore the condition of the English theatre before 1956.\textsuperscript{86} The playwrights wrote for a theatre that was of low literary quality, little theatrical innovation, and minimal relevance to the large portion of English society. Terrence Rattigan's plays were beautifully constructed, but their soft quality almost bespoke a recognition they were written for a limited audience. Eliot and Fry wrote a few verse dramas, but their attempts were more renovation than innovation. The comedies of Noel Coward were intentionally light and frothy, more icing on a glass bubble than on a cake; they too were for a particular type of audience.

The condition of the English stage is aptly analyzed in Richard Findlater's book, The Unholy Trade, published in 1952. The theatre, he lamented, "takes its sociology from Punch, its politics from British Movietone, its religion from memory.\textsuperscript{87} Findlater pens the disintegration of the British theatre. Not only were rents and production costs skyrocketing, but the plays themselves were similar, both in their structure and thematic content, and in their lack of worth.

Shaw apart, how sterile is the field of English drama in the last 30 years, how pigmy seem the heirs of Shakespeare.\textsuperscript{88} Kenneth Allsop agrees, noting that the angry young men "filled the vacuum in that great echoing museum where the arts used to be kept in Britain--and their very presence, even before the quality of their
offerings had been examined, seemed a heartening thing. D. E. Cooper concurs, asserting that "the dearth in the theatre and the novel provide the most important explanation for the reception of the 'Angries'." Finally, John Russell Taylor, reviewing the early 1950's, notes that "most of the big critical successes--those which were felt to add appreciably to the cultural life of the city--were foreign." After excepting John Whiting (who did not live) and Dennis Cannan, and the occasional play of Rattigan and Fry, Taylor finds little from British playwrights to commend the state of British theatre.

The plays during the decade following the war had been anything but attuned to the social upheavals catapulting Britain toward the Suez. "Since 1939," offers Findlater, "most of the new plays produced in London have been comedies of characters and situation." Arthur Miller, commenting on British theatre before an audience at the Royal Court in November, 1956, preached, "I sense that the British theatre is hermetically sealed against the way the society moves." Kenneth Tynan, with more than a glance at the Soviet Union, wrote a year later,

A sensation was lately caused in Russia by Dudintsev's novel entitled Not by Bread Alone. Our theatre needs a similar sensation, though the name of the play that might create it would be different. It would be called: Not by Cake Alone.

It was inevitable, then, that with such critics crying out for a political and social-oriented theatre, that the void would eventually be filled. Look Back in Anger apparently reached the critics at the peak of their frustration just as it reached the public at the peak of its despair. That the plays of Osborne, Wesker and Arden were received as political plays is thus not surprising in light of both their historical and literary environments.
CHAPTER I: FOOTNOTES


4Ibid., pp. 11-16.


8Clifford Leech, "Two Romantics: Arnold Wesker and Harold Pinter," ibid., Chapter 1.


11Kitchen, op. cit., p. 16.

12Osborne's most recent play, West of Suez, has not been published and is therefore not discussed here.

14 Marowitz, op. cit., p. 204.
15 Taylor, op. cit., p. 38.
16 Ibid., p. 31.
17 Rogoff, op. cit., p. 30.
19 Ibid., p. 185.
20 Taylor, op. cit., p. 33.
26 Reynolds and Brasher, op. cit., p. 324.
27 Ibid., p. 243.
30 Ibid., p. 15.
32 Arnold Wesker, "Fragment from London," unpublished article provided by author, p. 3.
33 Allsop, op. cit., p. 31.
34 Hopkins, op. cit., p. 136.
35 Osborne, op. cit., II. ii. 84.
36 Mander, Great Britain, op. cit., p. 28.
38 Reynolds and Brasher, op. cit., p. 223.
40 Ibid., p. 124.
42 Thomson, op. cit., p. 181.
43 Ibid., p. 187.
44 Reynolds and Brasher, op. cit., p. 32.
46 Thomson, op. cit., p. 182.
48 Sissons and French, op. cit., p. 12.
50 Pritt, op. cit., p. 455.
52 Thomson, op. cit., p. 203.
54 Wallace, op. cit., p. 207.
61 Mander, Great Britain, op. cit., p. 204.
63 Colin Wilson, "Beyond the Outsider," ibid., p. 42.
64 Doris Lessing, "The Small Personal Voice," ibid., p. 15.
65 Arnold Wesker, untitled galley proofs, provided by author.
67 Reynolds and Brasher, op. cit., p. 316.
71 Thomson, op. cit., p. 213.
72 Robert Skidelsky, "Lessons of Suez," in Bogdanor and Skidelsky, op. cit., p. 188.
73 Reynolds and Brasher, op. cit., p. 277.
75 Skidelsky, op. cit., p. 188.
76 Allsop, op. cit., p. 115.
77 Boyd, op. cit., p. 113.
78 Arnold Wesker, Chicken Soup with Barley, in The Wesker Trilogy, op. cit., III. ii. 71.
79 Boyd, op. cit., p. 113.

Quoted in Mander, Great Britain, op. cit., p. 52.

Osborne, Look Back in Anger, op. cit., I. I. 68.

Reynolds and Brasher, op. cit., p. 32.


Cooper, op. cit., p. 279.


Ibid., p. 17.

Cooper, op. cit., p. 281.

Taylor, op. cit., p. 17.

Findlater, op. cit., p. 114.


CHAPTER II: THE CRITICAL CLIMATE

Given the historical confluence of events and the theatrical environment prior to 1956, the critical reception to the plays of Osborne, Wesker, Arden and others could almost have been predicted. When Jimmy Porter barked dissatisfaction with his lifestyle, he shifted dramatic criticism onto a social-political plane. Not only did he illustrate the kind of theatre which Tynan, Findlater, and others were demanding, but with the considerable help of Tynan and the press, he structured the criticism of other more traditional writers along sociological lines. The purpose of this chapter is to annotate the political orientation of recent British criticism, providing a critical context for the study of the plays of Wesker and Arden. After this review, it will be necessary to define political drama, and to distinguish it from social drama. Finally, the concentration of the remainder of the dissertation on Arnold Wesker and John Arden will be justified.

That the drama of post-Suez England was treated as political is unquestioned. John Russell Taylor suggests that the younger generation was settling down to a movement of "playwrights of protest." Gordon Rogoff, recalling Look Back in Anger, says, "It seemed to be about commitment, it seemed to be a protest, it seemed to be political, and it even seemed to be new. . . ." The political slant in criticism finally led Harold Hobson to write in exasperation,
It is time someone reminded our advanced dramatists that the principle function of the theatre is to give pleasure. It is not the principal function of the theatre to strengthen peace, to improve morality, or to establish a good social system. Churches, international associations, and political parties already exist for those purposes. It is the duty of the theatre, not to make men better, but to render them harmlessly happy."

The Critical Context

To review further all dramatic and journalistic criticism of modern British drama is an impossible undertaking here. Individual interpretations of each play are reserved for review when the plays are treated later. Concentration in this chapter is on those critical works which encompass the entire movement, as an indication of the orientation of the criticism of the period. While such authors of these texts have the advantage of time to reassess initial responses, they still provide a suggestive framework that reflects in good part the criticism of the period. If such criticism is political after the historical atmosphere has passed, it reinforces the strength of the viewpoint that the original reception of the plays was prominently political.

Excepting anthologies of reviews, there have been eight texts dealing with contemporary British drama. Three of these—the Tulane Drama Review's 1966 issue, John Russell Brown's Modern British Dramatists, and the Stratford-upon-Avon Series' Contemporary Theatre—are collections of essays, and do not offer a unified viewpoint toward the new wave. The opinions and perspectives of these essayists, as well as those of the writers of anthologized reviews, are treated later individually in connection with the plays they discuss. Of interest here are those critics who take as their scope of inquiry
the totality of British drama since 1956.

Without exception, the most influential critic in the British theatre today is Kenneth Tynan. Not only is he, with Harold Hobson, the most familiar of British critics, but he is primarily responsible for the critical success of Look Back in Anger. Until Tynan's review of the play, reaction had been cautious. With Tynan's statement that the play spoke for the younger generation, the new wave was launched. Of all critics under study here, Tynan is easily the most politically oriented. In the preface to Curtains, a collection of his reviews published in 1961, he writes that his attitudes toward theatre over 10 years had widened until "I became aware that art, ethics, politics, and economics were inseparable from each other; I realised that theatre was a branch of sociology as well as a means of self-expression. From men like Bertolt Brecht and Arthur Miller I learned that all drama was, in the widest sense of a wide word, political..."4 Probably no other practising critic today with the occasional exception of Eric Bentley would be as willing as Tynan to intertwine politics and theatre.

Declaration is a collection of essays by the new wave authors, published in 1957. Tynan's contribution to the book, an article entitled "Theatre and Living", is an excellent defense of his 'all drama is political' position. It must be noted at the outset, however, that he connotes to the word 'politics' a more encompassing meaning than it is normally given. Rather than distinguish between sociological and political, Tynan not only broadens 'political' to include sociological attitudes and conditions, but he intentionally uses "'sociological' in its widest sense, the sense in which it applies to
Shakespeare's twin summits, the two parts of Henry IV.  

To determine whether Tynan is advocating a political or a sociological theatre, or sees the two as one, it is helpful to read his prescription of issues with which the theatre should deal.

Good technical playwrights abound, but among them no great questioner, no one who might uproot our deepest assumptions and turn the full glare of his mind on them; no one who could explain why we still stand for the national anthem, while imaginary generals pin imaginary medals to our breasts; no one who could show us how odd it is that we should be surprised to find a dustman sitting beside us at a performance of a first-rate play; no one, in short, who can dramatize what we feel about our world.

... a number of simple platitudes must be reasserted, platitudes about equality of chance, abolition of want, rejection of life after death in favour of life on earth; old stuff, of course, too yawn-provoking, but if we want a responsible drama we must go on plugging it. . . .

What Tynan advocates, then, is not political drama, but rather committed drama, not sociological drama, but social drama. In fact, the terms political and sociological probably have little utility for Tynan. His interest is the role of theatre in society, the assertion of direct communication between the life of drama and the lives of the audience. He seeks a "drama with a world view behind it."

That the drama must be committed still demands a political credo for in the act of commitment, "some kind of political commitment becomes inevitable." Tynan passionately believes that "a political belief is the most enriching thing that can happen to a writer."

If all art is a gesture against death, it must not stand by while Cypriots are hanged and Hungarians machine-gunned, and the greater holocaust prepares. It must go on record; it must commit itself.

Tynan's political preferences for the Left are well known.
Not only does he "want drama to be vocal in protest," but he "frankly does not see where the voices will come if not from the Left." His commitment to socialism, although hedged by healthy doses of Zen and the territorial imperative, is firm. "To discover one is a Socialist ought to be a liberating experience." The theatre, he insists, can help to achieve this sense of liberation, but unfortunately it seldom has.

The trouble with most Socialist drama, and with much Socialist thinking, is its joylessness. We think of social plays in terms of anger, squalor, dourness and violence. . . . Socialism ought to mean more than progress for its own sake: it ought to mean progress towards pleasure.

Tynan's influence in British drama is immeasurable, including the extent to which he has encouraged a political, or committed theatre. Unquestionably, he fostered and championed the new dramatists after Osborne. The political orientation of his criticism cannot help but have played a major role both in popularizing those playwrights, but in linking them together as a politically alive and philosophically committed group.

A second text dealing with recent British criticism is an anthology of reviews and articles from Encore magazine, The Encore Reader. Although not of single authorship, it presents a fairly unified critical stance toward drama. Encore magazine grew out of and helped sustain the dramatic revival (revolution?) of the late 1960's. "It has had a wide and reverberating influence among that minority inside a minority who have (in the Quaker sense) a rooted concern for the theatre and its relationship to the world in which we live." It supported those playwrights who broke from the
Rattigan-Coward tradition in British theatre, and encouraged efforts
to establish a British theatre of commitment. As Richard Findlater said,

Encore has in its own dogged and digging way helped to break open some of the seals which, as Arthur Miller said soon after its inception, have insulated too much of the English theatre from the life around it and the ideas underneath it.

A review of the articles in Encore Reader provide a second indication of the thrust of criticism between 1956 and 1961.

In November of 1957, Lindsay Anderson wrote an article for Encore which concluded,

I notice that the last issue of Encore was praised by one critic for 'not being afraid of letting every side have its angry say...' I believe that this is precisely the attitude we need to escape from--the assumption that all ideas are equally valuable, that intellectual discussion is an end in itself, a superior diversion for the cultured, instead of being a hunt for the useful truth. The opposition has plenty of organs of its own: Encore should not be expressing every point of view, but the right one. You see--the question of commitment raises its obstinate, contemporary head. You can't get away from it.

The response was less than kind; Anderson was accused of being a political authoritarian. While Encore has never gone as far as Anderson suggested by excluding the views of political or theatrical conservatives, it has, nevertheless, published and endorsed the 'right' philosophy Anderson prefers.

Representative of the search for a theatre of commitment in this book is Edwin Morgan's article, "That Uncertain Feeling." The 'feeling' to which he referred (in May, 1958) was that John Osborne really wasn't as committed as everybody thought he was, nor as committed as he ought to be.

... Look Back in Anger is essentially a play of pathos--
but if our cheeks are all begrutten with tears and we're not sure afterwards what we've been weeping for, or we do know and feel we oughtn't to have been weeping for it, how are plays of this sort going to help change English society?

O Brecht, where art thou?19

The Entertainer, which by the standards of most reviewers, came closer to political drama than Osborne's other early plays, came under equal attack by Morgan. "The Entertainer succeeds as a play of feeling, but fails as a play of ideas."20 It is striking that Morgan, in 1958, insisted on a truly political theatre, not simply a committed theatre.

Tom Milne used Encore as a vehicle to chastise the English Stage Company—which first produced Look Back in Anger—for failing to offer enough plays of writers "whose aim is to write valid comment on the world around us."21

In 1959, John Whiting excoriated the plays of the previous few years, agreeing with Morgan that they failed to achieve their purpose. In an article entitled, "At Ease in a Bright Red Tie," Whiting identifies the critical standards of his contemporaries, noting, "Large claims have been made for the Royal Court movement by critics such as Mr. Tynan, not merely for artistic achievement but for such matters as social reform and change. The movement must expect to be judged on those claims."22 Like other writers, Whiting—through Encore—argued for a theatre genuinely committed to social and political ideas, and intelligent presentation and discussion of those ideas. While this accords with most of the new wave dramatists, Whiting finds their drama lacking in intelligence.
The struggle at the Royal Court and elsewhere, it would seem was for the theatre to take on a greater social and political responsibility. Crying 'Forward', it is dwindling from our sight. Plays are being produced which rely for their effect on a false naivety. The problems they present are being simplified to a point of non-existence. We face the prospect of having nothing in this kind of theatre but plays for peasants. Mr. Osborne uses his considerable power of invective to wither things that are unimportant. Socially, the whole way of thinking is out of date. And, I say this without malice, out of touch.

From the political point of view the movement means nothing at all. . . . We are asked to admire its virility. I am pleased to do so. It is that little tiny head which worries me.23

The perspective of The Encore Reader is certain: it speaks for a politically committed theatre (which just incidentally is committed to the Left). Its philosophy pervades every review. Penelope Gilliatt, for example, ends her review of The Hostage with the aside, "It puts politics where they belong: in the midst of life, where they seldom appear in English theatre."24 So adamant is the political philosophy of the anthology that Robert Brustein, who justly describes himself as "a friend of the house," was led to remark,

What The Encore Reader finally lacks is a sense of critical disinterestedness. It does not advance dramatic art to defend bad plays because they support your prejudices, or to tolerate nitwittery for the sake of a Cause, or to reprimand playwrights for failing to deal with their economic and political environment.25

Whether Brustein's criticism is too harsh is not at issue. It testifies, however, to the virulence of Encore's editorial policy, and illustrates the virulence of the reaction against it, even from those who would normally be sympathetic to the policy itself. That Arden, Wesker, Tynan, Anderson, Brook and others wrote for Encore suggests the importance of the magazine to the new generation of theatre activists. Its importance, linked with its policy, provides
a major indication of the political orientation of dramatic criticism in the late 1950's.

Kenneth Tynan and *The Encore Reader* provide representation of political criticism from the Left. Speaking for a more politically conservative viewpoint is George Wellwarth, author of *The Theatre of Protest and Paradox: Developments in the Avant-Garde Drama*. Assessing European and American as well as English playwrights, Wellwarth suggests that the similarities between the playwrights he considers are a common theme of protest and a common form of paradox. Of interest here is the theme of protest, used by Wellwarth as a non-political rubric encompassing the absurdists as well as the traditionalists.

The new English drama, whether traditional in form and subject or whether imitative of the avant-garde, is a drama of rebellion. Like the French avant-gardists, the English writers are uniformly iconoclastic. Their purpose is protest against things as they are, and their method usually hinges on a central sardonic paradox.

Despite that neutral introduction, Wellwarth's treatment of the English dramatists of the post-Suez era is less than kind because it is more than biased. He opens his discussion of the new English dramatists with a swipe at Tynan's initial review of *Look Back in Anger*. To Wellwarth, the review that launched the movement was "pretentious, self-publicizing gush rather than criticism." The true reason for the critical success of these plays, he reveals, was the desire of the critics to prove that England could produce as good a play as America.

Chauvinism stirred in the critics as they watched *Look Back in Anger*; and the angry-young-man movement was born.
one play doth not a movement make; hence the renewed scrapping of pens in Earl's Court and Hackney. The new English playwrights got their chance because English national pride was aroused by the success of Osborne's first play.  

That Wellwarth does not sympathize with the politics of the new Left is evident in his criticism of its playwrights. Jimmy Porter "is an extremely unusual young man and anything but representative of the young men of our time." Wellwarth viciously condemns Luther as "the sort of thing that might and should have been written during the second World War if England had been occupied by the Nazis." Wesker's Chips with Everything is dismissed because it presumes a socialist-oriented class view of British society.

In present-day England class distinctions have disappeared for all practical intents and purposes. It is no longer necessary even to change one's accent in order to get ahead. In his review of Doris Lessing's Each His Own Wilderness, Wellwarth concludes, "Although there may be some angry young authors in contemporary society, there are no angry young men."

What society is actually composed of is young men who are the very opposite of angry. Or, rather, if they are angry at all, they are angry at those who would force them to be involved in the problem of society and therefore angry at it.

To John Arden, however, he directs his greatest amount of vitriol. His plays, "really only experimental essays," do not deserve a place in the professional theatre, but should be confined to the experimental or academic theatre. Of the ideas in Serjeant Musgrave's Dance, the "kind word that can be applied to Arden is that overworked term of psychological jargon 'confused.'"

Either an author must show a point of view or he must show that no point of view is worth having. Arden does neither, and as a result his plays are theatrically boring and intellectually inept.
The political conservatism of Wellwarth is most apparent in his rejection of *Live Like Pigs* because "it has nothing to do with reality. If there are people in England today who act as the Sawneys do, it is not because the building boom has left room for nomads, but because they are criminal types of low mentality and primitive living standards who do not deserve sympathy but rather require coercion."^37

To Wellwarth, the new English dramatists are to be criticized not for their lack of firm political commitment, as was suggested by *The Encore Reader*, but for their commitment to the wrong ideals. Their projection of reality is false, thereby undermining the validity of their political statements. Having essayed the French and German absurdist, Wellwarth turned to the English dramatists and found their credo 'stale, flat, and unprofitable.' His critical stance does not clear away the political and polemical clouds surrounding the angry young men; it only darkens them, making it all the more difficult to assess their work clearly and without bias.

Tynan, *The Encore Reader*, and Wellwarth represent criticism that views the new English dramatists in political and/or social terms. Laurence Kitchen and John Russell Taylor, the two remaining critics, do not use this framework, although for different reasons. Kitchen's *Drama in the Sixties: Form and Interpretation*, like Wellwarth's book, is not confined to English drama, nor does it deal only with recent playwrights, but discusses Brecht, O'Neill, Albee and O'Casey. Kitchen's focus is twofold: structure and production. He is interested in the actor's and director's style, as well as the playwright's.
"Form, as the envelope of communication," he suggests, "needs to be understood before any meaningful criticism can be made. While Kitchen by no means overlooks thematic content, his primary inquiry is into the structure of a given play. (Consequently, there is little discussion of the political orientation of a play.) The two dominant forms in drama in the 1960's, he finds, are epic and compressionism. John Arden is representative of the former, and Arnold Wesker of the latter. Epic drama is similar to C. M. Bowra's definition of an epic poem, "...by common consent a narrative of some length which deals with events which have a certain grandeur and importance come from a life of action, especially of violent action such as war." Defining Arden's style as epic, Kitchen defends Armstrong's Last Goodnight.

Some of the criticism which Armstrong has met with seems to come from inadequate sympathy with epic drama, and indeed from uncertainty as to what epic does.

Compressionism 'concerns itself with compressibility, that is, 'the resistance of materials to stress'. It symbolizes a kind of "modern man's prison complex," organized around the ability or inability of individuals to withstand the variety of social and psychological pressures placed upon him in his daily life. While the analysis is formal, Kitchen recognizes that form is the consequence of a playwright's thematic material and historical environment.

The theatre is a public art which goes limp when it loses contact with everyday life, or with life as reflected in the other arts. A new form that appears in the drama is not in the first place a result of backstage experiment, anxiety or boredom, like the so-called "theatre of cruelty", but a response to the human predicament. Up to a point, the new form will be historically conditioned.
Within this historically conditioned form, the playwright develops his theme, and Kitchen suggests—all too briefly—that the themes of the plays are as directed to the society as their form is molded by it. Commenting on the work of Pinter, Wesker, and others, he offers,

> It is their awareness of something beyond the dusty fact which raises the work of these dramatists above the mere documentation of ugliness.\(^4\)

*The Entertainer* and *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* \(^4\) attacked Conservative foreign policy in, respectively, Suez and Cyprus. In so far \(^4\) as the Left's point of view... was no longer suppressed, this permitted an influx of subject-matter which brought the drama closer to life.\(^5\)

Of John Osborne he concludes,

> What heartens one is Osborne's logical progression in choice of subjects. From the minor rebellions against parents and wives, to the stubborn nonconformity of Holyoake in *A Subject for Scandal and Concern*, and now to the historical roots of protest. It's a responsible progress and, however imperfect, the progress of a European dramatist no longer of merely local, or even national, interest.\(^6\)

Kitchen, then, does not deny political implications in the plays he studies (he admits them for *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, *The Entertainer*, and *Armstrong's Last Goodnight*), but he prefers to concentrate on form. Such a concentration, undertaken in 1957 or 1958 might well have swung the pendulum away from the politically oriented reviews of 1956 and toward a more objective analysis of the English dramatists of the period. Coming as it did in 1966, it could only help to eliminate some of the political mythology surrounding the plays.

John Russell Taylor's *Anger and After* truly chronicled the explosion of new drama in Great Britain following *Look Back in Anger*. 
Thoughtful and detailed, the text includes discussion of the minor playwrights of the period, as well as the more familiar writers—Osborne, Wesker, Arden and Pinter. Writing within an eclectic framework, Taylor's purpose is descriptive rather than prescriptive. He is considered in his summaries of each of the plays, insuring that the reader will not reject the playwright solely on the basis of his, Taylor's, viewpoint. The literature of a dramatic movement, not its politics, is the focus of Anger and After; Taylor is meticulous in his avoidance of political commitment as expressed in the plays he discusses. His text refutes the thesis of this chapter, that British criticism gave credence to the political atmosphere of the new wave drama. Albeit an important exception, Anger and After is the only major critical work which avoids discussion of the political issues in British drama.

Laurence Kitchen and John Russell Taylor avoid the politically oriented criticism of Kenneth Tynan, The Encore Reader, and George Wellwarth. The latter reflect the initial reception of the plays, as well as continue the emphasis on their politics. This focus is thematic rather than formal, and they find in the themes a not inconsiderable amount of politics. Later, this critical stance will be shown to be reflected in the reviews and essays of other critics' treatment of Arnold Wesker and John Arden.

**Definition of Political Drama**

Kenneth Tynan represents a critical style more devoted to commitment than to politics. As noted earlier, he shifts easily from social to political terms and back again. While political commitment
is uppermost in his mind, he admits to using the term in its widest sense. The confusion in terminology is not Tynan’s alone; the words are seldom explicated. Since the remainder of this dissertation proposes to concentrate on the politics in modern British drama, some clarification of the term is in order.

This dissertation cannot presume to offer either an original or definitive meaning for the myriad actions and thoughts commonly and scholarly associated with the rubric politics. Introductory texts in both Comparative and American Government often avoid a definition altogether, while others offer their own particular definition of the term. With the availability of different theoretical approaches to the study of politics, there is naturally a variety of interpretations and definitions of politics which may or may not be helpful.

To those political scientists concerned with the study of interest groups, politics is "conflict of interest, as competition among people with different interests, generally united in groups defined by an interest, for the limited resources, such as wealth, prestige, available in the governmental arena."\(^{47}\) Beholden to Arthur Bentley and popularized by David Truman, the interest group theorists "rely heavily on class analysis simply because... classes as such play a significant role in politics."\(^{48}\) This definition is unsatisfactory because it defines one phenomena in terms of another, but does not sufficiently define the latter.

Richard Rose is representative of many students of comparative governments with his attention to "the social and psychological influences at work"\(^{49}\) within the political system. His definition of politics is rather encompassing, for he does not preclude the
introduction of sociological phenomena into his study; instead, he welcomes historical and cultural data to provide explanations for political institutions. While tremendously helpful in a comparative situation, the definition does not have utility here because its purpose is to extend the boundaries of the term rather than limit them.

To the behaviorists, as represented by Heinz Eulau, "Politics is the study of why man finds it necessary or desirable to build government, of how he adapts government to his changing needs or demands, of how and why he decides on public policies." By itself, this definition would be useful; but Eulau continues, "Politics is concerned with the conditions and consequences of human action." His latter statement reopens the definition to a panoramic view of human behavior which emphasizes, rather than reduces, the confluence of sociological, psychological and political forces.

The decision-making approach of Richard Snyder adapts an institutional focus within a behavioral context.

There are two fundamental purposes of the decision-making approach: to help identify and isolate the 'crucial structures' in the political realm where change takes place—where action is initiated and carried out, where decisions must be made; and to help analyze systematically the decision-making behavior which leads to action and which sustains action. Unfortunately, it is difficult to utilize this definition here. It is intended to provide a focus for research more than a definition of politics.

Harold Lasswell has provided the neatest, if deceptively simple, explanation: politics is 'Who gets what, when, and how.' This epigram is echoed in most other standard definitions. Floyd Hunter, representative of the elitist theorists, has suggested that "power"
(and all policy-makers are 'men of power') is a word "that will be used to describe the acts of men going about the business of moving other men to act in relation to themselves or in relation to organic or inorganic things." Thomas Eliot, in his American government text, asserts that "politics is an individual's or a group's effort to gain and exert influence, or to obtain and exercise power in the administration of government and the making of public policy, for their material advantage or for ends which they deem ideal." Eliot's definition seems to accept the others, but places politics on a societal level, where most politicians and political scientists reside.

Most dramatists also place politics on this level. The politics of John Osborne's plays center around national issues and institutions—the Queen, political parties, disarmament, the class system, etc. Wesker's political philosophy is both socialist and societal. Arden either treats of a political issue, e.g., pacifism in Serjeant Musgrave's Dance, or of men in public political positions, as in The Business of Good Government and The Workhouse Donkey. To take another example, the plays of Shakespeare that are regarded as political are those about the actions of men in their capacity as public officials (the histories, Coriolanus, and King Lear). Othello, perhaps the zenith in dramatic representation of a power struggle, is not essentially a political play, because the characters are not acting in their capacity as public officials. The distinction is crucial: 'drama is conflict' says the homily, and conflict involves power; but only if the power exerted is a public power or is exerted for public ends shall it be regarded as political here.
Two examples will suffice. Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, while focusing on the fears and anxieties of contemporary man, also dramatizes the uses of power. Whether Goldberg and McCann can control Stanley, and the nature of and reasons for their power are both elements of mystery that run through the minds of an audience seeing the play the first time. However, *The Birthday Party* is not commonly regarded as political, because the exertion of power is on a personal level, for private ends, without consideration of or effect on public policy. In contrast, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* is political, for it questions the utilization of public power by an irrational society. If John Proctor is in conflict with himself (as Salem is with itself) in the first two acts, it is Proctor (and the reasoned elements of Salem) versus state power and public policy in the second two acts.

This distinction forces another consideration: the difference between a social play and a political play. If a political play is enacted on the societal level, then it is necessarily a social play. All political theories, issues and actions (as defined here) are social. But a social play need not be political, and it is here that theatre critics have often floundered. Most of the British plays after 1956 were greeted with a kind of Penguin-Guide-to-Politics analysis. A social play is one which contains a statement about a social condition. It neither deals with an individual's effort to gain and exert influence nor with the public policy or philosophy behind such exertion of influence. Arden's *Live Like Pigs* is a case in point. It is a social play, commenting on the social condition of people like
the Sawneys and people like the Jacksons, and what happens to them when they are brought together. However, George Wellwarth described the Sawneys as "criminal types of low mentality and primitive living standards who do not deserve sympathy but rather require coercion."56 Wellwarth's comment is only an astonished gasp away from political criticism, viz., this is what the government ought to do with these types, so why didn't you do so in your play?

Of Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*, John Russell Taylor has said, "None of the characters look outward at life beyond the closed circle of the stage world; they all live for and in each other, and finally all the rest, even Helen, seem to exist only as incidentals in Jo's world. . . ."57 This quality of not looking 'outward at life,' although elusive, provides one measurement of whether a play is political. Although it is possible to see in *A Taste of Honey* a bitter condemnation of the welfare state, it is clearly not a political drama. As a play of loneliness, it dramatizes a private condition, not a social condition. *The Crucible*, mentioned before, operates on all three levels. It depicts the private struggles between the Proctors, yet its characters do 'look outward,' commenting on the social conditions in which such paranoia could persist. With the introduction of the Lieutenant Governor, the play becomes firmly political, no longer confining itself to a social condition, but to the utilization of power and to the formulation of public policy as a consequence of that social condition.

The question whether a play is political, i.e., presents policy-makers in the act of making public decisions, or discusses
the philosophies that lie behind such decisions, is a delicate one. Ibsen's Hedda Gabler is a social play; An Enemy of the People is political. What is Ghosts? That there are plays difficult of categorization does not negate the usefulness of the distinction. The dichotomy enables the critic to isolate those plays (in this case, of the last fifteen years) which are truly political in nature, rather than simply labeled thus by pejorative journalists. It is a thesis of this dissertation that only with such a distinction can a genuine understanding of a playwright's meaning be accurately made.

Eliot's definition, then, provides a useful, yet not too restrictive set of boundaries on the term politics. Political drama is that which illustrates or discusses an individual's or a group's effort to gain and exert influence, or to obtain and exercise power in the administration of government and the making of public policy. For purposes of categorization and clarification, it will be distinguished from social drama, which illustrates or discusses a social condition.

(No attempt is made here to distinguish social drama from what may be called, for want of a better term, private or individual drama, drama which deals with a private pain or joy, a personal crisis or individual adventure. In part, the distinction is dependent on the historical situation at the time of the production. A Doll's House, when originally produced, had a great deal of social significance; today it is probably seen as a private play. Aristophanic comedy if not updated is essentially private today, because a modern audience

*For the remainder of this dissertation, it will be integrated into a definition of political drama, without further footnoting.*
is interested in the characters as types, ignorant of the social implications of the lines for Aristophanes' contemporaries. No firm boundaries could be drawn between the two, especially since such a distinction would eventually spill over into aesthetics, since 'good' plays are those considered to be relevant beyond their own time.)

Concentration on Wesker and Arden

The remainder of this dissertation, then, proposes to discuss "Politics in Modern British Drama." "Modern British Drama" is intended here to include those dramatists commonly associated with the angry young men movement, all of whom achieved attention as dramatists after the middle of 1956. This distinction, however, hardly reduces the number of playwrights to a manageable proportion, since Taylor's Anger and After lists eighteen playwrights for concentrated attention. Many of these, however, had only one play successfully produced, their fame carried along by the fame of the movement rather than by the strength of their own work. The plays of most of these same writers, further, would be eliminated as social rather than political drama.

Any criteria for the selection of certain playwrights must perforce be arbitrary. To treat each play that has been labeled political by a critic would lead to consideration of every new play written since 1956. Concentration therefore will be given to those playwrights who are considered at the forefront of the angry young men movement. The 'major' playwrights, whose work should be considered, may be defined as those who have written more than three plays produced on the main bill of the Royal Court theatre, where the movement began, and been given greatest attention by other critics.
The Royal Court playwrights include Arden, Dennis, Osborne, Simpson and Wesker (Pinter had been first produced elsewhere, but still had two of his plays produced there). The playwrights chosen are based on the performances of plays at the Royal Court between April 1956 and April 1963. Of the critics, Taylor devotes his primary attention to five playwrights: Osborne, Arden, Wesker, Owun and Pinter. The Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies series deals with Osborne, Arden, Wesker, Pinter, Simpson and Behan. Brown's Modern British Dramatists includes essays on Osborne, Pinter, Arden and Wesker. The Tulane Drama Review issue on British Drama concentrated on Arden, Wesker, Pinter and Osborne (of the angry young men group).

If these lists are accepted, Osborne, Arden, Wesker and Pinter stand out as major playwrights of the period. Owun is not included in this study both because he is primarily known for his television dramas, and because his most compelling theme is religion, not politics. Simpson, perhaps the only truly absurdist writer in England today also is not discussed; he is an illustration of the variety in modern British drama, rather than its mainstream. Brendan Behan stands apart from the other playwrights, although he is as politically oriented as Arden or Osborne. His is the politics of Ireland, not of England, and to treat of Irish politics would be to stretch the boundaries of this dissertation beyond manageable proportions. Like other Irish playwrights, Behan infuses his plays with Catholicism and anti-Catholicism, in themselves the subject of special attention. The decision not to include him in this study is admittedly an arbitrary one, although, it is believed, justifiable. (Behan's The
Hostage will be treated in the final chapter of the dissertation, however.) Elimination of Behan might warrant a change in the title to "Politics in Modern English Drama," but the word "British" is retained since the phrase is often used as a shorthand for the work of Osborne, Arden, Wesker and Pinter.

Neither John Osborne nor Harold Pinter are considered 'political' as the term is used here. Osborne's plays are contemporary, but not political; that is, Osborne mentions (and occasionally discusses) political issues currently before the public—in this sense he is contemporary. He does not, however, evoke the issues qua issues, the events qua events. His characters do not debate, probe or elucidate these issues or events. Rather he evokes a feeling about them, and it is the sum of these feelings that help to provide characterization. Neither are these feelings the substance of either the characters or content of play, however. They are used rather to support the characterization. In this sense, then, Osborne is not a political playwright; he is a personal playwright who uses contemporary issues to help identify the attitudes of his characters, but these attitudes are not the focus of the play.

Recent critical analysis of Osborne justifies this position. John Weightman, while conceding that Jimmy Porter's "grumbles . . . corresponded as it turned out, to the inarticulate resentment of a whole generation," nevertheless concludes that "Mr. Osborne has never had any obvious political principles, nor indeed any organized general philosophy." Laurence Kitchen compares both Osborne and Pinter to Arden, and finds that the former two "remain essentially private,
emotional and even domestic writers." In Ronald Hayman's short text on Osborne, the author concedes that "you can't really separate the private anger from the public-spirited indignation." Nevertheless, . . . the fusion of personal and public elements in Osborne's plays is incomplete and finally unsatisfactory. His concern with social issues assorts oddly with his obsession with the One and his indifference to the Many, even when the One is set up as representative of the Many, someone who feels for them vicariously.

Finally, A. E. Dyson attacks directly the notion that Look Back in Anger is a political play.

The hero is regarded as straightforwardly admirable, and his 'anger' as a finely directed critique of British society in the mid '50s. To my mind, such a reading is inadmissible for several important reasons. First, one has to say that no major drama is ever simple in this particular way. . . . More specifically, in Look Back in Anger it is clear that certain enigmas touching both the hero himself, and the validity of his 'anger', are central to the effect. Jimmy Porter is not only a warm-hearted idealist raging against the evils of man and the universe, he is also a cruel and even morbid misfit in a group of reasonably normal and well-disposed people.

To suggest that Osborne is not a writer of political drama is not to deny the social commentary of his plays. Certainly The Entertainer, Time Present, Hotel in Amsterdam, A Patriot for Me, and A Subject for Scandal and Concern discuss particular social conditions in Britain. The Blood of the Bambergs, part of Plays for England, may be considered political because it is a satire on royalty. The thrust of Osborne's work is social or private, however, rather than political. Even in The Entertainer, one wonders whether the characters 'look outward' to the politics of the Tories or to the psychological malaise of the country. Taken together, Osborne's plays do not have
the direct political implications of *The Crucible* or *Viet Rock*. Osborne's favorite dramatic technique is that of an individual character expressing, brilliantly, his dissatisfaction with his way of life. His characters do not seek to gain and exert influence, or to obtain and exercise power in the administration of government and the making of public policy.

Additionally, John Osborne has been excluded from this study because his plays have already been thoroughly analyzed in other dissertations, texts and articles. The question of political drama aside, then, it would be fruitless to duplicate the work of others. Finally, this dissertation intends to focus on playwrights who clearly illustrate differing styles of political plays in order to clarify the nature of that body of dramatic literature. Because the term political theatre has never been given succinct definition and then studied within the context of such a definition, it is paramount to limit this study to those playwrights who best exemplify the classification. To include Osborne in this study, therefore, would add little of academic interest and could blur the typology of political drama.

It is easier to justify Pinter's exclusion from a political analysis. By no major critic is he regarded as a political playwright. Yet his plays are unquestionably concerned with power, influence, and shifting allegiances—the very stuffings of political drama. Pinter however does not raise these political struggles to a societal level—a prime element of the definition of a political play. Not only do they remain on the personal level, but they remain there behind a misty cloak of ritualistic and psychological motivations. Pinter is
interested in who gets what, when and how (or at least in who gets whom), but he is not interested in the social consequences of his characters' actions. He will not be considered a political playwright.

This chapter has indicated the political orientation of dramatic criticism in the 1950's and early 1960's, defined political drama and narrowed the focus of the study to two major playwrights, Arnold Wesker and John Arden. The historical and critical contexts thus established, attention can now be given to these writers.
CHAPTER II: FOOTNOTES


6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., p. 118.

8 Ibid., p. 112.

9 Ibid., p. 112.

10 Ibid., p. 113.

11 Ibid., p. 112.

12 Ibid.


14 Tynan, "Theatre and Living," op. cit., p. 121.

15 Ibid., p. 120.


18 Lindsay Anderson, "Vital Theatre?" Ibid., p. 47.


20 Ibid., p. 54.


23 Ibid., p. 110.

24 Penelope Gilliatt, "The Hostage," in Marowitz, op. cit., p. 95.


27 Ibid., p. 222.  28 Ibid., p. 224.  29 Ibid., p. 224.


33 Ibid., pp. 248-49.  34 Ibid., p. 268.


39 Quoted in Ibid., p. 78.

40 Ibid., p. 88.  41 Ibid., p. 63.  42 Ibid., p. 60.


46 Ibid., p. 188.


48 Ibid., p. 7.


51 Ibid.


56 Wellwarth, op. cit., p. 271.

57 Taylor, op. cit., p. 115.

58 ibid., p. 7.


60 Stratford-Upon-Avon Series, op. cit., p. 5.

61 Brown, op. cit., p. ix.


65 Ibid., p. 79.

CHAPTER III: THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF ARNOLD WESKER

Introduction

Extensive critical treatment of Arnold Wesker has been limited. Two books have been devoted exclusively to his work, one by Harold Ribalow published in 1965, the other by Ronald Hayman published in 1970. Neither these books nor any of the critical essays in recent anthologies have penetrated the political philosophy of Wesker's plays. Yet, the centrality of politics to Wesker's plays is seldom challenged.

More than with any other dramatist of his generation—more even than with John Osborne—it is virtually impossible to consider the plays apart from the playwright; to separate judgement of the plays as works of art from judgement of the political opinions. . . .

John Russell Brown is representative of many critics who write of Arnold Wesker's plays without referring directly to political issues, but then conclude their sketch with a recognition of the political elements in the plays.

He is using the theater to explore, to demonstrate in more comprehensive and more subtle ways: that is why he is a dramatist before he is a propagandist.

Although Harold Ribalow's approach is essentially biographical, he recognizes that "Wesker has wrestled with politics and ideas" and that Wesker "does this in all of his plays."

On the basis of Wesker's biography alone, it would be easy to conclude that Wesker is a politically committed dramatist. He participated in demonstrations of the Committee for Nuclear Disarmament,
and was sentenced to a month in prison for his efforts. An outspoken supporter of Israel in the 1967 war, he was furious for the stand against Israel of the British Communist Party. On his return from Cuba in 1968, he wrote an extensive article for Envoy magazine, describing Cuba in romantic terms.

... this idealism is so infectious that it's making Castro and the tiny island of Cuba the focal point not only for the hopes and aspirations of the under-developed countries (who are roughly two thirds of the world) but also for Europe's artists, intellectuals and perhaps, soon, for Europe's tired and despondent younger political leaders.5

Wesker was, at one time, an active member of the Labour Party, particularly in 1960-61 when he worked to secure Trade Union support for Resolution 42, which stated:

That the trade union movement of Great Britain recognizes the importance of the arts in the life of the community and that therefore it should consider in which way it could promote and encourage the participation of its members in all cultural activities.6

The resolution, passed at the ACTU, is a superb example of the kind of activity in which Wesker immerses himself, for it is an appropriate blend of politics, art, idealism and education. Much, if not most, of Wesker's rhetoric for the past ten years has been directed at the English worker, almost pleading with him to recognize the enriching potential of the arts for his life. Not because he himself is in the arts does Wesker focus on this theme, however. He is impassioned in his commitment to improving the spiritual life of the average worker.

From this commitment to bring art and the working class closer together emerged Centre 42, named after the resolution. Wesker was instrumental in the formation of Centre 42, a cultural movement for
popularizing the arts, primarily through trade union support and participation. He hoped that it would attract the working classes to the theatre and serve as a symbol for a kind of cultural renaissance among the middle and lower classes in Britain. He envisioned it as the seat of a cultural revolution from which artists could go to other cities, carrying with them an atmosphere that "will be distinctly 'Fortytwo'—warlike, audacious, gay, courteous, brilliant—and no doubt drunk." While the purpose was noble, Centre 42 has not begun to meet its creator's expectation; it is today little more than an occasionally innovative theatre with few ties to West End traditions.

In his speeches on both Resolution 42 and Centre 42, as well as in his articles and pamphlets, Wesker displays a strongly didactic tone. "I want to write about people in a way that will somehow give them an insight into an aspect of life which they may not have had before," he wrote in 1958. "I want to teach." At the conclusion of his speech, "Fears of Fragmentation," Wesker suggests that his scope is far greater than just interesting people in his own plays.

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 tomorrow's revolution will not be an ugly but a noble one.

His definition and explanation of art further illustrates a tone of didacticism, bordering on the messianic.

The problem is not how can we encourage a man to listen to music because it might shape his sensibilities and hence his humanity, but how do we help a man recognize that his humanity
is a quality in him that can be shaped, or how do we explain that it needs to be shaped?

Wesker's artistic didacticism is not encased in the rigid boundaries of a limited perspective, but is enriched by a humanistic concern for the spiritual happiness of the individual. His goal is, initially, not to teach man to live a certain kind of life, but simply to live. Art is the most important and effective method for conveying and sharing one's joie de vivre.

Now surely, it seems to me you cannot hope to convince people that you've discovered something exciting simply by lecturing them about it, or making political speeches, you've got to demonstrate it in plays, sing about it, make films about it, write novels about it.

That British socialism is Wesker's philosophy of living goes without challenge. In a reply to a communist critic's objections to his work, especially *The Four Seasons*, Wesker suggests that one of the effects of art is "to remind and reassure people that they are not alone not only in their attempts to make a better world but in their private pains and confusions also."12 Sharing one's feelings with another is central to a socialist society, he believes, for he concludes the reply, "Deny *The Four Seasons* as a part of socialist literature and you alienate all men and women who need to know and be comforted by the knowledge that they are not alone in their private pain."13 To understand Wesker, then, it is incumbent to appreciate the extent and nature of the political philosophy which informs his plays. The remainder of this chapter will elucidate and clarify that philosophy as it appears in Wesker's plays. The following chapter will then test the thesis that Wesker's humanism struggles with his political socialism, eventually achieving such predominance in his later plays.
as to eliminate the political element altogether.

To chart the permutations of socialist thought in Britain over the past century is well-nigh impossible.

In the case of the British Labour Party, matters are additionally complicated by the fact that it was not founded on any body of doctrine at all, and has always preserved a marked anti-doctrinal and anti-theoretical bias. The foremost historian of the Party, writing of its formative years, speaks of a "Socialism almost without doctrine... so undefined in its doctrinal basis as to make recruits readily among persons of quite different types."[4]

The variety of social and socialist thinkers, organizations and political parties, while detrimental to the development of a unified philosophy, has certainly enabled the Labour Party to include many within its ranks who are of very opposing viewpoints. The Party itself has come to provide still another version of British socialism since it has held power on two occasions, 1945-51 and 1964-71. While both terms were opportunities to relate theory to reality and thus better delineate the theory, these two periods in office instead settled few questions of either theory or policy; instead they raised questions of tactics and sincerity.

Because of this rainbow of philosophies, each blending quietly into another, it would be easy to apply several labels to the political philosophy of Arnold Wesker. To the Owenites, Wesker is indebted for his desire to convert the upper classes rather than carry on a class-war with them. From the Marxists he has enlisted at least the concepts of alienation and dialectical materialism. From the Fabians, he has acquired a sense of gradualism and a belief in discussion. From the Independent Labour Party has come the concern with brotherhood, especially on an international level. Finally, from Morrisites,
Wesker has derived his social-artistic theories, an emphasis on small cooperative unions and development by all of crafts and artistic talents. As with other British socialists, Wesker's political philosophy is a confluence of historical, social, philosophical and economic theories that is difficult to delineate or define.

With this caveat in mind, the philosophy of Wesker will be linked to the early writings of Marx and to recent British socialist philosophy. The former is chosen both because Wesker's ties to Marxism are stronger than is found among some contemporary British socialists, and because it provides a context within which to appreciate British socialism. The latter is included, of course, because it is the environment within which Wesker has developed his own socialist philosophy.

Marxist Philosophy as Expressed in the Plays of Arnold Wesker

It is often assumed that Marx was interested in the proletariat first, last and foremost, and that he was, in varying degrees, consumed by a hatred of the rich. However, Marx approached the proletariat not from an analysis of the empirical economic world, but from his study of philosophy and the role it must play in the development of the future. The views of Marx on the nature of man and his assessment of what is good and evil in the world indicate that he placed greatest emphasis on the freedom of the individual.

While some philosophers have suggested that Marx has no ethics, the early writings of Marx provide normative assessments, and these assessments are clustered around an historical and economic conception
of the enslavement of the individual and the prescriptive search to free him. Arnold Wesker is very much in agreement with both the conception and the search. The notion of Marxian ethics does not deny the strictures which philosophers of both communist and anti-communist persuasion have placed on Marx's writings; nor is it to suggest that his early writings can be isolated from his later work. It says simply that even though he has used empirical analysis in his studies, his ethics is no less normative for its method.

To understand the philosophical context within which Marx expresses his ethical and normative view of the individual, it is important to discuss briefly his own specific utilization of the Hegelian dialectic and Feuerbach's materialism. While neither concept originated with Marx, he interpreted each differently and provided a unique combination of the two. It is with these two theoretical tools and his passionate belief in the freedom of the individual that Marx set about the task of demolishing capitalism.

The dialectic is a view of history and reality which at once recognizes systematic development in reality and postulates the interconnection of all things as part of the 'totality.' This development is summarized in the familiar thesis-antithesis-triangle, which states that each idea or economic system contains within itself its own contradiction (negation), the seeds of its own destruction. Because this antithesis is an intrinsic element of the thesis, conflict is inevitable; the result of the conflict is the destruction of the thesis, and its replacement by a synthesis which, in turn, contains its own contradictions. The inevitability of this process cannot be stressed
too highly, for it enables later communists to feel a part of an historical movement which is assured ultimate victory.

To use the most obvious example of this theory from Marx, capitalism can be taken as the thesis, a particular stage in history. As Marx developed in Das Kapital and elsewhere, capitalism contains its own negation (antithesis) in the proletariat, the workers who must work more and more for less and less. The proletariat was a necessary creation of capitalism, intrinsic in its development; yet it embodies the contradictions of capitalism. It is therefore the proletariat which will induce change in the system, overthrow capitalism (thesis), and establish communism (synthesis). Thus, the dialectic is a philosophy supportive of change, for each negation is a negation, insuring its ultimate transformation as a result of inner conflict.

While the dialectic was used by Hegel primarily in the realm of ideas to support his belief in "the self-movement of ideas... ever spiraling upward," Marx used the dialectic as an historical method, and Engels applied the dialectic even more broadly to nature. Of fundamental difference between Hegel and Marx, however, is that Hegel believed reality to be a reflection or embodiment of ideas, i.e., ideas formulate reality; Marx took the opposite position that ideas are the embodiment of the external world. They do not exist independently of reality, but are determined by it, for ideas reflect reality, not formulate it.

My dialectical method is not only different from the Hegelian, but its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of "the Idea," he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world,
and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of "the Idea." With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.17

This rejection of the independent influence of ideas is the source of Marx's materialism.

Materialism is a kind of environmental determinism, which posits the cause of all things in matter, in concrete reality. Derived from Vogt, Feuerbach and others, materialism was a reaction against the romantics' faith in emotions and the rationalists' faith in man's reason. It tended to reduce man to a mechanistic level. The materialists categorically denied religion, which imposed order on man through a Supreme Being; they believed the only order could be found in actual events.

Marx rejected this kind of materialism, preferring a more active role for the individual in the shaping of events. While he accepted the centrality of material existence in his world view, he was unwilling to overlook the influence of history and the capacity of man to influence that history. So strongly did Marx criticize Feuerbach that Zeitlin has been led to conclude,

Marx was as far from mechanistic materialism as he was from idealism, and neither term adequately describes his outlook. His philosophy is neither idealism nor materialism but a synthesis of humanism and naturalism.18

While other theorists would not be as willing as Zeitlin to attribute a humanistic strain to Marx's philosophy, there is general agreement that his concept of alienation is humanistically motivated. Absolutely central to the entirety of Marx's economic analysis, the concept involves four elements.19 First, man is alienated from the
product of his work because the division of labor has given him only a small task to perform on each product; his task is thus a part of the whole product, rather than the product being a consequence of the whole man. (Man likewise feels alienated from all of nature, because only when he is working with the raw materials of nature can he come to dominate it.) Second, the division of labor creates and defines certain tasks which must be performed; jobs are defined in these terms rather than in terms of the man who performs them. Man must meet the mold of the job; the job therefore controls him, not the reverse. Third, man is alienated from himself because he is alienated from work, which is his social generic being. Fourth, man perceives other men as tasks (or roles) rather than as men. He may see them as the capitalists who exploit him, as other workers who threaten his job or as components of a society that is demanding the further division of labor. However it may be, man (the worker) thus feels himself dominated or threatened by other men, and is therefore alienated from them.

It is apparent that Marx, if not a humanist, is at least formulating an economic theory sturdily rooted in a humanistic concern for the proletariat. This concern is in turn based on a fervent belief in both the freedom and dignity of man.

Freedom is so thoroughly the essence of man, that its very opponents bring it into actuality even while they struggle against its reality. . . . No man fights freedom, at most he fights against the freedom of others. 20

Because later communists adopted a position of forcing their conception of freedom on an individual, conservatives would scoff at the notion of Marx as a humanist. Nevertheless, this element is an identifiable strain in Marx's earlier writings. It is a strain greatly emphasized
by British socialists.

The Socialist attitude towards welfare legislation is based, first of all, on the view that poverty is primarily due not to the faults of the individual but those of society as a whole.  

Under socialism, wrote Clement Attlee,

State action is advocated by Socialists not for its own sake, but because it is necessary to prevent the oppression of an individual by others, and to secure that the liberty of the one does not restrict that of others, or conflict with the common good of society.

Dialectical materialism, the concept of alienation and the belief in the freedom and dignity of man are the central elements of Marxist philosophy adopted by British socialists. These elements are to be found in the plays of Arnold Wesker. Wesker's characters and situations do not, of course, discuss or illustrate dialectical materialism directly. The concept is too abstruse and abstract for dramatic treatment. Nevertheless, the characters are committed to socialism and to deny their belief in dialectical materialism would be to deny their ability to understand their own political theory. They are convinced that the contradictions of the capitalist system are to be found in the proletariat. Further, they are motivated by a belief in the ultimate success of socialism, despite their individual failures. That strains of dialectical materialism are no more apparent than this, then, is only a recognition that the philosophy is dramatically cumbersome, not that it is ignored or abused.

The concept of alienation, however, is fully illustrated in Wesker's first drama, The Kitchen. The theatrical environment is a symbolic representation of society—oppressive, inhuman, indifferent, inexorable and frenetic. Unless one captures the effectiveness of
this environment, the play is meaningless. The characters, on reading, appear lifeless and caricatured in their simplicity. Their depiction is valid only in the context of the environment in which they work, for it is that environment which has made them lifeless and caricatured. When the heat, the noise and the pace of the kitchen are added to their lives, they are no longer uninteresting, for their individual struggles are seen to be struggles not against each other, but against the system in which they work. That this system is obviously representative of the society in which we live adds yet another level on which the play operates. The "continuous battle between the dialogue and the noise of the ovens" provides the context within which thirty people strive to establish, to maintain or to recover their sense of identity as human beings.

That man is alienated from the product of his work is a central motif of the play. During the rush hour, food is passed around with speed, not concern, with indifference, not with care. The characters go to their respective positions as "if going into battle." Food is shoveled onto the plates with assembly line precision. The waitresses walk around in a prearranged circle collecting food at each station like a car adding parts as it passes through a factory. No one sees the final product, nor cares. No one knows who is getting the food, nor whether they have enjoyed it. There is no pride in this kitchen. There is only mechanistic movement.

As these characters are alienated from the product of their work, they are likewise alienated from work itself. If work is an expression of a man's individuality and joyful participation in
society, there is no 'work' in this kitchen; there is only drudgery and unhappiness. Kevin senses this instantly when he recognizes that he will never last beyond his first day on the job. Work in the kitchen is hostile and threatening because it exists independently of the people who are in the jobs. The characters know that if they leave, they will not be missed. Each of the jobs in the kitchen has been reduced to a task, a repetitive process devoid of feeling or originality. There is only one chef in this kitchen, and he is chef only in title. The others have been divided and redivided into limited, confining positions: fried fish, grill, eggs, poultry, roast and the like.

If man's work is base, he becomes alienated from his universal social generic being. The tension he experiences in his work derives from the inner conflict between what he wants to be and what he is as expressed in what he is doing. Peter strives to infuse into his work a sense of joy; he tries to become himself and to encourage others to do likewise. The ovens continue aflame, however, humming constantly to remind him of the primacy of machines over man. In desperation, he axes the gas lines, bringing the ovens to a halt, trying to prove his superiority, hoping that the proprietor will care. Marango, however, can only respond, "I give work, I pay well, yes? ... What more do you want? What is there more, tell me? What is there more?" The play ends. Peter has failed to make Marango care for his workers or become aware of the system he has created.

Finally, The Kitchen illustrates the alienation of man from other men. That there are thirty characters and that only three of these are developed in depth is intentional: the kitchen is a society
in which men cannot pause to know other men. The job is more important
than the individuals who hold it. Few in the kitchen knew that Winnie
was pregnant. When she passes out, work does not stop; she is
removed so that work can continue. That the others did not know of her
pregnancy illustrates the lack of contact between these people. When
Kevin borrows Peter's cutting board, Peter "stops his work, and
jumping on Kevin, grabs board: in the kitchen it is every man for
himself now." Even Peter, who is more determined than any other
character, to relate to the others around him, joins the system. He
is not infallible.

At least he tries, however. During the lull between rush hours,
he encourages the others to sit with him and dream. The 'dream'
sequence is the frustrated effort of these people to lift themselves
beyond their environment, to express their social generic being and to
share that sense of being with their fellow man. Unable to appreciate
each other as human beings, they move to the realm of fantasy, the
only realm where their alienation from each other is muted. In this
world, as Peter says, "No one is going to laugh, we love each other,
we protect each other. . . ." Kevin thinks the whole thing mad, but
the others are infected with the moment. The first act ends with
Mangolis, Dimitri, Gaston and Nicholas joining in a Greek dance.

The concern for the consequences of this alienation is rooted
in an abiding faith in the freedom and dignity of the individual. To
believe that man is incapable of expressing himself because of the
economic system in which he is oppressed is to believe that man does
have the capacity to express himself at all. Marxists are not
satisfied to overthrow capitalism, to eliminate the oppression. They want to replace it with a society of free expression through cooperation. When man recognizes the joy he feels when he works in harmony with his fellow men, he will realize the true sense of dignity he can have in himself.

This sense of dignity derives first of all from a belief that life is worth living. The socialist millennium will arrive, but until it does, it is necessary to work for its achievement. It is invigorating to recognize the development of history toward socialism and to be a part of that development by working with the proletariat. Regardless of the setbacks one may receive, it is important to care for other people; one cannot isolate himself because true dignity comes from man's social generic being, not his individuality alone. To care for another person enough to teach him, help him or share with him is to participate in the development of mankind. All of these are sentiments expressed in the first play of The Wesker Trilogy, Chicken Soup with Barley.

The dominant character in Chicken Soup is Sarah Kahn, whose own brand of socialism is the political focus of the play, as her soup is the social focus of the characters. Sarah is neither an intellectual nor a political activist in the sense of learning about her politics in order to act on them. She cannot explain the Communist Manifesto, discuss the reasons why the Attlee government failed to institute socialism or probably even understand why the proletariat is the source of contradictions for the capitalist system. Hers is a deeply personal socialism, rooted in a love for mankind and a fervent need to
care for other people. She realizes that it is not enough to accept the system as it is, nor to be a humanist without wanting to initiate a humanist society. However, she doesn't know how to initiate that society, except to provide the one thing she knows people need, food. When Ronnie confronts her at the end of the play, she reveals her true commitment to socialism. She does not understand many things around her, but she knows she has to care if she is to survive with a sense of dignity. With an almost Kirkegaardian leap of faith, she admits the futility of life, but refuses to accept its ultimacy. Her socialism, such as it is, gives her a purpose for living which is only apparent to those who accept it, on faith. If one does not care, life is futile; one must, therefore, accept socialism, because it enables a person to get through life believing that life is not always futile.

Sarah's simplistic faith in socialism is the central idea in *Chicken Soup with Barley*; Ronnie's effort to preach socialism is the central element of *Roots*. Although he never appears onstage, Ronnie, Sarah's son, is constantly quoted on his attitudes toward life, learning and socialism. Beatie Bryant is the theatrical expression of Ronnie's goal in life: to teach socialism to someone by making them aware of their own capabilities, i.e., by giving them a sense of dignity. Beatie describes Ronnie's approach to socialism, and the problem he faced in trying to teach her.

He's a socialist and he used to say you couldn't bring socialism to a country by making speeches, but perhaps you could pass it on to someone who was near you. So I pretended I was interested—but I didn't understand much. All the time he's trying to teach me, I want to show I'm willing. I'm not used to learning. Learning was at school and that's finished with.
At the end of Act II, Beatie tries to get her mother to do something other than her daily tasks. She tries to help her mother as Ronnie helped her. In a burst of enthusiasm she repeats Ronnie's brand of socialism, which appears to be a philosophy that enables one to stand in awe of the process of living and the process of becoming.

Socialism isn't talking all the time, it's living, it's singing, it's dancing, it's being interested in what goes on around you, it's being concerned about people and the world.\(^\text{29}\)

The play appears to revolve around whether Ronnie will show up; as soon as he does not, it is obvious that the play was not concerned with Ronnie's commitment to Beatie, but Beatie's commitment to herself. If Beatie is to discover her own potential, to say something important that is not a Ronnie Kahn quote, it is necessary that Ronnie not arrive. Ronnie's betrayal triggers Beatie to speak from her heart with her own words; it is the beginning of her sense of dignity and self-respect. She has captured Ronnie's socialism and now can live it.

I'm Talking about Jerusalem, the third part of the Trilogy, shifts the focus from dignity to the freedom of the individual. The socialism of this play belongs to Dave and Ada Simmonds (Sarah's daughter and son-in-law), who attempt a William Morris experiment in living socialism in the country. The nature of this experiment is discussed later. Of interest here is the effort of these two people to be free of any economic chains, away from the questions and doubts about socialism that arise when they remember Spain and read about Hungary. Dave, in trying to explain to Sarah why they have come to the country, says, "Nothing's wrong with socialism Sarah, only we want
to live it—not talk about it."\(^{30}\) The Simmonds want to be free to raise their children to be human beings, to be free of the mechanistic rigidity of the city, to be free to create whatever they like, however, they like. Their failure does not negate their philosophy (as against that of Ronnie or Sarah), but simply identifies its limitations.

**British Socialism and the Plays of Arnold Wesker**

The emphasis on the freedom and dignity of man in both Marx and British socialism leads the latter to the belief in the necessity of cooperation rather than competition, and the consequent emphasis on the fellowship of man. The declaration of the Labour Party's Annual Conference begins appropriately, "The British Labour Party is a democratic socialist party. Its central ideal is the brotherhood of man."\(^{31}\) The cooperative movement has always had a following in England, from the early Owenites and Christian socialists, through William Morris and the Fabians, to contemporary writers. A reaction against the competition inherent in capitalism, the cooperative philosophy assumes that society can advance further with everyone working together rather than competing against each other individually.

The insistence of socialists on the need for preserving or re-creating the group, and the sense of belonging to it, is not for the sake of the group as such, but for the sake of the individuals who compose it.\(^{32}\)

It is the socialist belief that through fellowship and fraternal love, the individual is at peace with his fellow man and therefore with himself; and because of this inner peace, he is freed to express
himself and his social generic being.

At times, it appears that British socialism confines itself to an admirable humanism mixed with a heavy dose of fellowship and cooperation. The source of both these, however, is a critique of the capitalist system resulting in the replacement of it by a socialist economic system. The most famous clause in the Labour Party's Constitution is Clause IV, which states,

To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.  

Although the party is not rigidly doctrinaire, although it is evolutionary not revolutionary, although it professes pacifism to violence, although it does not subordinate the individual to the state, the Labour Party remains committed to a socialist economic system and that commitment cannot be overlooked.

Much of the modification of socialist doctrine has come since 1945, when the Labour Party has twice had to deal with its philosophy in terms of the execution of government policy. Electoral success insured that it would never convert to an anti-democratic strategy, but hold to its policy of evolution.

British socialism is essentially democratic and evolutionary. Throughout its history it has rejected the revolutionary use of armed force, or of industrial action for the attainment of political ends.

With the Labour victory in 1945 came the realization that the party could no longer theorize; it must enact. No longer could the party content itself with doctrinaire disputes over the nature of
capitalism; it must formulate a policy of responsible participation.

The difficulty with which socialists contend today is that their programmes, their ways of thought, their very language, have all grown out of the discontents of the past, and were designed to meet the injustices of a past age. They were directly concerned with economic exploitation and the resulting inequalities. Today capitalist exploitation is no longer the burning question that it was...

What emerges now as the leading task for socialists? The old struggle for political power to eradicate the remaining evils of a class society must go on. The ground that has been won is again being threatened and large areas still stand unconquered...

The answer, if it is to be brief, can be summed up in a phrase—to arouse responsible participation.

The above statement is even more informative when it is realized that it was written, not by former members of the Government, but by left-wing members of the party. In 1949 Bertrand de Jouvenal chronicled the progress of the Attlee government and noticed a change in the Labourites from theorists to pragmatists.

British socialism accepts the realities frankly: its leaders are petit bourgeois, most of its rank and file are the same... and those who are not petit bourgeois aim at becoming so.

Socialism in Britain, then, is committed to an evolutionary change of society through responsible participation in government, rather than revolution from without the democratic processes.

Finally, one other consequence of Labour's term in office should be noted: the grave doubts and almost masochistic self-analysis of many socialists, who seem no longer convinced of either the validity of their philosophy or the capacity of the working class to be reformed. As explained in the previous chapter, many left-wing intellectuals were bitterly disillusioned with the results of Labour's first six years in office. Uncertain whether to blame the leadership, the policies, the
institutions or the people, they were left with only their bitterness. Throughout the socialist movement today is a strain of unhappiness: the leadership regrets the horrible financial crises it has had to face, the theorists resent revisionism in the Party, the workers are not convinced that the Party is any different than the Conservative Party, and the intellectuals and artists are unhappy probably because they realize all of these and recognize their impotence in correcting them.

Each of these elements of British socialism—fellowship and brotherhood of man, critique of capitalism and self-doubts—finds its way into the plays of Arnold Wesker. The emphasis on fellowship and the brotherhood of man is closely linked to the faith in the dignity of man, already described in the Trilogy. Especially in *Chicken Soup with Barley*, the communal feeling of brotherhood is reflected in the lifestyle of the characters; they excitedly work together on the demonstration. The home of the Kahn family is like a political headquarters where people come to share their experiences, to encourage one another and to plan for the future of a brotherhood of socialists. The tight-knit family structure of the Kahn's emphasizes this theme of cooperation and involvement in the lives of others. Ronnie's disillusionment with socialism, in good part, derives from his inability to relate to the lack of brotherhood in the world when he had been raised with such a strong sense of brotherhood as a child. To Sarah, socialism is chicken soup with barley; it is sharing whatever you have with someone who needs it.

The second element of British socialism, opposition to
capitalism, is evident throughout the plays, occasionally becoming explicit.

RONNIE: You mean a sale is not what is left over from the season before?

CISSIE: Oh, grow up, Ronnie. You should know that by now. It's cheaper stuff, inferior quality.

RONNIE: And the union doesn't protest? It is also found in Wesker's depiction of characters who represent the capitalist system. They are dull and inhuman stereotypes who never display an interest in anyone or anything beyond their businesses. Healey, in Roots, comes to see if Mr. Bryant is feeling well only to insure that he will return to work. Healey has sacked a younger employee who is no longer needed because of new equipment. The Colonel in I'm Talking about Jerusalem is equally abrupt. He allows Dave only one day to get settled in his new home before expecting him to work. Later, he is infuriated with Dave for taking linoleum (which he had said was useless to him) without asking. Marango in The Kitchen is equally devoid of feeling. Like the others, he is more a symbol of oppression than a developed character. He cannot understand why Peter would try to stop the ovens in the kitchen. He pays his staff well, so, 'What more could there be?'

Through Wesker's plays, the atmosphere of faith in socialism is permeated with doubt and disillusionment. The disappointment with the future of the Labour Government and loss of idealism after Spain, Hungary, and the treatment of Jews in the Soviet Union, all find their way into the Wesker plays. The Simmonds first arrive in Norfolk in 1946, and the expectations for the arrival of the millenium are
expressed by Ronnie.

We just put a Labour Party in power didn't we? It's right they should be the pioneers--good! Every-ye-bo-dy is building. Out go the slums, whist! And the National Health Service comes in. The millenium's come and you're still grumbling. What's the matter, you don't like straw­berries and cream?39

In Their Very Own and Golden City, Jake illustrates what happened to these expectations,

Would it have been unreasonable to expect a socialist government to apply socialist economic principles instead of the usual patchwork? It wouldn't, would it? But did they? (Mocking.) "The time isn't ripe! The government'll be defeated!"40

Another source of disillusionment was a series of world events which confirmed the fear of Western socialists that the communist party was not adhering to the same humanistic ideals as they. To many left­wing intellectuals, the civil war in Spain was a clear-cut battle between ideologies. The battle proved otherwise, as Monty describes to Sarah.

Listen, Sarah. Remember Spain? Remember how we were proud of Dave and the other boys who answered the call? But did Dave ever tell you the way some of the Party members refused to fight alongside the Trotskyists? And one or two of the Trotskyists didn't come back and they weren't killed in the fighting either?41

Spain alone did not convince Monty that the communists were no different than the fascists they fought; there was also the treatment of Jews in the Soviet Union.

And remember Itzack Pheffer--the Soviet Yiddish writer? We used to laugh because Itzack Pheffer was a funny name--ha, ha. Where's Itzack Pheffer? everyone used to say. Well, we know now, don't we. The great 'leader' is dead now, and we know. The whole committee of the Jewish Anti-Fascist League were shot! Shot, Sarah! In our land of socialism.42

Later, Ronnie expresses the anguish with which many socialists greeted...
the intervention in Hungary.

RONNIE (suddenly): I don't suppose you've bothered to read what happened in Hungary.

SARAH: Hungary?

RONNIE: Look at me, Mother, Talk to me. Take me by the hand and show me who was right and who was wrong. Point them out. Do it for me.43

He, too, is perplexed by the anti-semitism of the Soviet communists.

Why do I feel ashamed to use words like democracy and freedom and brotherhood? They don't have meaning any more. I have nothing to write about any more. Remember all that writing I did? I was going to be a great socialist writer. I can't make sense of a word, a simple word. You look at me as if I'm talking in a foreign language. Didn't it hurt you to read about the murder of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the Soviet Union?44

Doubts about the verity of the socialist cause spring not only from disappointment with the Labour Government and the actions of the Soviet Union. Wesker recognizes, even fears, that underneath the drive for power of the socialists is a commitment only to power, not to philosophy which serves as the vehicle to power. Ada turns on her father, accusing him of wanting to control capitalist society, not destroy it.

You have never cried against the jungle of an industrial society. You've never wanted to destroy its values—simply to own them yourselves.45

This theme is reiterated in Their Very Own and Golden City, in a speech of Andy's.

My lifelong boys! My lifelong boys? Prefects! That's all; the Labour movement provides prefects to guard other men's principles for living. Oh we negotiate for their better application, shorter working week and all that but—prefects! They need them, we supply them. . . . I don't suppose there's such a thing as democracy, really, only a democratic way of manipulating power. And equality? None of that either, only a gracious way of accepting inequality.
If Wesker's characters do not trust the motives of those who seek power in the name of socialism, they are doubtful also of the ability of socialist leaders to persuade the masses to join them. Ronnie in the Trilogy and Andy in Their Very Own and Golden City are both in competition with inertia, the inertia of the family and social structures around them, and the inertia of the trade unions. The former is a fundamental issue in Marxism, for if an individual can not break away from his childhood environment, the entire set of assumptions of the rise of the proletariat on which Marxism is based falls apart. Wesker posits this inertia in the character of Harry who is much less committed to the socialist ideal than his wife, although she is less educated than he. He recognizes his failing, pausing at the end of Act II to tell Ronnie,

What I am—I am. I will never alter. Neither you nor your mother will change me. It's too late now; I'm an old man and if I've been the same all my life so I will always be. You can't alter people, Ronnie. You can only give them some love and hope they'll take it. I'm sorry. It's too late now. I can't help you. 47

The stroke which renders him helpless (and inert) symbolizes his inability to work for the goals he has espoused and ingrained in his family. Both Ronnie's effort to teach socialism to Beatie in Roots and Ada's move to the country in I'm Talking about Jerusalem are, in part, reactions against their father's inability to live actively the socialism he professes.

Roots has this same theme as its basic motif. The struggle in the play is whether Beatie can overcome her roots, her heritage, and participate in the new world and new life shown her by Ronnie. The Bryant family is inert—they cannot speak of anything but gossip,
and this gossip is repeated again and again. The father speaks almost exclusively in monosyllables. When Beatie does break free of them, it is because she communicates directly to their existence, not indirectly through Ronnie to her own existence. Her final speech of the play summarizes her feelings toward the indifference and inertia of the north country family life.

'Blust,' they [the really talented people] say, 'if they don't make no effort why should we bother?' So you know who come along? The slop singers and the pop writers and the film makers and women's magazines and the Sunday papers and the picture strip love stories—that's who come along, and you don't have to make no effort for them, it come easy. 'We know where the money lie,' they say, 'hell we do! The workers've got it so let's give them what they want. If they want slop songs and film idols we'll give 'em that then. If they want words of one syllable, we'll give 'em that then. If they want the third-rate, blust! We'll give 'em that then.'

Wesker's doubts about and disillusionment with socialism extend to the trade union leaders who should be the vanguard of the movement. In Their Very Own and Golden City, Andrew's battle to build six golden cities is stymied, not only by the conservatives, who encourage him while forcing him to compromise, but also by the trade union leaders, who force him to compromise by discouraging him. The union leaders cut the scheme from six cities to one, then shatter the plans for that city by rejecting a proposal to finance its industry. Andy symbolically submits to the conservatives when he accepts the title of Sir Andrew Cobham.

The disillusionment which stems from all the foregoing is best summarized by the self-doubts of Ronnie in the Trilogy. Ronnie has been raised a socialist; his home life centered around discussions of socialism and socialist activities. When he confronts the
realization that socialism is no more secure than the life of a child, it is inevitable that he will begin to doubt himself. Ronnie returns to Sarah in *Chicken Soup with Barley* to accuse her of being a "pathological case" because she is still a communist. At the conclusion of *I'm Talking about Jerusalem*, he realizes that his self-doubts have prevented him from carrying anything through to its finish.

It wasn't sordid, you know Dave. I know I didn't see it through to the end but it wasn't sordid. Beatie Bryant could have been a poem—I gave her words—maybe she became one. But your [sic] right. There isn't anything I've seen through to the end—maybe that's why you two were so important to me. Isn't that curious? I say all the right things, I think all the right things, but somewhere, some bloody where I fail as a human being. Like my father—just like poor old Harry. O Christ! Look at me.

(Ronnie sinks to his knees in utter despair. . . . Slowly, very slowly, he rises to his feet. He knows what is wanted of him but still cannot do more than stand in a sort of daze, looking from one to another. . . .)

The *Trilogy* ends on this note of self-doubt. Sarah's chicken soup has proved inadequate for her children, Dave and Ada's experiment in Morrisite socialism has failed, and Ronnie, who left Beatie, cries out,

We--must--be--bloody--mad--to cry!

The final keystone of British socialism is responsible participation and evolution to socialism, not revolution. Their *Very Own and Golden City* is an exercise in responsible participation. Andy's effort to build a golden city is itself a recognition that society must work toward socialism, not fight violently for it. He recognizes that there is no revolutionary situation in England anyway.

Then what else is there left worth doing? The alternative was that complete revolution we all used to talk about, but--there's no situation that's revolutionary, is there?
Face it, all of you. There—is--no--revolutionary--situation.52

Instead of educating the masses to overthrow the government, he works within the context of union and business leadership to evolve a socialist scheme which will serve as a model for other schemes. The scheme itself is based on responsible participation.

I've got a questionnaire here, I've worked one out, we'll ask each person what kind of a city he wants. Participation! We'll involve them, a real community project, a real one!53

This is baffling to the chairman of local town planning, however, for he realizes incredulously that the idea and motive force behind the city is the ultimate transformation of society through example. He reminds Andy that the patchwork socialism which has been created must not be ignored, for Andy's scheme is patchwork just as are the other schemes Andy has criticized.

Chairman. I'm not a fool, Cobham, and you listen, you listen, you listen to me. Patchwork? Slum clearance--patchwork? Right. I agree. And what's more I agree for your reasons: the intrusion of a little bit of order in the midst of chaos. Useless. I agree. Patchwork. I agree. Because one day the chaos will overwhelm the tiny bit of order, won't it? . . . You know why the cities won't work--them's also patchwork. Them's also a little bit of order in the midst of chaos. . . .

Andy. Whether you stonewall, whether you legislate, whether you lobby, argue, deceive or apply your lovely reasonable sanity, the end is the same. A cheapskate dreariness, a dull caution that kills the spirit of all movements and betrays us all--from plumber to poet. Not even the gods forgive that.54

Andy's reply is heartless; it forecasts his merciless attack on himself after he has accepted a patchwork of his own vision.

We don't really like people, do we? We just like the idea of ourselves liking people.55

Their Very Own and Golden City assumes the same kind of society as
contemporary British socialists, one which will not submit to violent overthrow of the government, one which is firmly rooted in the democratic principle of popular participation. Because Andy's original vision is badly tarnished by play's end, it can be argued that the play speaks for a more radical approach to social change. But the character of Andy obstinately refuses to take that path. When confronted with the need for compromise, his response is not revolution, but defeat while remaining true to the ideal. The ideal must not be betrayed. "Not even the gods forgive that."

Before leaving the philosophical heritage of Arnold Wesker, it is important to credit his indebtedness to the aesthetic theories of the late nineteenth century socialist, William Morris. Like Wesker, Morris was a man of varied talents and interests. Best known as an architect, poet and novelist, he worked with several socialist organizations in the 1880's and 1890's before preferring his own brand of socialism, which he saw as an economic system that would make of each individual an artist. He was something of a utopian socialist, describing in his works an idyllic, bucolic way of life in which every individual is an artist, expressing his social generic being without impinging on others. His contribution was more that he helped popularize this conception of the ideal society through lectures, poetry and novels, than the conception itself.

His own contribution was to make his own idea of Socialism seem desirable to the public largely by convincing them of the difference between things as they are and things as they might be. He hoped to create anew the idealism of a native British proletarian spirit which, he thought, had lain dormant during the many years that had elapsed since the Middle Ages. To these ends, the re-creation of the ideal
and the true portrayal of the ideal—the depiction of things as they might be—he was to devote most of his energies during the closing years of his life.57

In his depiction of the new socialist order can be found many of the aesthetic ideas later espoused by Wesker. To Morris, art is not a pastime; it is central to the socialist society.

To the Socialist a house, a knife, a cup, a steam engine, or what not, anything, I repeat, that is made by man and has form, must either be a work of art or destructive to art.58

The new society will not be simply one in which the individual can express himself artistically. Art, to survive, requires such a society.

And, second, I assert that inequality of condition, whatever may have been the case in former ages of the world, has now become incompatible with the existence of a healthy art.59

While many contemporary statements by Labourites indicate a limited function for art, Morris believed art to be a necessity.

The first point, therefore, in the Socialist ideal of art is that it should be common to the whole people; and this can only be the case if it comes to be recognized that art should be an integral part of all manufactured wares that have definite form and are intended for any endurance. In other words, instead of looking upon art as a luxury incidental to a certain privileged position, the Socialist claims art as a necessity of human life which society has no right to withhold from any one of the citizens; ...60

Arnold Wesker is motivated by this same artistic creed. Both in the Trilogy and Their Very Own and Golden City, attempts are made to construct a William Morris kind of socialism, both fail, but the audience is made to feel that they should not have failed. In the Trilogy, Dave and Ada embark on a socialist journey to Norfolk to live a rustic, idyllic life, hopefully avoiding city life, industries and progress.
Ada: The only rotten society is an industrial society. It makes a man stand on his head and then convinces him he is good looking. I'll tell you something. It wasn't the Trotskyist or the Special Democrat who did the damage. It was progress! There! Progress! And nobody dared fight progress.61

The life of London is oppressive, inhuman; no one knows his next-door neighbor. Dave wants to build his own woodcraft shop, sell directly from it to customers. As Morris saw everything in society as a work of art, so Dave tries to instill this same feeling for creativity in Sammy.

... For no reason at all you worked out a design on an ordinary chisel rack. But there was a reason really wasn't there? You enjoyed using those tools and making up that design. I can remember watching you—a whole afternoon you spent on it and you used up three pieces of oak before you were satisfied. ... Creating! For the sheer enjoyment of it just creating.62

The other characters are aware of the kind of socialism Dave and Ada are striving to practice. Dobson says, "You've gone back to William Morris. . . ."63 The two sisters, Cissie and Esther, discussing Dave's purchase of new machinery, try to understand Dave's ideal.

Cissie: It's all got to do with the work of another socialist furniture-maker, William Morris.

Esther: A yiddisha fellow?

Cissie: He was a famous person. He used to say 'Machines are all right to relieve dull and dreary work, but man must not become a slave to them.'64

The failure of the ideal, Dave explains, derives from the double fact that Dave is burdened by the everyday realities of his family and his work and that modern society and its techniques have simply pushed past him. The experiment began with Ada decrying progress; it ended with Dave's realization that progress defeated him.
I'm not saying I'm useless, but machinery and modern techniques have come about to make me the odd man out. Here I've been, comrade citizen, presenting my offerings and the world's rejected them. I don't count, Ronnie, and if I'm not sad about it you mustn't be either.65

As a preface to Their Very Own and Golden City, Wesker chose part of a speech of William Morris's, worth repeating here because it suggests the central focus of the play.

... and accordingly the Trade Unionists and their leaders who were once the butt of the most virulent abuse from the whole of the Upper and Middle classes are now praised and petted by them because they do tacitly or openly acknowledge the necessity for the master's existence; it is felt that they are no longer the enemy; the class struggle in England is entering into a new phase, which may even make the once dreaded Trade Unions allies of capital, since they in their turn form a kind of privileged group among the workmen; in fact they now no longer represent the whole class of workers as working men but rather as charged with the office of keeping the human part of the capitalists' machinery in good working order and freeing it from any grit of discontent.

...66

The focus, then, lies in the struggle between the ideal—which all socialists once had, and the reality of power politics as played by union leaders. The ideal is based on Morrisite principles, for all people own the city, they help to create it through weekly planning meetings. Industry is to be run by labor, so the workers will not be alienated from their work. The center of the city is not a Town Hall, but the city's "gardens, concert halls, theatres, swimming pools."67 Andy is designing a city for human beings, not shoving human beings into an inhuman city.

Again, the experiment fails (at least from Andy's point of view). In I'm Talking about Jerusalem, however, there is room for pessimism. When Dave and Ada return to London, there will be nothing left of their experiment. They are defeated and they know it; one
cannot get the feeling that they will be happy in London. Ronnie, who should be the source of hope—having learned about socialism from at least three different sources, can only shake his fist at the gods. *Their Very Own and Golden City*, on the other hand, does not permit this same pessimism. As with Dave and Ada, there is the optimism that emerges from tragedy—the effort was admirable, even though it has fallen short. More importantly, *Their Very Own and Golden City* is a hopeful play because the final scene returns to Durham Cathedral in 1926, where the four friends first discussed their golden city. Locked in for the night, they merrily form a human chariot and gallop off. We are left with their youthful ideal, not the bittersweet taste of their middle-aged compromise. If not in *I'm Talking about Jerusalem*, at least in *Their Very Own and Golden City*, the William Morris experiment survives.

In summary, the plays of Arnold Wesker reflect the principle elements of British socialism, clearly establishing him in the mainstream of that socialism and illustrating the political content of his early plays. The later plays, however, do not highlight this political philosophy but sustain many of the humanistic elements that are also evident in the earlier plays. The relationship between the socialist and humanist elements in the plays will be studied next in order to clarify the importance of politics in Wesker's plays and to show that few of Wesker's plays can be appropriately labeled political drama.
CHAPTER III: FOOTNOTES


4Ribalow, op. cit., p. 41.

5Arnold Wesker, unpublished article on Cuba, provided by author.

6Arnold Wesker, "Two Snarling Heads," mimeographed article provided by author, p. 3.


9Wesker, Fears of Fragmentation, op. cit., p. 128.

10Ibid., p. 66. 11Ibid., p. 17.


13Ibid., p. 4.


This paper accepts the view of Zeitlin, Marcuse and others that Marx is essentially non-Hegelian in his use of the dialectic. For a differing view, see Robert Tucker, Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961).


Ibid., p. 10.

This explanation of the concept of alienation closely follows that given in Eugene Kamenka, The Ethical Foundations of Marxism (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), Part II.

Quoted in ibid., p. 28.


Ibid., I. 49.

Ibid., I. 49.

Ibid., I. 55.


Ibid., II. ii. 129.

Arnold Wesker, I'm Talking about Jerusalem, ibid., I. 164.


Quoted in Wilson, op. cit., p. 6.

Ibid., p. 2.


37 Arnold Wesker, Chicken Soup with Barley, in Wesker, The Wesker Trilogy, op. cit., II. ii. 49.

38 Wesker, The Kitchen, op. cit., II. 78.


41 Wesker, Chicken Soup with Barley, op. cit., III. i. 61.

42 Ibid., III. i. 62.

43 Ibid., III. ii. 71.

44 Ibid. 45 Ibid., II. i. 43.

46 Wesker, Their Very Own and Golden City, op. cit., II. vi. 89.

47 Wesker, Chicken Soup with Barley, op. cit., II. ii. 56.

48 Ibid., III. ii. 73.


50 Wesker, I'm Talking about Jerusalem, op. cit., III. ii. 216-17.

51 Ibid., III. ii. 218.

52 Wesker, Their Very Own and Golden City, op. cit., II. iii. 59.

53 Ibid., II. iii. 56.

54 Ibid., II. i. 51-52.

55 Ibid., II. vi. 90.

56 Ibid., II. i. 52.


59 Ibid. 60 Ibid., p. 321.

61 Wesker, Chicken Soup with Barley, op. cit., II. i. 42.

62 Wesker, I'm Talking About Jerusalem, op. cit., II. ii. 191.
63 Ibid., II. i. 182. 64 Ibid., III. i. 200.
65 Ibid., III. ii. 216.
66 Quoted in Wesker, Their Very Own Golden City, op. cit., p. 9.
67 Ibid., II. vi. 66.
CHAPTER IV: SOURCES OF DRAMATIC TENSION
IN THE PLAYS OF ARNOLD WESKER

Whether Wesker believes socialism to be the only philosophy by which to live or can accept another is a question central to a full understanding of his plays. Whether his love for life is greater than his love for a life of socialism—that question shifts the focus of criticism away from the strictly political in Wesker's plays and forces reconsideration of them from thematic and structural viewpoints. That reconsideration will help to determine the degree of importance of his socialist philosophy to his plays. Such an investigation is not intended to prove that Wesker is not a socialist, nor that his plays aren't socialist. The previous chapter has already established both of these. The purpose is rather to determine whether Wesker's plays are political drama and whether they should be regarded as political tracts or treated as private drama of socialists struggling with their own world rather than the political world around them. The plays are treated chronologically and developmentally to show the progression of Wesker's thematic concerns, and to illustrate thereby the thematic similarity of his last two plays and his earlier ones. The continuing concern to find a humanistic faith unburdened by social reality and to find someone with whom to share that faith—if these are the foundation of Wesker's plays, then The Four Seasons and The Friends, his two most recent works, are not 'a totally different
kind of drama," but an integral progression from his earlier plays.

The thesis of this chapter is that, while Wesker's plays are certainly political--both by general critical claim and by the standards employed in this paper--the political ideas and messages are not the heart of his drama. To see them as such is to date Wesker's plays, to restrict their meaning, to confine the potential power of emotion that surges below their surface and to lead to a misunderstanding of his later plays. Wesker does want to teach, as he once said, but this does not perforce make his plays didactic. The one play in which he does 'teach' a character, *Roots*, is probably his least didactic play. Rather than say "I want to teach," Wesker might have more accurately said, "I want to be a teacher," one who communicates, one who shares, one who is empathically involved with his students, one who is learning from his students at the same time he teaches. In teaching there is tension--tension within the teacher over the use of his materials, tension between the teacher and the student and tension between the student's desire to learn and his desire to avoid the discipline of learning. This is the true basis of Wesker's dramatic tension, based not on the conflict between those who agree with a political message vs. those who disagree, but a tension arising naturally from the most humane of man's achievements, the learning process.

The structural elements of the plays support this interpretation. Five themes--bridges, dreams, Jerusalem, roots and leadership, and two dramatic devices--games and dances, appear repeatedly in the plays. Bridges are used as a dramatic metaphor for the need to communicate, to establish relationships between people, to share
knowledge with one another. Dreams in Wesker's plays reflect the effort to communicate on a plane above social reality, where individuals are unencumbered by the sense of alienation and the compartmentalization which is enforced on their daily lives. The Jerusalem motif represents the need to encourage growth in people and the construction of a new society. Itself a dream, Jerusalem symbolizes dissatisfaction with communication and insistence that something be built, learned or taught from that communication. Roots is expressive of the autobiographical element in Wesker's plays because the characters, stories and even lines have roots in his own life. It stands as a metaphor in its own right, however, symbolizing the characters' desire to break away from their restrictive surroundings, and to free themselves to accept new ideas which will in turn provide roots for continued growth. It expresses metaphorically the learning process of the child becoming an adult. Fifth, the leadership motif highlights an anti-authoritarian strain in the plays, a distrust and dislike of those in positions of leadership. Not confined to capitalist leaders but encompassing all in authority, the leadership theme illustrates the same desire for the freedom of the individual as is suggested by the roots motif. The two dramatic devices, games and dances, are obviously expressions of the message of Wesker's teaching: that enjoyment of life, freedom of expression and sharing are the foundation of a meaningful life.

Form and structure in Wesker's plays are to be analyzed, then, to determine whether his true purpose as a playwright lies not in political polemics, but in his search for a humanistic credo and someone with whom to share it. The plays are treated individually in the
order in which they were written. It will be shown that the dramatic
world of Arnold Wesker is a progressively smaller one, as is the
breadth of his thematic material. Concomitant with this constriction
is less concentration on socialist philosophy and greater determina-
tion to establish private, personal relationships between two people.
Finally, it will become evident that the source of dramatic tension
in Wesker's plays is derivative from tension within the playwright
himself between his strongly political socialism and his thoroughly
apolitical humanism. Although the early plays are predominantly
political, the more recent work of Wesker has increasingly focused
on a restrictively humanistic concern for establishing close relation­
ships with one or two other people. This thematic transition in turn
reflects on the early plays and forces their reconsideration from a
less political orientation.

The Kitchen

The first of Wesker's plays, The Kitchen, is easily the most
political and socialist of the eight he has written. On initial
reading, it appears ideologically stilted, intellectually obtuse
and dramatically uninteresting. Phrases (even in the revised edition)
such as "This is the U.N., eh?"2 are unnecessary reminders of the
obvious central metaphor of the play, the kitchen as microcosm of the
world. The contrast between the owner and his workers is stark and
uncompromising. Characters continually repeat that they are working
only for money. No one has the capacity to discuss or explain the
philosophical reasons why the others are unhappy. Only three
characters are developed to the point of sustaining audience interest
as individuals; of these, Paul and Kevin are not developed by actions but by what they occasionally say.

The Kitchen has been explained earlier as a dramatic representation of the Marxist concept of alienation both in its overriding theatrical image and in its characterization. It is the only one of Wesker's plays which can be explicated entirely through its political philosophy, because it is the only one of Wesker's plays in which his socialist orientation permeates the entire atmosphere, controlling development of the theme. There is no talk of Jerusalem here, because Wesker's focus is not on how to build Jerusalem but why it is needed. It is the only play in which Wesker does not assume the need for socialism, but tries to prove it. Perhaps for this reason it stands as one of his most effective dramas. The characters are not struggling with themselves to justify their own philosophical shortcomings and inability to communicate, but are working with each other and in spite of each other to survive. The play is consequently more theatrical than most of Wesker's plays because the dramatic conflict is between people who are fighting each other for a moment of human dignity, a physical place of their own, a sense of freedom of thought and action. In other plays of Wesker, the antagonist is human weakness—a character struggles with himself rather than with other people, but in The Kitchen the antagonist is superbly realized, a theatrically vivid representation of the system against whom the characters battle, the kitchen. Only one other time, in Their Very Own and Golden City, does Wesker find a theatrical image as captivating and stunning.
Because the play has been treated in the previous chapter, concentration here is on the editorial revisions Wesker made in the two published versions of the play. The revisions reveal the development of Wesker's craft after he had written other plays, his greater facility in handling characters, and his increasing interest in games and dances. A comparison of the two versions (the original published by Penguin and the revised and expanded text published by Jonathan Cape\(^3\)) instructively pinpoints the dramatic and theatrical weaknesses in the original which Wesker sought to correct. He softened the emphasis on the kitchen as a metaphor for the world by cutting two embarrassing lines,

>This stinking kitchen is like the world—you know what I mean? The world is filled with kitchens—only some they call offices and some they call factories.\(^4\)

Added to the play were large sections which can be classified roughly into three different types of revision. First, Wesker has filled out the main action line of the play, increasing by almost six pages the amount of kitchen activity with dialogue. These sections extend the momentum of Part I, increase the stage action without complicating the play, and heighten the audience's awareness of the nature of the kitchen: inhumane, impersonal, inexorable.

Secondly, sections were added to individualize some characters in the play. For example, the opening sequence is embellished from two lines between Magi and a 'Hefty Woman,' to sixteen lines between Magi and Bertha, giving the audience more time to accept the characters and permitting Wesker to use Bertha later. More importantly, however, the characters of Paul, Raymond and Monique are more fully
developed in the revision. Paul emerges more clearly as a mature, stable and perceptive character, less affected by the kitchen than anyone else, better equipped to survive the daily routine. Raymond is equally developed to balance the relationship between him and Paul. Dramatically, the Paul-Raymond friendship better counterpoints the frustrating attempts of the others to relate to people around them, and it softens the stark, uncompromising picture of the kitchen to a more believable mixture of pathos and courage. Monique, Peter's lover, also becomes more prominent through added scenes which establish her as an independent, self-serving woman with feelings of warmth for Peter, although she is married.

Because the relationship between Peter and Monique is the only storyline in the play, Wesker undoubtedly enlarged it to answer those critics who said there was no plot in the play. If this storyline were too developed, however, it would stand independent of the kitchen, and Peter's action at the end would not be organic either to the metaphor or the rest of the play. The conflict between the two is not intended to overshadow the central conflict of the play between the employees and the system. Consequently, the sections Wesker has added only illustrate more clearly Peter's inability to get Monique to commit herself to him. Peter gives Monique a birthday present (which did not occur in the original), providing stronger motivation for his breakdown when she thanks him quickly, then says that her husband is buying her a house.

Thirdly, Wesker has added three highly effective theatrical moments which illustrate his increased ability to transform material
into theatrical images. During the Interlude, Peter builds an arch between the stoves with dustbins, a broom handle and dish-cloths. He goosesteps through the arch while Paul throws flowers on him and Hans plays the "Horst Wessel" on the guitar. The incident precedes immediately the dream sequence, and provides a ready transition to it. Motivating Peter to think in terms of fantasy, it is a remarkable theatricalization of Peter's character--his love of games, his ability to enjoy life in spite of the kitchen, his German background and his central role in the kitchen as the source of merriment. The second moment occurs at the end of the Interlude, after the dream sequence. The scene moves "very, very slowly to denote the passing of the afternoon." Paul and Raymond relax, enjoying each other's company. Mangolis sings a Greek air, and slowly the other Greeks--Nicholas, Gaston and Dimitri--join him in a dance. The section ends the play on the upbeat, brings these four characters close together at least for a moment and summarizes the purpose of the Interlude, to make the audience aware of the potential for joy and participation in the characters and to contrast their real selves with the inhuman work they perform in the kitchen. At the opening of Part II, Wesker has included a third section, a mock football game fantasized by Michael, which reestablishes and reinforces the euphoric mood of the Interlude. It too illustrates the capacity of the employees to enjoy life, and offers a glimpse of a personality struggling to emerge through the noise of the kitchen.

In its original version, The Kitchen was interesting, occasionally effective drama. As Wesker has revised it, however, it
is perhaps his best play. All elements of the play are tightly controlled by the metaphor and the philosophical theme of conflict between the workers and the system. That theme is realized not only in the staging of the play, but in moments of theatrical excellence which Wesker has added. The Kitchen is less discursive than any other of his plays; the characters do not try to explain their feelings, they act them out. After The Kitchen, Wesker turned to a more traditional structure and to a Shavian interest in discussion which, although sometimes brilliantly effective, never brought him to another theatrical image as powerful as the kitchen.

**Chicken Soup with Barley**

Although the time span of Chicken Soup with Barley is one of the greatest in contemporary drama, the play's form has the Chekhovian structure of closing in around its characters. Chekhov uses the physical settings of his plays to mirror the disintegrating world of his characters. Wesker uses other characters to achieve this same effect. The background of the first act is a socialist demonstration. The atmosphere is bubbling with enthusiasm, excitement and anticipation, with people coming in and out, reporting the events outside. The Kahn home is a center of this kind of activity because the whole family is committed to socialism, but also because Sarah wants them there in order to provide them what she feels is important: food and tea. Dramatic tension in the act derives from the conflict between Sarah, who participates in the demonstration through her role as mother to the demonstrators, and Harry, who pretends to be involved, but in fact is not.
The ten years between acts finds the Kahns living in a more respectable dwelling, but the dramatic focus has constricted to the immediate family—Harry, Sarah, Ronnie, Ada and Cissie (who appears briefly). Harry's first stroke occurs during this act; he remains capable of talking and moving, but he is no longer able to fight with Sarah. Ada, after a fight with Harry, leaves the apartment and does not return again in the play. Sarah and Ronnie are left, their confrontation the obvious focus of the third act.

That confrontation, however, is carefully delayed to provide time to inform the audience that the others who appeared in Act I have left the cause of socialism. The first scene is a reminiscence between Monty and Sarah, flashing pictures of Act I through the audience's mind to compare to the quiet, threateningly empty world of twenty years later. Harry's third stroke ends the scene, leaving Sarah alone to care for a helpless husband with whom she has battled for years. An attempt at an evening of cards opens the last scene. The conversation is noticeably devoid of socialist principles or plans. In contrast to the enthusiasm and activity of the first act, the short game of solo emphasizes Sarah's age, the absence of any purpose in her life and the equally important absence of socialism. The game is punctuated with gossip, not plans for socialist activities. By the time Ronnie arrives, the others have left. Everything has been stripped from Sarah: her husband is an incoherent invalid, her daughter has moved to the country and her comrades have tired of the faith that brought them together. She has only her son, and he has come to challenge her beliefs and lifestyle. The poignancy and
effectiveness of Sarah's last speeches about caring derive from the dramatic structure Wesker has chosen. The spotlight, which has gradually shrunk until it is a pinspot on Sarah, should go out; but Sarah will not let her life die. She will go on caring, through Roots (Beattie reports that Sarah encouraged her to study) to I'm Talking about Jerusalem, when she will welcome back her children.

The socialism of Sarah, such as it is, is the philosophical focus of the play just as her will to survive is the dramatic focus. Which of the two is the more predominant, however, is a moot point. If it is Sarah's survival instinct combined with her credo of caring, the play can be seen as private drama, social only in its depiction of a communist family and political only by circumstance. The previous chapter established, however, that Sarah's humanistic philosophy of caring, is very much in the mainstream of socialist thought. Her sense of responsibility for others, her willingness to share, her awareness of the importance of brotherhood, her determination to teach her children the same philosophy and her acceptance of the inevitability of the socialist millenium—all these are characteristic of a strongly committed woman. Chicken Soup with Barley presents and discusses a political philosophy, the aim of which is the exercise and administration of power. It is, then, political drama.

Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to direct a production of the play concentrating on its political elements. Sarah is anything but a human caricature of a political philosophy. The philosophy she represents is as much a consequence of her personality structure as of the ideas she has learned. Her strength lies in her determination to
care, not in her determination to care only for socialism. Her humanistic concern for others gives the play both its momentum and its universal appeal. Her perseverance in Act III, faced with Ronnie's breakdown, has the same qualities of courage and dignity as Nora in *A Doll's House*. Sarah's play is not the equal of Nora's, making any comparison impossible. Nevertheless, she has a strength and determination which enable her to rise above her political philosophy and appeal to audiences of all persuasions.

*Chicken Soup with Barley* identifies the source of dramatic tension not only for the entire Trilogy but for all of Wesker's later plays: whether a socialist should accept the humanist on his own terms or whether he must try to convert him to socialism. On a philosophical level, this means trying to resolve the incompatibility of a humanistic faith in life however it is lived and a socialist demand that life be lived in socialism. Although the two philosophies are by no means mutually exclusive, the one urges communicating and sharing for their own sake while the other urges communicating and sharing a specific political philosophy. The difference, although small, is crucial: a socialist may be a humanist, but a humanist need not be a socialist. The one philosophy leads toward a private world of relationships built on trust and love; the other leads toward a public world of commitment to political action.

In dramatic terms, the question is more pointed. The conflict in *Chicken Soup with Barley* is between Sarah's humanistic faith in living and the committed socialists who are dissatisfied with her because they sense her greater concern with living than with living
socialism. Ronnie wants both, but his doubts about socialism prevent him from achieving his goal. Events in Hungary and Spain have made him realize that socialists are not always humanists; it is impossible for him to choose between the dynamic political world of his youth and the private faith of his mother. In the remainder of the Trilogy, Ronnie continues to work out the problem within himself.

**Roots**

*Roots* dramatizes the emergence of a young girl's mind, her struggle against the intransigence and inertia of her surroundings, and the conflict between city life with its myriad styles, ideas and people, and the country life with its single lifestyle, its intellectual confinement and its small number of people. It is a play about roots—finding ideas that help an individual to grow, and about bridges—establishing links of communication to other people, which in turn enables the exchange of ideas that provide nourishment for the roots.

The first act establishes the character of Beatie and the conflict between the life of her Norfolk family and the life that Ronnie has tried to give her. It establishes the dramatic question of the play: can Beatie accept the ideas of Ronnie for herself, or will she reject them and blend back into her family background? It isolates the three elements of the play—Beatie's personality, Ronnie's ideas and the Norfolk way of life, and it prepares for the confrontation between these three elements—first Beatie and her family (Act II), then Beatie and Ronnie (Act III), resolving itself in Beatie's decision. If such preparation were not given, her final
choice would be meaningless, for it would weight the play so heavily in favor of Ronnie's philosophy that there would seem no point in writing the play at all. Only through extended treatment of the Norfolk family is a balance established which makes the significance and difficulty of Beatie's choice apparent and viable. Taylor is wrong, then, when he suggests that the "first act is virtually duplicated in the second as far as ideas are concerned."

The second act moves directly to Beatie's challenge to her parents. Her enthusiasm and vitality carry the play through the stale lives of the people around her. As Wesker writes in the stage directions, "Throughout the play there is no sign of intense living from any of the characters--Beatie's bursts are the exceptions." Her father speaks in monosyllables and refuses to show emotion even when he has been put on casual labor. Her mother, who constantly repeats stories, also shows no emotion. They are the opposite of the lifestyle that Beatie has learned from Ronnie. Beatie's determination to give her family a sense of life is finally rewarded at the end of the act; her mother (for the first time) smiles, clapping in time to the music, thus encouraging Beatie to continue.

Throughout the first two acts, Beatie has gradually moved to the focal point of her past--her family, fighting to imbue them with the same sense of vitality that Ronnie has given her, striving to renew them, using Ronnie's ideas as the bridge between what they are and what she would have them (and herself) become. When he fails to appear, the bridge collapses; the family revert to their traditional ways, leaving her alone to choose between them and Ronnie. The moment is critical: she could fall back, in tears, relying on her family to
brace her in her emotional despair, or she could stand up to both Ronnie and her family and live what she has learned. In choosing the latter, Beatie parallels Sarah: the people around her have fallen away. She is isolated, but undaunted. She determines to stand—alone, if necessary, and to care.

Roots parallels Chicken Soup with Barley in structure in that it gradually isolates the central character (and her socialism), leaving her to stand by her beliefs or succumb to the emotional pressures of the isolation. It is parallel, too, in that Beatie throughout the play reiterates a socialist philosophy, but ends the play holding only to a humanist philosophy. Ronnie has taught her about socialism, but she cannot integrate those phrases into her life. What she has learned from him is the desire to live, to express oneself and to learn about the world around her. Roots is not a political play; despite Ronnie's statements, the play dramatizes the search for faith in life and living.

This is evident in the two dominant themes of the play, communication and teaching. Ronnie's statement, "You can solve things by talking about them," is a sentiment no doubt inherited from his mother. The lack of communication between Harry and Sarah is the family background within which the characters of Chicken Soup with Barley live. In Roots, the theme is more central and more fully developed. A critical question throughout the entire play is whether Beatie will communicate her own ideas or must rely always on Ronnie's. The Bryant family does not communicate well, and Beatie at one point must serve as message-carrier. The story Frank tells in Act III is about how to improve communication between people. Ronnie's fear that
he has not communicated is what ultimately keeps him from coming to Beatie. The metaphor of the bridge symbolizes this theme. Beatie quotes Ronnie early in the play,

"Bridges! bridges! bridges! Use your bridges woman. It took thousands of years to build them, use them!" And that riled me. "Blust your bridges," I'd say. "Blust you and your bridges—I want a row." Then he'd grin at me. "You want a row?" he'd ask. "No bridges this time?" "No bridges," I'd say—and we'd row. Sometimes he hurt me but then, slowly, he'd build the bridge up for me—and then we'd make love.9

Finally, the play emphasizes the almost messianic need of Wesker and his characters to teach. Ronnie wants to teach Beatie a humanistic view of life, an ability to share things with others, a freedom of expression, a will to live. Just as Sarah doggedly insists on these precepts for her family, so Ronnie strives to pass them on to Beatie. It is because he fears he has not taught her anything that he withdraws from their relationship. Beatie in turn wants to teach her parents what she has learned, and to reform Norfolk life. Because she has not learned yet herself, however, she fails. Yet the attempt is made. The feeling emerging from Roots is less what Ronnie taught Beatie than the fact that he taught her. Ronald Hayman criticizes Wesker's writing in Roots, wishing he had "been content to write a more documentary and less didactic play..."10 The didacticism is not directed at the audience, however, but woven through the texture of the play as the humanistic desire of Ronnie to teach Beatie to become aware of her roots and to teach her how to grow stronger ones. Didacticism implies the teaching of a doctrine. Roots does not talk down to the audience because Ronnie does not teach Beatie doctrine, but rather convinces her of the need to enjoy life, something he had
learned from his mother in *Chicken Soup with Barley*. When Beatie does speak on her own, it is not socialist principles that she espouses, but a condemnation of rural attitudes. The humanistic concerns in socialism are what have been passed on, and that gives the play an upbeat ending. Ronnie did succeed as a teacher in that respect, and that, Wesker hopes, will enable the audience to feel that it can (and should) learn the same lessons as Beatie.

*I'm Talking about Jerusalem*

Of the plays of the *Trilogy*, the third is by consensus the weakest. Dave and Ada do not share Sarah's passionate fervor for life. Their antagonist--Norfolk society--is the same as Beatie's, but is less carefully drawn than in *Roots*. The socialism they preach is easy to depict, difficult to dramatize. The play's ending is unsatisfying because one wonders whether Ronnie has learned anything from their experiment except cynicism. The play is the most discursive of the three, coming alive dramatically only in moments when 'games' are played. Nevertheless, it provides a fascinating character study of two idealists seeking to establish their own sense of reality on the world around them. It illustrates something of Wesker's technique and further develops the themes of *The Trilogy*.

Despite structural weaknesses in *I'm Talking about Jerusalem*, the play is carefully written. It traces the fortunes of Dave and Ada who pit their talent and their determination against an invisible enemy, mechanized progress. It dramatizes two of the people in *Chicken Soup with Barley* who were dissatisfied with Sarah because she was more humanist than socialist. Dave and Ada seek a better balance between
the two philosophies, and attempt to resurrect the bucolic, idyllic, crafts-oriented society of socialist William Morris.

The play is neatly structured. Hope is the keynote of the first act. It includes Beethoven's Ninth Symphony as background music, a romantic Louis MacNeice poem, chicken soup brought from London and Ronnie's speech about the coming of the millenium. The act ends with the family singing together a Yiddish folk song. In Act I, Wesker is talking about Jerusalem. With Act II, the realities of the Simmonds' life which stand in opposition to their dream are introduced. A war buddy who shared Dave's hopes while they were in Ceylon, viciously attacks the pair.

Now the picture is complete. Two ex-communists! There's nothing more pathetic than the laughter of people who have lost their pet faith.

Colonel Dewhurst comes to the farm to give Dave his notice for having 'stolen' linoleum from the shop. Sammy announces that he is going to leave for the city. Despite the events of the act, however, the two are still alive, and share their desire to live with their child in the final scene. With the third act comes despair. Dave and Ada learn that the loan they needed to finance Dave's work was not approved. Their final defeat is sounded when Dave forsakes his own philosophy and utters, "God! I'm learning to hate people!!" Sarah and Ronnie help them pack to return to London. The attempt to live socialism alone, without depending on others, has failed.

The Jerusalem image, present in the play through the very action of the Simmonds to build their world according to their own ideals, derives from a poem of William Blake's, which begins,
Bring me my spear, 0 clouds unfold, bring me my chariot of fire! I will not cease from mental strife, nor shall my sword sleep in my hand, till we have built Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land.13

In none of Wesker's plays is Jerusalem realized. It may be concluded, therefore, that Wesker is not talking about Jerusalem, but about the difficulties of building it. That Sarah gathers her children together at the end of the play to take them back to London suggests that her humanistic faith has come closer to triumphing in the Trilogy than the political socialism of the others. If Jerusalem can't be built, one can only turn to one's friends to build a decent, if private, world with them. The Trilogy apparently helped Wesker decide that Jerusalem could not be built, for in the plays that follow the Trilogy he becomes less and less concerned with political activity and more interested in private happiness.

Chips with Everything

In apologizing for the failure of Chips with Everything to secure popular acclaim in the United States, Harold Ribalow comments, "The class struggle is more relevant to England than it is to Americans."14 To Hayman, the play "embodies a more serious, powerful and systematic attack on the class system than any other play I know."15 Wesker himself has supported this class system interpretation of his play.

Chips is a warning. It says to the ruling class: you can no longer kid us. We know the way it happens. And to those who are ruled: look, boys, this is the way it happens, and this is the way it will end if you don't recognize that you are very sweetly but very definitely being put in your place.16

This view reinforces the political and socialist aura surrounding
Wesker's plays, but it would do well to look more closely at the play to determine whether this is the primary thrust of the plays, or whether, like The Trilogy, other themes are equally important and give the play meaning on another level.

That the play treats of class conflict is evident in the characters of Pip and the Pilot Officer and in the Burns poem in the first act. Pip is an aristocratic snob who recites his family's history, and informs the recruits that his home was built in the time of George III and that he has always had his bed made for him. His pity and disdain for the lower classes are revealed in his story of the time he had tea in a small, rundown cafe, and the horrible reaction of hatred he had for the man who sat next to him. On top of the menu of the cafe it said, 'chips with everything,' establishing that class prejudice is the main theme of the play. Indeed, Pip's eventual conversion by the officers can only be accepted if his true loyalty to his upperclass background and preferences are credible.

The class attitudes of the Pilot Officer are similar to those of Pip. He tells Andrew that Pip's being in the ranks is nothing more than slumming, and concedes that he only slums occasionally for enjoyment. When he and the other officers try to break Pip in Act II, scene iv, he tries to win Pip's confidence by reminding Pip of their similar backgrounds. Again, he accuses Pip of slumming.

You enjoy mixing with men from another class. Why is this? Do you find them stimulating, a new experience, a novelty, do you enjoy your slumming?

During the Christmas party, Pip endeavors to strengthen the recruits against the officers. When the officers condescend to an
entertainment from the soldiers, Pip perceives their disdain and encourages a Robert Burns poem from Andrew. The message of the poem is that those who are rich can withstand the winds and fire of life, but those who are poor do not have the means to do so, so let "Christ receive thy souls." The first act ends with Andrew repeating the refrain of the poem.

Two of the main characters, the title and the ending of the first act all suggest a class-prejudice interpretation of the play. This view of the play is not fully convincing, however; structural elements in the play permit of a different interpretation. Pip is won over to the officers, but not by appeals to his class attitudes. His very personal fear of wanting to be a king causes his breakdown. Corporal Hill does not reinforce the officer-recruit distinction with comments about his class upbringing. The two other major characters in the play, Charles and Smiler, are not drawn as modern-day Doolittles, but as individuals in search of learning and understanding. Wesker may have wanted to dramatize the class conflict in Chips with Everything, but other themes give this particular drama a greater scope and appeal than the class conflict alone would permit.

Among the most evident of Wesker's themes is leadership. Throughout Wesker's plays, characters in position of leadership are presented unsympathetically. Healey and Dewhurst in The Trilogy and Marango in The Kitchen are representative of the capitalist exploiters, and are predictably characterized as antagonists in these plays. Their Very Own and Golden City is an attack on labor leadership and their lack of genuine concern for the well-being of their followers. Chips
has this same characterization of leaders, depicting the officers as bourgeois, decadent, inconsiderate and inhuman. Their dislike of the recruits borders on the contemptuous. Hill's treatment of Smiler can only be regarded as heartless. In the brilliantly satirical introduction of the officers (scene iv), they reveal their primary concerns: preparation for war, discipline, cleanliness and unreal men, not self-respect, knowledge and real human beings.

Because these men are portrayed as RAF officers, not economic scions or decadent gentry, it is easy to interpret their characterizations as an attack on people in positions of leadership more than an attack on the class attitudes of these officers. If the play took place amidst the surroundings of the aristocracy, one could focus more readily on the attitudes of these people. The theatrical setting of Chips, however, is a training camp, and the uniforms suggest a leader-follower dichotomy as well as an upperclass-lower class one. Reinforcing this leadership theme is Pip's determination to convince the recruits to do as he bids during the Christmas party, not what the officers want. After the coke stealing scene, the recruits discuss whether they could have done it without Pip's leadership. "You always need leaders," is their conclusion. Most importantly, however, is that Pip's breakdown comes not because he decides he is slumming, but because psychologically he fears that he is really fascinated with power. Andrew accuses him of seeking martyrdom, which supports the recruits' class view of Pip as someone who is giving up his easy life to suffer among the lessers. Pip is not really moved by Andrew's attack, however. The Pilot Officer, on the other hand, manipulates Pip into believing that power is Pip's goal. After being
accused of wanting to become a king, Pip succumbs and obeys the
order to bayonet the dummy. Finally, Wesker himself has stated that
Chips demonstrates the following about leadership:

1. Leadership can begin from another class—e.g., Marx, Engels.
2. That unlike Marx and Engels such leadership is often
(though not always) shortlived and one must be on guard not to
dismiss it quickly but to follow it only so far, after that
the ruled must produce their own leaders.
3. That when those leaders are produced they must be on guard
against the flattery of the rulers or else they will be
divided....
4. That in so far as Charles, one of the recruits, leads the
mutiny, the ruled are capable of producing their own leaders,
but it's not easy.20

The other themes familiar in Wesker's plays appear in Chips
with Everything, centering around Charles and Smiler. Charles' rela-
relationship to Pip is a beautifully, cautiously developed student-teacher
relationship which blossoms into other roles as a natural outgrowth of
the close contact between the two. Initially, Charles is resentful
of Pip's background, but after Pip narrates the story of his family
history, Charles is captivated. In scene viii, the conversation shifts
readily between Charles' desire to be educated, their differing class
backgrounds and Pip's sullen attitude toward Charles. Tension in
scenes between the two derives from Charles' need to be educated but
fear of Pip's disdain, and from Pip's willingness to have a follower
but fear of the responsibility that goes with it. Charles' feelings
graduate to hero worship, and still later to a mutely expressed love.
He does learn from Pip, for it is he who leads the recruits in
defiance of the officers' treatment of Smiler.

Smiler comes quickly to the attention of all the officers
because they think he is laughing at them. His smiling, his simple
manner and his warm demeanor all build him as a terribly sympathetic
human being, unable to understand any hatred in the world, let alone that which is directed against him. He is, like Peter in *The Kitchen*, one human being against an inhuman system. Hill's arbitrary decision to destroy Smiler through constant punishment epitomizes the inhumanity of the system. To save his sanity, Smiler runs away, an effective counterpoint to Pip who succumbs to the system.

The nature of class bias, the motives of leaders, the student-teacher relationship, and the story of Smiler all illustrate the efforts of individuals to humanize an inhuman system and to retain their dignity and freedom as individuals even if they cannot succeed in overcoming the system. The play has moments of effectiveness: the brilliant satire in the speeches of the officers, the dramatically effective coke-stealing scene, the warmth of feeling generated at the end of the first act, Smiler's speech while he is running away and Charles decision to lead a sitdown against the officers. Not one of Wesker's best plays, *Chips with Everything* illustrates, nevertheless, his continuing probe into the systems and motivations which inhibit man's search for a life of dignity, freedom and brotherhood.

Their Very Own and Golden City

Of Wesker's next play (written before but performed after *The Four Seasons*), J. W. Lambert demanded, Wesker "must either recreate the idea with poetic force or explain it in detail. He does neither." The massive scope of the play, (twenty-nine scenes extending over a sixty year period), its structure (a flash-forward) and its theme (a sweeping condemnation of most everyone in the play), all combine to make this Wesker's most energetic and experimental
play. Structurally, Their Very Own and Golden City is as expansive and encompassing as the city its characters want to build. The flash-forward, which concentrates most of the action in the future, emphasizes the dream quality of the whole scheme and the hope and expectations of the characters. The entire technical form of the play is ambitious, with back projections, rapid shifts in set and locale and tremendously difficult adjustments for the actors. The stage directions are written with the same fervor that Wesker has given his characters, calling for magic, discovery, purpose, bustle, growth and decay. Wesker has created a theatrical vision which embodies his dramatic idea.

Andrew is probably Wesker's most developed male character to date. He is Peter and Paul (from The Kitchen) combined—sensitive, idealistic, gregarious, warm and energetic like Peter and mature, aware, respected and mindful of the system like Paul. He is more fully realized than Adam in The Four Seasons because the characters around him are more challenging, particularly Jessie, the wife who almost resigns herself to the role of housekeeper, and Kate, the aristocrat whose vision of Andrew matches his own vision of his city. The play's antagonists—the union leaders—are also more carefully developed than in any other play save Chips with Everything. They are not caricatures but full representations of the political and philosophic attitudes against which Andrew is battling. In short, Wesker has realized his main character and the people and beliefs which block him.

Thematically, Wesker's sixth play treats the loss of ideals through compromise, represented both by the union leaders and Andrew.
Wesker has prefaced the play with a William Morris quote, cited earlier, predicting the sell-out of unions to capitalism. Matheson is the truth of the prediction, acknowledging his belief in profits and his opposition to any scheme which smacks of utopianism (and by extension, idealism). Cambridge is equally insidious, opposed to the original ideals of labor by his defense of compromise and his willingness to accept the political realities of the trade unions. Tough, coarse, but not unsympathetic, he has fought in labor circles for many years, and knows how to deal with men like Andrew. Together with Worthington, Cambridge and Matheson represent men who have become more committed to the union than to the ideals which initially brought about the formation of the union. Because the union is an accepted part of the country's economic and political system, they have by extension come to accept it as well. Andrew's opposition to the union leaders stems not only from what they attempt to do to his ideals, but what they have done to their own.

Golden City traces the rising fortunes of the golden city, but more importantly traces the efforts of Andrew to withstand the imposition of the system on his plans. He is accepted into architecture despite his boss's low opinion of him, overcomes the doubts of his friends, involves himself in the political system which takes away from his work, and then fights city officials for his land, the unions for their financial support and the economic leaders for his city's industry. The compromises he makes along the way are gradual, yet certain. They wear down his enthusiasm, idealism and plans. Worse, they destroy him as a human being, for he cynically concludes, "We really don't like people, do we? We just like the idea of
ourselves liking people.²² Like Dave in I'm Talking about Jerusalem, Andy's compromises have taken away the warmth and character he had as a youth.

Three themes identified in other of Wesker's plays are found in Golden City: leadership, Jerusalem, and teaching. In his battles against labor, the bureaucracy and the aristocracy, Andy has learned the necessity for leadership, but also the inevitable disappointment with men in such positions. He desires to be free of leaders almost as if this would eliminate evil in the world and thus enable the ideas and enthusiasm of people to come to fruition. This anarchic streak is glaringly revealed when his idealism has turned to bitter cynicism.

Do you know what depresses me? Men need leaders, that's what depresses me. They'll wait another twenty years and then another leader will come along and they'll build another city. . . . I don't suppose there's such a thing as democracy, really, only a democratic way of manipulating power.²³

Wesker's goal of a golden city society fashioned on socialist principles of brotherhood and responsible participation is another dramatic expression of the Jerusalem theme. One of the best moments in the play is Andy's recitation of the origin of the Jerusalem motif, Blake's opening lyric to "Introductory to Milton." The moment is an imaginative statement of the theme, for it at once captures the youth, vigor and playfulness of the characters, and contrasts that with the age and cynicism of the labor leaders.

Teaching is a third motif prominent in Golden City, revealed in the need of the main character to teach an essentially humanist credo ("love yourself and love the world"²⁴). In addition, Andy asks
Jake to teach him, and he learns from Jake the importance of holding to one's principles against compromise. Andy's lecture on the origins of the labour movement in England is illustrative of both Andy's and Wesker's need to teach. Andy's entire being is an expression of his desire to be a teacher—to share ideas, to make men's minds soar like cathedrals, to build Jerusalems in each person, to listen to others, to respond to the realities of each situation and to question his own beliefs.

Included in the play are the two familiar techniques, games and dreams, which are more apt for this group of characters than any of Wesker's others. The 'magic' and 'discovery' Wesker wants in the cathedral are captured in the games the friends play: Andy stands on his head, gives a lecture from a tomb, and helps form a human chariot to end the play. The entire play is a daydream look at the future, and Wesker includes references to dreams, dreaming, visions, lunacy and battles with the gods to heighten the idealism of the characters and their scheme. Dreams also hold the answer to the question raised early in the play, what happens to hold a movement together?

We know what holds men in a movement through all time— their visions. Visions, visions, visions! What else? To fight for a penny more an hour for standing at the lathe, our energies for only this?

Their Very Own and Golden City is obviously a political play, characterizing as it does the three major elements of British politics, labor, management and the bureaucracy. It is a discussion of public policy and effort to exert influence and pressure in order to effectuate that policy. It meets the requirements of the definition of
political drama, including commentary on political leadership, their motives and their tactics. Yet, the play does not rest easily in this prescriptive niche. The idealism of the youths breaks any boundaries which criticism might place on the play and infects the entire play with the magic, discovery and gaiety of the cathedral scene. Golden City is a political play in which the issues neither bore nor retard, but enhance the dramatic structure and provide the reason for the vitality and humanity of the characters. Although he comes close to this in other plays, particularly The Kitchen and Chicken Soup with Barley, it is with Their Very Own and Golden City that Wesker most fully succeeds in blending his love of socialism, teaching, theatre and humanism into an integrated, effective theatre piece.

The Four Seasons

None of Wesker's plays has been more poorly received than The Four Seasons. "Oh, what a gruesome tiresome twosome," gasped the Guardian. Even less kind was the Daily Mirror, which called the play "... a ham-fisted cliche-ridden pretentious piece of nothing. . . ." Both Hayman and Ribalow are more critical of the writing in this than in all other Wesker plays. The playwright himself attributes much of the response to the critics' refusal to accept a non-political play from him and to their lack of understanding of the meaning of the play.

Even for the most intelligent and sane critic, it still is a shock to go expecting one kind of play and to receive another. Four Seasons, with its heightened dialogue, is just too strange for ears that we have trained to accept the colloquial dialogue and ordinary rhythms of speech.
This section will determine the place *The Four Seasons* has within the context of Wesker's other plays and seek to balance the critics' reviews with Wesker's defense.

*The Four Seasons* is not Wesker's most politically didactic play, but it is his most humanistically didactic play. It focuses on the same kind of relationship that Beatie and Ronnie have in *Roots*, but shows the full progression and consequences of such a relationship if Beatie and Ronnie had remained together. Adam needs to teach humanism, to awaken someone to the joys of life. "I have a desperate need to give joy, to create laughter again, to heal someone."[^29] He insists on teaching Beatrice to sing, even though she can't. He makes her believe, come alive, communicate. He shares with her his talents as a cook, teaching her to make apple strudel. Beatie recognizes the role, for she quotes to him, "Despise not the teacher for from him comes a love the most unselfish of all."[^30] Yet, the teaching fails. In each of Wesker's plays, the teacher backs off, having lost confidence in his pupils. Peter loses control of himself and attacks the ovens, frustrated with his inability to communicate and to dream. Ronnie fails Beatie, fearful that he has not succeeded in teaching her. Dave's efforts with Sammy falter when the latter decides to live in the city. Pip joins the officers, in part because he thinks he cannot convey anything to the recruits as one of them. And Andrew miserably fails to carry through his teaching role with Jessie. Adam is no different, concluding bitterly,

> The only thing is, when I give you my love you don't return it, and that's the hell of it. Only a human being can return that and the price you pay is the advantage they take.[^31]
When Beatrice pleads for help in response to his cynicism, he replies weakly, "I cannot." Wesker's teachers are impatient. They want their students to catch the fascination with life instantly and return it to the teacher, thereby reinforcing him. Ironically, with the exception of Beatrice, the students have learned, but the teacher leaves them, either because he is afraid to see a relationship to the end (as Dave says of Ronnie) or because he succumbs to the system (Dave, Pip and Andrew). Wesker's plays are often puzzling in performance; audiences wondering whether the play is optimistic or cynical. The bewilderment stems from this teacher-student relationship, the teacher always faltering, cynically rejecting his principles or his way of life, while the student offers hope because he has learned from the teacher. Beatrice has awakened and grown under the care of Adam, but when she turns on him at the end of the apple strudel scene, he immediately crumbles and both teacher and student have lost what they sought together.

The language of the play has bothered most critics, but satisfied Wesker. At times it is simply flat and unimaginative.

BEATRICE. I warned you. I asked you to come away from this place didn't I?

ADAM. That's the reason is it?

BEATRICE. I warned you. You were not big enough.

ADAM. That's the reason.

BEATRICE. Now go home.

In contrast to sections such as this, poetic moments in the play seem inflated. Wesker is certainly correct that "it depends on how you
read the poetic lines. The line, "I have a golden eagle for a lover," can be both simple and beautiful. However, it can also seem self-conscious when other sections of the dialogue do not soar with it. Nevertheless, the language does provide effective stage moments. Adam's long speech in Summer discussing his marriage, Beatrice's speech explaining her marriage, the exchange between the two at the end of Autumn—-are captivating dialogue, use poetic images with facility, and expose the inner souls of the characters.

The language of The Four Seasons sustains the play, therefore, in spite of soft moments. The play's structure, however, is less able to withstand criticism. The metaphor of the four seasons is obvious, yet Wesker needlessly draws attention to it.

Spring comes and it's time to repair the damages of winter. At the end of spring comes another reminder of the seasons.

Make yourself golden clothes for the sun. Splendid golden clothes, before the summer comes.

Winter is cold and barren, and so it is in the play. There is no dialogue, and little action. Predictably with Spring comes Beatrice's budding. She reveals the reasons for her marital failure, and begins to respond to Adam's efforts to give her new life. Except for the apple strudel scene, Summer is also stiffly plotted. The fortunes of the relationship pass the summer solstice of trust and sharing, and inch toward autumn, assuring the tragic return of winter. With Autumn comes death, and the relationship between Adam and Beatrice is no exception to nature's way.

The Four Seasons moves Wesker finally, and sharply, away from any consideration of politics, political issues or political
implications. It is neither political nor politically socialist, but neither is it a break from Wesker's earlier work. It is because the other plays have been incorrectly interpreted as political tracts rather than socialist drama that *The Four Seasons* has been considered a marked shift for Wesker. In fact, it is a logical progression for Wesker, thematically and structurally.

**The Friends**

*The Friends*, the most recent and as yet unpublished of Wesker's plays, continues to move him away from a drama of political commitment toward a drama of humanist concern. The play revolves around Esther, who has been political and spiritual leader of a group of friends. While alive, she dominates the others by her presence. After her death, her body remains onstage, the other friends still looking to her in some mysterious way for guidance and direction. The other friends, who together own a series of interior design shops that are in economic trouble, are each hiding some private secret from the others. Roland, Esther's lover, is ashamed of his inherited wealth, and burns money to attempt to show its insignificance. Seeking refuge in aestheticism and yoga, he cuts himself with a razor blade and rubs salt in the wounds in an effort to feel real pain. Crispin, who needs to touch and to be soothed, sleeps with old women who come into the shop. Simone loves Crispin but cannot tell him directly because she fears for tomorrow's reproach. Macey, the manager of one of their stores, confesses that he does not love his wife. Tessa hates Simone because she has an aristocratic background. After each have symbolically cut their backs and rubbed in salt as Roland
literally does, they have at least bridged one of their main difficulties: lack of personal communication. Their fear of death is reduced because their fear of life has been reduced. Roland hugs the body of Esther. Simone lifts one of Esther's arms and waves it at the others, then pulls Roland's face down to Esther's neck to kiss it. Roland places Esther's body in a chair facing a portrait of Lenin. Each kiss her cheek, then return to their household chores, happy that they can accept the fact of death in their group.

Certainly the most unusual ending Wesker has written, the macabre scene is an outgrowth of the efforts by all the characters to establish order in or give purpose to their lives. Reading from a book, Manfred identifies the perception of the world the characters have: "We are moving into phases of creative disorder; everywhere the lines are blurred." Later he quotes extensively from the same book on scientific discoveries. There have been seventeen 'revolutions,' epoch-making events that changed the course of the world, few of which are known to anyone because they were abstruse and technical. The speech renders meaningless the term 'revolution.' More importantly, however, it highlights the rapidity of change in the world and man's inability to understand it or do anything about it. The consequence of these revolutions was to transform the behavior of the world "from an exact and predictable pattern into a blur of probabilities."

The lives of the characters reflect this uncertainty, loss of purpose and lack of order. The room is filled with furniture and memorabilia from different periods in history. Roland tries to prove that he can suffer pain, because that would give him a genuine emotion. The friends do not care about their waning business interests. They were,
at one time, obviously involved in the socialist movement in some way, but their revolutionary fervor has dissipated, and with it their revolutionary ideology. At the end of the play, Simone condemns the others for their lack of order, loss of purpose and inability to understand their revolutionary rhetoric. Out of her speeches (and Macey's) the characters are given a new sense of life.

A second predominant theme in The Friends is communication. The play is rich in images of non-communication, isolation and solitude. Esther and Manfred open the play talking on their own levels, each greeted with Chekhovian silence from the others in the room. None of the friends will admit to Esther that she is dying. Macey tries to give the friends a lecture on the value and beauty of words, but the others are unresponsive. Crispin uses his North English dialect because he cannot communicate what he feels in his daily speech. Simone is silent throughout most of the play, unable to tell Crispin (except in writing) of her love for him. When she does speak, Crispin accuses her of misusing words. When Macey, Simone and Crispin open up their secret lives to Roland, he does not respond, until he fears he has lost the ability to speak. When Simone tells the group what is wrong with them, she does so in a whisper, heard only by Macey. As in his earlier plays, Wesker is dramatizing his belief that those who cannot communicate to other people are not alive.

Trapped by the illogic of their revolutionary beliefs, the friends are not worthy of the label socialist, for they are self-serving and self-pitying. To this extent only the play is socialist. Wesker insists that communication is an innate element of socialist brotherhood. The friends are socialists, but there is little else in
the play to suggest politics. Even the effective condemnation of
their politics by Simone and Macey in the last scene is "not the half
of it."\textsuperscript{40} Manfred identifies the real problem of the group: "little
damages we've done to each other and a terrible sense of defeat and
time passing and appetites fading and intellect fading."\textsuperscript{41} The
Friends is not a political play, but an expression of the private pain
of former political activists. It is Wesker's most withdrawn and
enclosed drama. The friends come to terms with time passing (Esther's
death), but the little damages are still there. The group does not
speak, Macey leaves, the friends are left alone. Like The Four Sea-
sons, the play is not about a search for faith in socialism, but a
search for faith in living.

Conclusion

The use of the term 'political drama' is not for purposes of
categorization or classification. Rather, the intention is twofold:
to enable the identification of political elements in a play and
illustrate their relative importance to other elements, and to
demonstrate the need to qualify the use of the term 'political' in
criticism in order that a playwright's true intentions are not lost in
a welter of polemics and external criticism of his political philo-
sophy. In the case of Arnold Wesker, both these points are central to
an appreciation of his form and content. To label Wesker a socialist
playwright without identifying his socialist philosophy is to risk
missing the strongly humanist strain in that philosophy. To label
him a political playwright is to overlook the greater role that that
humanism plays in his dramas. That there are political ideas and
actions dramatized in his plays cannot be denied. The foregoing analysis, however, suggests that these ideas and actions are always expressed within a wider context, the need "to care—or you'll die."42

Thematically, the predominant ideas of all his plays are clustered around this need to hold, communicate, share and live some kind of faith in life. Teaching, dreams, roots, Jerusalem, communication (bridges) and leadership—lying behind each of these is Wesker's belief in the dignity of the individual, freedom of expression and action, and brotherhood; certainly these are socialist ideals, but they are also ideals embraced by other political philosophies. His dramatic devices, games and dances, support and express the joie de vivre which Wesker's characters seek for themselves and others. Only in The Friends, which is concerned with death rather than life, are there no games or dances. It is therefore quite inadequate to treat Wesker as a political writer; to do so is to misinterpret the motivations of the characters, to misread the true strength and vitality of the characters' beliefs, and 'to misjudge the message in Wesker's plays, a message more encompassing than a belief in British socialism. To the extent Wesker has not been produced in the United States because his plays are too socialist or too polemical, they deserve renewed consideration. Wesker's themes point to a topicality that is certainly universal, not just British or socialist.

Wesker's plays are very personal expressions of himself. After reading them, one has a stronger image of Wesker than of many of his characters. That image is of a passionate, concerned, buoyant, articulate and introspective teacher. From his plays, one feels that Wesker is in love more with the process of teaching than with its
subject matter. Equally as important as the ideas to Wesker's characters is the exchange of ideas—the process of sharing, communicating, building bridges to other people, growing roots into the intellectual and cultural past and present. Peter, Sarah, Ronnie, Dave, Adam, Beatie and Andrew all want to teach the people around them to reach for the sky, to stretch out their potential as far as it will go, to 'soar like a cathedral.'

Wesker also infuses his plays with what is evidently a source of great tension in his own life: the tension between the humanist's desire to let others live as they wish as long as they live in the full sense of that word and the socialist's urge to convert others to his way of life. If he were certain that socialists could and do live up to their philosophy the conflict would not be great. Because he is acutely aware of the shortcomings of both socialism and socialists, however, the tendency to opt for humanism is greater. That tendency has increased with each play. Taken together, Wesker's plays point him in the direction of less political discussion and more concern with the private pain of his characters. His dramatic world is shrinking, from the activity of The Kitchen to the quiet of Esther's room, and his focus is increasingly on the pains of individuals rather than their plans for society. The Kitchen and Chicken Soup with Barley are two of his three most political plays: they are his first two dramas. The Four Seasons and The Friends, his last plays, are his least political. Socialism never completely disappears from his plays, nor is it likely to do so since Wesker writes from personal experience. For the time being, however, it is certain that it is more important to Wesker that a person (or character) find himself and explore the
world around him than to work for the socialist millenium. It must be hoped that the socialism will not disappear, however, for then the tension which gives the early plays their momentum and effectiveness would be lost. His two most recent plays suffer primarily because the balance between the humanist concern and the socialist philosophy is weighted heavily in favor of the former. When they are evenly balanced, however, as in The Kitchen, Chicken Soup with Barley, Roots and Their Very Own and Golden City, the result is intriguing and exciting.
CHAPTER IV: FOOTNOTES


4 Ibid., I. 123; ibid., p. I. 124.

5 Wesker, The Kitchen (Cape edition), I. 60.


8 Arnold Wesker, Chicken Soup with Barley, ibid., II. I. 45.

9 Wesker, Roots, op. cit., I. 90.


12 Ibid., III. i. 205.


14 Ribalow, op. cit., p. 74.

15 Hayman, op. cit., p. 52.


Arnold Wesker, "Arnold Wesker's reply to Jeremy Hawthorne's article in Mainstream, October, 1965" (mimeographed article provided by author), p. 3.


Wesker, Their Very Own and Golden City, op. cit., I. vi. 90.

Ibid., II. vi. 88-89.

Ibid., I. iii. 21.

Ibid., II. v. 63.


Wesker, "His Very Own and Golden City: Interview," op. cit., p. 201.


Ibid., II. i. 40.

Ibid., II. ii. 55.

Hayman, op. cit., p. 81.

Wesker, The Four Seasons, op. cit., II. i. 30.

Ibid., I. ii. 11.

Ibid., I. ii. 23.


Ibid., I. iii. 28.

Ibid., II. iv. 16.

Ibid., II. iv. 17.

Wesker, Chicken Soup with Barley, op. cit., III, ii. 75.
"John Arden is above all a public playwright. He doesn't write of private obsessions or personal problems. His plays are much more about relationships between groups than relationships between individuals." That John Arden must occupy a central position in any discussion of politics in modern British drama would be readily conceded by any critic. Ronald Hayman, who has written the only text devoted exclusively to the playwright, begins his analysis with the above remark. John Russell Taylor also perceives a political orientation in Arden's plays.

For behind Arden's work there seems to be brooding one basic principle: not exactly the obvious one that today there are no causes. . . but that there are too many. 1

In an interview for the Tulane Drama Review, Walter Wager asked Arden, 'You don't consider yourself a political playwright or a sociological playwright, do you?' The response was revealing:

As a matter of fact, I do. I don't think that it's possible not to be a political or sociological playwright. . . . Therefore any play which deals with people in a society is a political play. 2

If Arden's credentials as a political playwright are unquestioned, the nature of his politics is very much in doubt. So great is the confusion surrounding the meaning of his plays, in fact, that one critic has concluded in disgust, 'Either an author must show a point of view or he must show that no point of view is worth having. Arden
does neither, and as a result his plays are theatrically boring and intellectually inept. Even his sympathetic admirers are occasionally baffled, as Taylor's comment on The Waters of Babylon illustrates.

... it is in many ways the most teasing and apparently perverse of all his plays in what it says (or appears to be saying), even apart from the eccentricity of its form and style. 

Taylor's statement suggests that it is difficult not only to discern the message of Arden's plays, but that the form of his plays is equally elusive. Charles Marowitz expresses this sentiment.

The curse of John Arden is that he simply won't play ball. After creating a picture of Welfare State slovenliness in the farcical Live Like Pigs, he switched gears and gave us the spare and chilling Serjeant Musgrave's Dance. Then, all set for more thought-provoking austerity, he trots out The Happy Haven, a Commedia dell'Arte zanni on old age.

When the critics do conclude that they have pegged Arden's style, they stand in disagreement with one another. Laurence Kitchen believes Arden to be an epic dramatist, G. W. Brandt concludes that Arden's plays are parables, Ronald Hayman prefers to see the plays as ballads, while Richard Gilman insists that the plays reside in a Freudian world of conflict between the id and the ego. Chapters V and VI attempt to eliminate some of the confusion surrounding both the form and content of John Arden's plays.

The thesis of this chapter is that Arden views the socio-political system as the antagonist of his political plays. If critics are confused because Arden does not seem to make up his mind whether he sides with Armstrong or Lindsay, or whether he agrees with the actions of his heroes—Musgrave, Butterthwaite, Krank, and Lord Nelson, the reason is that Arden's plays are not about individuals against each other, but about individuals in conflict with the political system
Taylor is correct when he says that Arden is "less influenced by moral preconceptions than any other writer in the British theatre today," if by that he means that Arden does not pass moral judgment on his characters. However, Arden does indeed have moral perceptions about the political-social systems in which his characters live. As soon as the System is recognized as a main character in the action, it is apparent that Arden does make decisions both about his characters and the System. In each of his political plays, the System defeats the individual.

Jan Kott has written that Shakespeare saw history as the Grand Mechanism. "History unfolds on the stage, but is never merely enacted. It is not a background or setting. It is itself the protagonist of tragedy." Underlying the plays is "the conviction that history has no meaning and stands still, or constantly repeats its cruel cycle; that it is an elemental force, like hail, storm, or hurricane, birth and death..."

This same can be said of Arden's representation of the political system (and by system is meant not only the structure and institutions of government, but the various philosophies justifying them.) It is the cruelty of the System, for example, that hangs Armstrong through treachery, and then, almost as if to demean the purpose for which he was killed, comments,

Will ye look at what the man was wearen? Gif we were to set ane crown upon the carl, he wad be nae less splendid than ourself. (A carl is a person of the lower classes.)

It is the indifference of the political system that dances around Musgrave, physically mocking his ideals, dramatizing the triumph of the System. It is the slow-moving, always victorious System that defeats
Krankiewicz in The Waters of Babylon because he could not hide his individual identity. It is, then, the political System as participant in the lives of men that Arden creates and describes, and this is the focus of his political plays.

Kott insists that the Grand Mechanism is the protagonist of Shakespeare's history plays because it is both the center of attention and the precipitator of the action. Obviously he is speaking metaphorically, for in traditional structural terms Richard III is both the center of attention and the one who moves the action forward in his play. Because of possible confusion in terminology, therefore, this study will accept the traditional use of the term protagonist as "a person whom we can understand and who arouses our sympathy and admiration" and who carries the action forward structurally rather than metaphorically. This is not to suggest, however, that the System is any less important in Arden's plays than the Grand Mechanism is in Shakespeare's histories. Whether the label protagonist or antagonist is utilized does not alter the balanced relationship between the main character and the System. If anything, the System is the stronger because it is the antagonist for its strength lies in its response to action rather than its initiation of action.

Arden's System is malevolent by its disregard, awesome by its indifference, mocking in its self-confidence, Kafkaesque in its extensiveness. The System's objective is to maintain the status quo and it thwarts the actions of any individual whose deeds would challenge that objective. Always present, it lies dormant until attacked, then like a dragon in a fairy tale it attacks mercilessly; unlike the dragon, however, it never loses. It eliminates the
intruder whose actions threaten to upset the status quo.

Each of Arden's main characters battle the System, not because they are opposed to it or desire its overthrow, but because it does not permit them the freedom to do as they wish. Each wishes to extend his own range of free action, yet hold the System intact. Each wishes the benefits of the System, but none of its disadvantages. On a more philosophical plane, each (except Musgrave) wishes to assert his individuality by striking out against the System, but not overthrowing it.

Within this dramatic framework, Arden develops two themes in his plays: left-handed liberty and the business of good government. Left-handed liberty is the recognition of the slender thread by which freedom hangs, and it is the dramatic enactment of how easily those liberties are misunderstood or misused after they have been granted. Thematically, the question of the nature and consequences of liberty are closely related to the dramatic conflict in the plays between the individual and the System, for the question of liberty defines philosophically the boundaries of the conflict. Each character is trapped while attempting to secure liberties for himself while refusing to extend them to those in the System who will use them to defeat him.

A second predominant theme emerging from the opposition of the individual and the System is the business of good government. To the System good government is maintaining the status quo and enforcing all laws impartially. It is pursuing those policies which promote peace and security which, not coincidentally, sustain the System in power. Arden questions, however, whether such 'business' is in fact in the best interests of the individuals in the System. In each play, he considers whether good government should eliminate (kill or evict)
the rebel or outsider, or adjust to him.

Arden does not offer an answer to this or any other political question raised in his play. He tells us only that the System is the final victor, whether we agree with its policies or not. A different character arises in each play to challenge the authority and power of the System, and thereby raise a number of political questions. The System, each time, is preserved, but the questions remain to be pondered.

**Serjeant Musgrave's Dance**

Confusion and uncertainty are often the result of reading or viewing Arden's best known work, *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*. Audiences are unable to locate exactly the setting, to empathize readily with any of the characters, to determine neatly whether Musgrave is a pacifist or to understand clearly whether Arden approves of Musgrave's actions. It is difficult to relate to a major character who wants to prevent war by killing twenty-five innocent people. Nor can one's sympathies rest with the townspeople, half of whom aren't named, because they have no fully-developed characterizations. To resolve the ambiguity, it is best to accept Arden on his own terms and attempt neither to make a hero of Musgrave nor to conclude that the play is a story of a pacifist gone wrong (which would lead to all sorts of philosophical conclusions).

Instead, the play can be interpreted as the depiction of an individual striking against the System for what it has made him do for eighteen years, determined to prevent it from treating others the same way. Musgrave is the protagonist in this drama, the intruder who is
upsetting the balance of the townspeople and threatening the status quo. The System is the antagonist, attempting to preserve its own peace, struggling to end the strike so that business can return to normal, offset in its efforts by the intrusion of Musgrave. Believing that God is on his side, Musgrave is not satisfied with just this town. Arguing with Hurst about how best to carry out their scheme, Musgrave shows who he wants to get.

... you think you can make a whole town, a whole nation, understand the cruelty and greed of armies, what it means, and how to punish it.¹³ Later, his interest in defeating the entire System becomes evident.

The winter's giving us one day, two days, three days even--that's clear safe for us to hold our time, take count of the corruption, then stand before this people with our white shining word, and let it dance!¹⁴

When he threatens to kill the townspeople as part of his Logic, his first targets are the System—the Mayor, Parson and Constable, not the colliers. Musgrave is certain in his purpose: to attack the entire System. He instructs his followers, "... we'll watch and take count, till we know the depth of the corruption. ... We're each one guilty of particular blood. We've come to this town to work that guilt back to where it began."¹⁵

Musgrave intends to defeat the System by applying its own Logic against it. Musgrave has always accepted and obeyed that Logic, which is based on duty. For eighteen years he has obeyed the System, followed its orders, fought in the colonial wars and killed. Even when he arrives in town, he takes orders from the System, doing as he is instructed by the Constable. Musgrave's initial error is in assuming that the System must have some Logic, and that that Logic can
explain war and killing. He has come to the town to apply the System's Logic to itself. He is defeated because he cannot defeat the System on its own ground. In the army, he had been taught his Duty—to obey orders. When Sparky is killed, Musgrave believes the death to be irrelevant because Sparky was planning to escape. He fails too to realize that Sparky's death is a break in his pacifist intentions because he is using the Logic of the System, which is that death (war) is necessary to achieve a political goal (conquest).

Arden is sympathetic to Musgrave to the extent that he is interested in the effort of an individual to defeat the System, but he concludes that the System cannot be defeated by its own Logic. When an individual attempts to do so the System will only mock him and dance round him as the townspeople dance round the scaffold after Musgrave is led away.

The Bargee is not merely a Brechtian theatrical device imposed between the audience and the action. He is a central character who executes the System's response to Musgrave by controlling the various forces in the town and working them around for the final defeat of Musgrave. Charon-like, he brings the soldiers across the river to their doom, then suggests to the town leaders that they use the soldiers to recruit some of the strikers (and thereby help to end the strike). He encourages the strikers to join the army when Musgrave refuses to let them enlist. He tells Walsh about the Gatling gun, then tells the Constable that Walsh is going to get the Gatling gun. He observes Musgrave putting the body of Sparky aside, thwarting any efforts at secrecy. He watches Musgrave praying to God and mocks him cruelly for his appeals to an authority higher than that of the System.
Finally, the Bargee is the character who encourages and assists Musgrave in his confrontation with the town, then turns on him and puts the gun to his head when the arrival of the Dragoons is announced. The Bargee is a kind of Jester for the System, leading Musgrave carefully on, observing his weaknesses, grotesquely laughing at his futile attempts to challenge the entire System. He is not simply a theatrical device but is a visual representation of the System, grotesque, misshapen, live and self-serving. He is dancing around the soldiers from the time of their arrival in the town, foreshadowing the dance of the townspeople after Musgrave has been led away. The Bargee is Arden's physical representation of the actions and attitudes of the System.

While the townspeople are not as central to the action as the Bargee, each represents an element of the System. The town officials and the colliers are all unnamed—Arden's System is impersonal, a series of social roles to be played without feeling or concern. Every town and System must have its officials, but the people who hold those positions are unimportant. They are but insignificant elements of the System, which could as easily put other bodies into the roles. Every town, too, has its tavern owner and girl-with-a-soldier-lost-in-war. Mrs. Hitchcock and Annie are individualized, however, because they respond humanly to their situation. While Musgrave and his soldiers, the Bargee and the town officials do not elicit much empathy, both the women do. Mrs. Hitchcock, in her earthy fashion, recognizes the mistake Musgrave made—he imposed his own anarchy on the town, failing to realize that in spite of its corruption, it did contain life and love (in the person of Annie). Annie's pain in seeing the
bones of her lost love cuts immediately through the Logic of Musgrave and forces an awareness of its inadequacy. Finally, Walsh stands apart from the other colliers because of his greater intelligence and his unwillingness to be convinced by Musgrave's actions.

Serjeant Musgrave's Dance is not a play inquiring after the difficulties or consequences of maintaining a pacifist philosophy. It is a play almost of classical structure, portraying an individual struggling to follow his own conscience against overpowering odds. He seeks to be greater than other individuals (he takes upon himself the task of challenging the entire social-political System of the country with, he believes, the authority of God.) Arden's main character, however, is not attempting to defeat the gods, but rather to defeat a creation of men, viz., the system of government by which men live and the morality by which this system functions. The play remains, therefore, a thoroughly political drama, not for its discussion of pacifism but for its vision of the impossibility of defeating the impersonal, confident, encompassing System which men, not man, have created. It is a theme Arden continues in later plays.

Left-Handed Liberty

Written for the 750th anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta, Left-Handed Liberty illustrates Arden's continued interest in the individual vs. System and also introduces the theme of liberty, although he is somewhat restricted in developing both by the confines of historical reproduction. Arden focuses on the events that followed the signing of the Charter rather than the events preliminary to it. Although specifically commissioned for the anniversary celebration,
the play is noteworthy for its characterization of John, the conflict between John and the Barons within the context of the religious system and the consequent questions raised about the effect and force of law and liberty.

In contrast to the evil and ruthless John portrayed by Hollywood in movies about Robin Hood and Richard the Lion-hearted, Arden's King John is witty, sensitive, astute, loving and occasionally wise. Often outflanked by his Barons (and the French) in military matters, he is unmatched as a politician. His goal is to secure the realm under his command, and the political intrigues he undertakes to that end nearly succeed in spite of his military shortcomings. John's battle is twofold: against his Barons in the political and military realm and against the System in the religious realm. His battle with the Barons takes place within the context of the religious order of the time, and John ultimately challenges that because his feuding with the Barons threatens the security of that religious order. John seeks personal prestige and power rather than philosophical victory. However, he also seeks to control the System for his own purposes; in so doing, he challenges the entire System.

The array of forces opposed to John are nearly the antithesis of his own character. Superior in military power, the Barons (with the occasional, hesitant support of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Mayor of London) are only astute enough to recognize the potential duplicity of John; they are never witty, loving or wise. They too have set as their goal the control of the System for their own ends. Through their military strength they exact certain liberties from John (the Charter), but they are unable to comprehend that these
liberties were granted to their enemies as well as themselves. They fail to realize that the Charter has added to the strength of the System, not just to their power or to John's.

The religious System in Left-Handed Liberty is represented by Pandulph, who explains to the audience the structured view of the world as dictated by the Church. "The Church is central to human life, as the world itself is central to the organization of the universe." Pandulph, however, is interested in nothing but the "Supremacy of the Church in spiritual matters," yet it is a supremacy which neither the Barons nor John may question. While the spiritual realm may seem of little interest to John, Pandulph concludes Act I with a speech that illustrates the involvement of the religious System in what he does and its determination to maintain its own security.

Storm breaks in among the perfect circles,
Every day a puff of wind or a rumble of thunder
Declares some vain attempt to declare—what?
Very busy very busy very busy!
Whatever it is, it will be vain,
It will be some broken blunder:
But we who preserve the circles
Preserve their unfaulted music,
And we who are privileged to hear it
Can do no more than wonder
When presumptuous persons, particularly Bishops,
Believe that they with their own false notes can steer it
Into a new tune.
Why, they do not think that God speaks through their Charter?

The System is as much a part of Left-Handed Liberty as either John or his Barons. While the latter are attempting to obtain power, the System is itself acting to insure that neither John nor his Barons overtake the System, but only overtake their opponents. The System is indifferent to the political machinations of the King as long as
he is loyal to it (his loyalty proven by his willingness to embark on the Crusades.) It is insensitive to the approaching death of John, pausing only to comment, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."^9 When the play ends, John is dead and his Barons are soon to be defeated. Only the System remains, victorious and intact.

As in Serjeant Musgrave's Dance, the System succeeds because the individuals in opposition to it try to use it for their own purposes while accepting its shelter when they themselves are attacked. Left-handed liberties are those which the right hand takes, but in the taking are guaranteed to the left hand as well. An individual fights for rights he believes necessary to obtain his own ends. In securing these rights from the System, they are secured to all members of the System. It is necessary, therefore, for the individual to be certain that he wants those rights to be secured for all before demanding them for himself. Secondly, these rights are fragile, and can be lost by the very effort to achieve them. Finally, the liberties can be lost if the combatants seek to hold the liberties only for themselves. By their obstinacy and duplicity, John and his Barons effectively destroyed the Charter for some two hundred years. These points, identified by Arden as the "message"^20 of his play, are dramatized in his play. They are carefully woven through Arden's recurring theme of the futility of individuals who seek to gain power for themselves over the System.

Armstrong's Last Goodnight

The subtitle of Armstrong's Last Goodnight is "An Exercise in Diplomacy." It is a study of the efforts of a government to subdue
a vital, energetic, determined man who not only rejects the authority of the System but threatens its security by his actions. It also considers the thin threads which tie together the liberties of men in the political system. Finally, it questions the business of good government—is it to promote the rights of the individual or to maintain peace and security at the cost of the individuality of its members?

Armstrong is probably Arden's most fascinating creation (only Butterthwaite in The Workhouse Donkey can compete with him.) He is Dionysian in his attraction—"A great bull, or lion, of a man," who lives passionately, fervently. He has the attraction of an uncomplicated, naive child, the physical and sexual power of a man and the cunning and prowess of an animal. He is disdainful of the effete politicians of the Court, protective of his clan and its territory, capable of murdering without remorse. In every way he is the antithesis of the social-political system—rebellious, assertive, independent, self-serving and vital. His forays across the border into England to pillage the nearby towns and farms threaten Scotland with a war she can ill afford. The opening scene of the play establishes Armstrong's place in the System: the English and Scots commissioners have settled all the differences between them but one, the Border raids, the worst of which are led by Armstrong. It is the task of David Lindsay, the Scottish King's Herald, to secure Armstrong's agreement to stop the raids.

In contrast to Armstrong, Lindsay is refined, poetic, educated and urbane: the compleat politician. His dedication to the System
is total. He willingly uses his mistress to win the favor of his enemies. The single quote he recites from the Bible is "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters." He is also mindful of the consequences of simply murdering Armstrong, preferring to win him over by political means rather than risk civil bloodshed. For that reason he elects to meet Armstrong man against man.

The rags and robes that we do wear
Express the function of our life
But the bawdy body that we bear
Beneath them carries nocht
But shame and greed and strife.

Yet here I stand and maun contrive
With this sole body and the brain within him
To set myself upon ane man alive
And turn his purposes and utterly win him.

I will gang towart his house
As ane man against ane man,
And through my craft and my humanity
I will save the realm frae butchery,
Gif I can, good sir, but gif I can.

Only when his aide McGlass has been murdered and he himself excluded from the Court does he reject this strategy. He dons the robes of authority given him by the System and immediately plans with the King to have Armstrong killed. The symbolism is inescapable—as a man, Lindsay cannot abide murder, but as part of the System he knows that he must use it as just another element of diplomacy. When Armstrong is killed by the trickery of Lindsay, the System mocks Armstrong for his vain attempts to look like a King, to be greater than the System.

KING. Will ye look at what the man was wearen? Gif we were to set ane crown upon the carl, he wad be nae less splendid than ourself.

It is a cruel epitaph for a man who had more vitality than any of the members of the Court.
Armstrong sought to live by his own rules. He also died because of them. He feigns friendship with his old enemy Wamphrey, lures him into the forest, gets him drunk and leaves him defenseless to be killed by another clan. Armstrong rides away from the scene, laughing. Later, when he agrees to trust Lindsay, he shakes his hand with ceremony, saying, "When ye shake Gilnockie's hand, ye shake the hand of honour, sir." He shakes hands with the right hand of liberty, but it is the left hand which returns the shake in the third act. As he realizes that he has been trapped by Lindsay, he asks incredulously,

Whaur hae ye taken my men? Ane letter. Delamont. The King's letter. The King's honour, the Royal seal—but nae man can say a word against my honour: the elect, the godly, me: washit white in the Blood of the Lamb. With Armstrong's death, the System is secure. The English treaty will be signed, the King "did become ane adult man, and learnt to rule his kingdom" and Lindsay is once again secure at Court. Armstrong acted in accordance with his nature. The System did likewise. The System won. Arden admires his main characters to the extent of giving them a tremendous vitality and lust for life. He does not, however, sympathize with them to the point of overlooking their failure. And in each case that failure is the inability to recognize that if they strike against the System, it can strike back with the same tactics.

Although the System wins in his plays, Arden does not for a moment suggest that it should win. It is as full of duplicity and intrigue as the characters who act against it. The various Lords at the Palace are in constant intrigue against one another and at least Lord Maxwell is probably in league with the English as well. The
Cardinal is no less involved for his religion, involving himself in state politics to rid himself of Lindsay because he is an adulterer. Some critics, noted earlier, have been confused about Arden's own personal politics. Simply, he does not permit either the antagonist (the System) or the protagonist (in this case, Armstrong) the luxury of innocence. Because neither side is blameless, Arden does not portray them as blameless. He dramatizes the consequences of one man's struggle against the System, a struggle which ends in defeat for the individual. In the bargain, he raises questions about the business of good government—what is good government? is it peace and security at all costs? what room is there for individuality? can the individual ever win against the System? should he? These questions form the backdrop to each of Arden's plays. Never answered directly, they nevertheless provide a political context within which to watch the unfolding of the drama. They prick the audience occasionally throughout each play, reminding it of the relevance of what it is watching to what it is living. Arden is no less a dramatist for failing to answer the questions, for they cannot be answered. Philosophers since Plato have tried to answer them. Arden only reminds us that they have yet to be answered.

The Workhouse Donkey

Besides Armstrong, Arden's other major dramatic creation is Charley Butterthwaite, who appears in two of his plays and is mentioned in two others. The Workhouse Donkey is the story of Alderman Butterthwaite's fall from power in a small town in North England. Tying the various political elements together is the choral figure in
the person of the town doctor, Blomax. With a rambling structure and involuted plot, the play presents the System in all its myriad facets, personal idiosyncracies and private motivations. In no other play of recent time has the political System been thus exposed.

Charley Butterthwaite has been Mayor of the town nine times, and controlled the city the remainder of the time through his position as titular leader of the Labour Party. Described by himself and other characters as a Napoleon, he is in control of the town now because Mayor Boocock is a Laborite and relies heavily on Butterthwaite for advice. (The only time he acted without Charley was in the selection of a new Chief Constable, Feng, who proves to be Charley's nemesis.) Born and raised in a workhouse, Charley felt rejected by people because of his background, and determined to earn their respect through politics. He is the protagonist of The Workhouse Donkey because he attempts to upset the status quo, overthrow those in power (both Feng, the Chief Constable and Sir Harold Sweetman, the Conservative leader) and destroy anyone who blocks his path. He wants to be greater than the System, a Napoleonic Emperor who can do whatever he chooses.

Arden has delineated the political system more sharply in The Workhouse Donkey than in any of his other plays. Having pictured the System as an anonymous group of officials in Serjeant Musgrave's Dance, Arden now identifies all facets of political life and illustrates the breadth and intricacy of the System. Butterthwaite is a brilliant politician who has, as much as any man, helped to create the System he now undertakes to defeat. Yet, even he cannot control or direct the complex of personal motivations that reverberate throughout
the System whenever one of its members is threatened. Sir Harold Sweetman, the Conservative leader, is equally involved in the corruption because he is the owner of the Copacabana nightclub. The Labour leaders remain loyal to Butterthwaite until it appears his actions might cost them the election, then they too side with the System. The wives of both Sweetman and Boocock are equally adept at involving themselves in the action of the System in order to aid their husbands. The Constabulary are, apart from Feng, as much a part of the corruption as the politicians. Feng, who insists on absolute neutrality, is unable to do so without impugning his reputation.

To look closely at the System, Arden suggests, is to realize that one man—even 'the Napoleon of the North'—cannot control or defeat it. It is a maze of intricate political maneuverings, obscure personal loyalties and structured public relationships behind which lurk intense private obligations. If the System is to be anything more than an anonymous, insensitive mass, it must be seen for its true self—a complex of individuals who together seek to sustain the status quo because they have each defined a position for themselves within the System and do not want any part of it to be destroyed because that might affect their own position. Although Butterthwaite has been a part of the System, he upsets its balance by his personal crusade to have Feng removed and his determination to discover the owner of the Copacabana Club. In both cases, Butterthwaite breaks the rules by which the System operates—his motives are purely personal. He is obsessed with the notion that Feng is a political appointment with a vendetta against him. He must know the name of the owner of the club because he wants to know everything in the town in order to control it.
Thus, the conflict is joined between the System and an individual who sees himself as an Emperor more powerful than the System.

Acting as a choral interpreter for the play is Blomax, the town doctor, who is himself deeply involved in the political machinations of the other characters. He introduces the action, occasionally explains it, helps to keep it moving and eventually forces its final resolution. He is also a fascinating study in his own right, a "corrupted individual" who has served as Butterthwaite's councillor and manipulator, passing on information to him, fixing records for him and using his position as a doctor to do favors for people, thus making them indebted to him. He has also placed bets for Charley and gradually built up a £450 credit against him. Blomax, then, serves a triple role—Greek chorus, Machiavelli and personal friend to Butterthwaite (Blomax is the last to desert him). Given the extensive structure of the play, he is essential in each of the three roles.

The defeat of Butterthwaite is a consequence of his inability to control the personal motives of each of the people comprising the System. Feng is an absolutely scrupulous man of Duty who distinguishes between only two kinds of systems, law and order or chaos and anarchy. That his first action as Chief Constable is to arrest Butterthwaite and the other Labour members for drinking after hours is coincidental to Feng—that was the first crime he observed. To Butterthwaite, however, it is a personal attack, and he vows to have Feng removed. He visits the Copacabana on the reasonable assumption that if anything illegal does take place there, the police are condoning it and receiving some kind of kickback. If true, Charley can use the
information to embarrass Feng and force his retirement. What he unleashes, however, is more than he had expected. Sweetman's wife, realizing that her husband (who owns the club) is in danger, goes to Gloria (the manager of the club) and the two conspire with Blomax to force Butterthwaite to pay his racing debts, thus discrediting him before he finds out who is the owner of the club. Charley steals the money with the aid of Blomax, who eventually confesses in order to put his daughter in a position to marry Sweetman's son. Feng will not accept Blomax's confession, however, because his scruples insist that he prosecute Blomax (Feng is afraid of being biased because he too loves Blomax's daughter.) As a consequence, Butterthwaite remains free long enough to lead his labor supporters in an attack on the new art gallery (formerly the Copacabana). At play's end, Butterthwaite is defeated, but the System is secure--neither party can say for certain which will benefit the most by the scandal, the Sweetman's are safe from prosecution, Blomax is forgiven and his daughter marries the younger Sweetman. Only Feng is a casualty and he was just an outsider anyway.

Butterthwaite's 'tragic flaw' is that he suffered from the sin of pride. He thought himself to be greater than a man, equal to an Emperor. He was confident of his ability to manipulate the System, but he failed to see that he was attacking the System not just using it. He threatened the security of Sweetman and Feng and in so doing threatened the status quo, which ultimately threatened the security of his own party members. Butterthwaite fails to hear Blomax tell the audience at the opening of the play that these characters are just people, nothing more. Only when he is stealing the money does he know
that he is just a man. He does not realize, however, that he is compensating for that moment when others thought him a donkey by trying to prove to be more than a man, more than the System created by men. At the end of the play, the entire cast (save Charley and Feng) conclude with a song that emphasizes this theme.

We stand all alone to the north of the Trent
You leave us alone and we'll leave you alone
We take no offence where none has been meant
But you hit us with your fist, we'll bash you with a stone!
Withdraw those quivering nostrils
We smell as we think decent
If we tell you we've cleaned out armpits
You'd best believe we've cleaned 'em recent. . . .

In The Workhouse Donkey, Arden has intricately detailed how the System works to defeat an individual who thinks himself better than it. The power of the System lies in its size, its complexity, its resilience, its longevity. Arden has also provided, very tentatively, something of his vision of individual man, whose nakedness shines through his pretensions, whose individual achievements are rarely individual. The Emperor is always a donkey; the donkey may become an emperor, but must never forget his origins.

The Hero Rises Up

In the preface to The Hero Rises Up, the playwrights (Arden and his wife, Margareta D'Arcy) explain the play's significance.

This play is about a man who was, by accident of birth and rearing, committed to a career governed by the old Roman 'rectilinear' principles. He himself was of asymmetrical 'curvilinear' temperament to an unusually passionate degree. But the English soon discovered how to handle him. He was done properly: wasted his extraordinary energy, courage, and humanity upon having men killed (in the end himself killed); and then finally was installed as a National Monument. The individual is pitted against the System, but the focus is on the
individual and what becomes of him as a consequence of the System, rather than the battle itself. The play confronts directly a question lurking in Arden's other plays—what is an individual?—by asking the questions, what is the nature of heroism? and who is a hero? For answers, Arden and D'Arcy went to the last of the great heroes in British history, Lord Nelson, permanently enshrined in Trafalgar Square in the hearts of Englishmen everywhere.

Nelson is the equal of Armstrong and Butterthwaite in his egotism and self-esteem. He is proud of his medals and honors, and displays them always. He follows orders, but he also cannot resist a battle. He is ruthless, hanging Caracciolo without a trial. He is consumed with self-doubt, wondering whether he has done all that could be done. He is passionate as a lover, insensitive as a husband. He refuses to read letters from his wife, and his son wishes he were dead. Above all, however, he is haughty, confident and eager to do battle for his country, thereby winning, not incidentally, more honor for himself. Nelson is a hero before he is a man; he is little without his honors. His lover, the flamboyant, colorful Emma, cannot restrain him from undertaking another expedition. He needs war to reassure himself of his own capabilities.

The System accepts Nelson-as-Hero because in that role he helps sustain the System. It needs him to win its battles, but will not permit him to flaunt his victories. Nelson-as-Hero is acceptable to the System; indeed, it is grateful to him. It does not, however, accept Nelson-as-a-Man, for in that role he is no better than anyone else. The System is willing to allow Nelson to take risks on its behalf but it will not accept any blame should he falter. When
Nelson returns from war, neither the Admiralty nor royalty are there to greet him. In the Danish battle, Nelson is called upon to lead the attack because he can withstand the blame that would fall upon his shoulders should he lose. In short, the System has little use for Nelson when there is no war and it indifferently ignores him.

The System cannot permit Nelson to follow his own rules as an individual because that would place him above the System. Consequently no one in the System—the Admiralty, royalty, or even Nelson's own relatives—accept Emma as Nelson's de facto wife. They refuse to honor his bequest to the nation on her behalf. The System demands its due; Nelson need not obey the orders of the System while at war because he thereby promotes the security and peace of the System. As a man, however, he must follow its rules or be rejected. Accepted as a hero, he is rejected as a man. Ultimately, Arden implies, it is because he is a man that he is not a hero.

The Hero Rises Up, beyond the conflict of individual vs. System, is an inquiry into the nature of heroism. In the Prologue, the Academic Representative of the Authors posits the difficulty of determining when a hero is a hero.

... an heroic leader might just as well be on the other side from oneself: this does not diminish his greatness: nor does it mean that one's own cause is necessarily ignoble. It merely serves to show that God has decided—in what Dr Farquharson calls 'His Infinite Wisdom'—that victory is to be allotted to the enemy—at least for the time being. This is a very severe Calvinist view and I am not entirely able to accept it. But what one must, I think, accept, is the impossibility of determining, except by means of hindsight, exactly who the hero—in any given situation—is.

To Arden, no man is fully a hero until after his death because he then is useful to the System as a source of pride, stability and
history. While he is alive, he remains a threat to it. Arden goes beyond this, however, to assert that the characteristics of man-as-a-man prevent him from being fully a hero ever; he is still subject to the need for love, both public and private. Only when he is raised up in a chariot to heaven can everyone happily sing his praises. Only then are his weaknesses as a human being ignored. As Nelson is rising up, the cast pause for a moment, aware that they are singing hymns of praise to someone who was, but a few moments ago, a man like themselves. He is no longer a man, however, and they continue singing. Heroism is false pride, on the part of both the hero and those who worship him. Just as a legend developed about Armstrong after his death, so has legend established Nelson as a hero. However, Arden states all too pointedly that both of them were men and less the heroes for that.

Incidentally, the question of the nature of liberty appears in *The Hero Rises Up*, although it is confined to only one section. After Nelson has won the battle at Naples, he engages in a conversation with the dead Caracciolo, in which the two debate which of them gave liberty to the Neapolitans. Earlier, the sailors have sung a song about liberty, part of which deserves repeating here.

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He ordered in his red marines
Sing ho for liberty
And he smashed them all to smithereens
All for to make 'em free.

We caught the chief of all the gang
Sing ho for liberty
And we beat him down with many a bang
We meant to make him free.

We tied his arms with a length of twine
Sing ho for liberty
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And we dragged him up at the end of a line
That's how we made him free.

We set him out on the quarter-deck
Sing ho for liberty
And bejesus he looked like a terrible wreck
But he knew that he was free.32

Arden does not permit his audience to forget that the liberties which they profess are involved in the struggle between the rights of an individual and the needs of the System. The individual offers freedom of action, the System provides security from reaction. The choice is moot because the System always wins, not because security is preferable to liberty but because it cannot be defeated. That audiences are usually unsettled by Arden's plays indicates that they have been offered a Scylla and Charybdis choice which they would prefer not to make. Arden is not didactic in that he does not force a choice on the audience, nor offer his own preference. Yet the need for choice remains, nevertheless.

The Business of Good Government

The Business of Good Government is a Christmas play written by Arden and D'Arcy for performance by a group of amateur actors. It was not intended as a fully developed drama. Nevertheless, it is of interest because of its concentration on Herod, who is a spokesman for a major theme running through Arden's plays, viz., the business of good government.

Although the story is that of the nativity, Arden and D'Arcy have elevated the character of Herod to a position of predominance by including him in two scenes with the Wise Man and one with a Farm-Girl who saw Joseph and Mary escaping. At the beginning of the
play, Herod identifies the business of good government.

HEROD. Goodwill, great joy, peace upon earth--I do not believe they are altogether possible. But it is the business of good government to try and make them possible.\footnote{33}

He believes the birth of Jesus to be a threat to the security and peace of his realm, and therefore orders all babies under the age of two to be put to death. Herod has brought peace and prosperity to the people of his kingdom and he appeals to them to understand his order. Presumably they do, for the common people in the kingdom (the Shepherds, the Hostess and the Farm-Girl) express the desire to be left alone to live their lives in security. Arden and D'Arcy clearly suggest that Herod's policy is defensible from the viewpoint of the business of good government. As in \textit{The Hero Rises Up}, the playwrights realize that whether a man is a hero depends on one's point of view. Christians naturally have considered Herod a villain. He was, however, merely trying to carry out the policies of a good government. A nativity play is not the place to challenge an audience's political allegiances, yet Arden comes close to doing just that. Was Herod a complete villain? To answer yes, an audience must affirm that the policy of good government is not always peace and security, and there are few who can unequivocally agree to that. Like Arden's other works, \textit{The Business of Good Government} teases us, pricking our intelligence, and reminding us of the consequences of our political philosophy, whether it is liberal or conservative. Those who believe that Arden does not make political choices miss the point. His plays go beyond the realm of political partisanship to question the very fundamental problems created by the existence of government itself.
Although Arden's first full-length plays, *The Waters of Babylon* and *Live Like Pigs*, do not fit neatly into the same political framework as his later works, they both concentrate on the same conflict between the individual and the System that dominates his other plays. Because neither raises directly the immediately political questions of liberty and good government, they appear on the surface to be only tangentially political at all. They are, however, as concerned with the nature of the social-political system and its effects on the individual as any of Arden's other plays.

The two characters who have captured the most attention from Arden, Butterthwaite and Sigismanfred Krankiewicz, both appear in *The Waters of Babylon*. Butterthwaite has come to London following his political defeat, described in *The Workhouse Donkey*. Krank, the major character of both *The Waters of Babylon* and a television drama, *Wet Fish*, is a Polish immigrant who is concurrently a slum landlord, pimp and architect. Crusty, coarse, and cautious, he has eighty lodgers in his dwelling, far more than health standards permit. Many of the lodgers are prostitutes in his employ. Formerly a guard in a Nazi concentration camp, Krank has developed a fierce determination to keep his identity to himself, to be independent and to get what he wants. He is neither trusting nor sympathetic, but interested only in pursuing his own business ventures. He hires Butterthwaite to help him attack the System.

**BUTTERTHWAITE.** But I don't reckon you need me, a good solicitor's what you want.

**KRANK.** No, no, no, no, no. A good solicitor would defend
Krank is determined to defeat the System and in so doing to liberate himself.

KRANK. . . . I am not the man to liberate my country. All my efforts are devoted to the liberation of myself.

His spine is certain: to attack the bureaucracy in order to free himself both of bureaucratic interference in his life and of personal persecution from those who do not accept him either for his nationality or his occupation. Butterthwaite's solution is to establish a municipal lottery in which Krank always wins the prize. The scheme would be initiated by Joe Caligula, a Borough Councilman originally from Barbados who has always spoken against the kind of lodgings Krank keeps. The money would enable Krank to buy a second building and at the same time make it difficult for the Council to harass him for his other activities.

The System is represented by Loap, the MP for the district, Caligula and Barbara, an architect for whom Krank works who represents the respectable side of Krank's life. None of these people are innocent: Loap has a mistress, Caligula succumbs to the charms of Bathsheba and Barbara has, apparently, a dark background herself. Yet none of them attack the System as Krank does. As in The Workhouse Donkey, the interweaving of personal motivations of the people in the System becomes too complicated for one individual. Krank fails to maintain his separate identities, get the money from the lottery, keep control over his tenants, prevent anyone from discovering his past and keep his friend Paul from involving him in a plot to
assassinate Khrushchev and Bulganin. His efforts to defeat the System fail because it is greater than him in every way—more powerful, more complex, more encompassing. Krank endeavored to overcome the System to secure his own financial and legal position, but his entanglements with it lead to his accidental death at the hands of Paul. When Krank dies, the other characters join together to sing a round, the cymbal clashes and the curtain falls. The System has united to celebrate its victory and laughs at those who attempt to defeat it. The individual, again, loses.

**Live Like Pigs**

One of Arden's most controversial plays, *Live Like Pigs*, is also one of his most powerful dramas. The confrontation between the Sawneys and their gypsy lifestyle on the one hand and the Jacksons and their antiseptic lifestyle on the other teems with unavoidable social and political implications. The Sawneys have been moved by officials of the welfare state into a housing system. They are indifferent to the System's consideration, careless with the furnishings of the house and fiercely determined to maintain their style of living. The house is soon in a shambles, in part because of the arrival of a trio of fellow nomads: Blackmouth, who fathered Rosie's child, Daffodil, his new girl, and Old Croaker, one of the most bizarre creatures in dramatic literature. The enlarged household is soon at war with the System—the officials are dissatisfied with the condition of the house and want it improved, and the Jacksons are unable to cope with the insolence and sexuality of the Sawneys. Although the Sawney's are terrible housekeepers, they are attractive for their
fierce sense of independence and their strident, overpowering capacity for taking from life all they can get. They do not accept the System, but only accept life as it happens. They do not plan to adjust or adapt to the housing scheme, but challenge it to adjust or adapt to them. They threaten the System by their independence, their refusal to submit to rules, their vitality and by the living conditions they maintain (which lowers the standard of the area).

The antithesis of the Sawneys is the Jacksons, a bland, meek, comfortable family with little vitality or imagination in their lives to commend them. They are as settled in their own life pattern as the Sawneys are in theirs. To the Jacksons, the Sawneys are a direct challenge because they threaten the routine and style of their life, a crucial challenge because to them it is more important how they live than why they live. They prefer comfort and security, and do not question their own capacity for violence and sexuality until forced to do so by the Sawneys. When they discover these elements of their personalities, they become ferocious. Once pulled from the security of their lair, they act as much like animals as the Sawneys whom they reject for living like pigs.

Live Like Pigs differs from Arden's other plays in that an entire family challenges the System, but in other ways it is similar. The Sawney's by their determination to live free of any authority are a challenge to the security of the System. The System is characterized both by the Jacksons and by the officials who constantly remind the Sawneys to obey the rules of the housing scheme or be evicted. The opening song of the play directs attention to the right of people to live as they wish.
0 England was a free country
So free beyond a doubt
That if you had no food to eat
You were free to go without.

But if you want your freedom kept
You need to fight and strive
Or else they'll come and catch you, Jack,
And bind you up alive. . . .

Later, Rachael and Sailor reintroduce this theme. After Rachael sings the stanza of a song, she says, "What does it matter which way [you live], so you make your true own choice of it? Hey?"

Although critics have recognized political and social implications in *Live Like Pigs*, they are not in agreement about what those implications are. Arden, however, is not interested in taking sides with either the Sawneys or the Jacksons, with either the conservatives who are opposed to public housing or the liberals who decry the system which put the Sawneys there in the first place. His political interest, as always, rests on a more fundamental level, probing the right of the System to determine an individual's way of life, questioning whether the lifestyle of one individual should be permitted to infringe on that of another, doubting whether the System can ever permit variety if it is to maintain peace and security. In *Live Like Pigs*, the System is again victorious; the Sawneys are evicted. However, the System may have met its match, for the Jacksons become like the Sawneys, suggesting a moral victory for them, although a short-lived one. The play concludes with the peace and security of the System the victor. However, it also concludes that the desire to be free, to express the animal nature in man, to live and act as the Sawneys, is very much a part of us all. For this reason, the conflict
between the individual and the System, between the Sawneys and the Jacksons, is an eternal one.

Conclusion

John Arden is a supremely political playwright. His plays both illustrate and discuss an individual's or a group's effort to gain and exert influence, or to obtain and exercise power in the administration of government and the making of public policy. With the exception of the Sawneys, the major character in each play exerts influence primarily for himself, but the methods he uses and the consequences of his actions spill over into the public arena. Musgrave, King John, Herod and Butterthwaite are directly involved in public policy and the other characters with whom they must deal are a part of the political system. Krankiewicz, Armstrong and Nelson each seek to affect the administration of government, although for private motives, i.e., they compete with the System in order to secure freedom of action for themselves rather than to affect public policy for its own sake. The political consequences of their actions are, however, no less public. Although the Sawneys are not intentionally political, their lifestyle is a direct threat to officials of the System and to the families which are a part of it. Their story, therefore, also becomes a study in the administration of government and the execution of public policy.

Three philosophical questions raised by the stories of these individuals are equally as political as the stories themselves. In each of Arden's dramas is the conflict between individual liberties and the demands of society. On his behalf, the individual has the
desire for freedom of action and the right to self-determination. Arden has further infused each of these characters with a tremendous vitality, energy and joie de vivre. On its behalf, the System has the virtues of security and peace, comfort and stability. That Arden does not permit an easy choice between the two is no fault of his. The conflict has been central to government and politics since the formation of the first government. A second theme emerging from the first is the business of good government, i.e., what is the ideal public policy? Put differently, Arden asks whether people in the System should be able to assert authoritatively that their definition of security is what is best for all people under the System. Arden is wise (and clever) enough to refuse a simple answer to these two questions as well. Only in The Business of Good Government does he imply that the government is not correct in placing its own definition of security above the potential development of society that can come from the imagination of someone outside the System. At that, however, Arden indicates that the 'little people' of the System probably endorsed Herod's action because of their desire to be left alone. Finally, Arden inquires into the nature of liberty in his plays. Primarily in Left-Handed Liberty, he illustrates the fragility of liberty and demonstrates that it is often infinitely more or less than was intended by those who received and granted it.

Were Arden to avoid all these questions, his plays would still contain the seeds of political drama, for his depiction of the social-political System is itself political commentary of a high order. To Arden, the System is an almost Kafkaesque complex of impersonal faces and indifferent attitudes. It either absorbs or
kills its opponents, never permits them equality or victory. Osborne's Jimmy Porter cried that there are no brave causes left. Arden's characters realize why—because the System does not permit them. Wesker's recent characters have graduated from determination to despair. To the extent that Arden's characters despair, it is because they know that contemporary society does not permit social or political imagination to exert itself meaningfully. Pinter's characters are motivated and consumed by an unknown fear. For Arden's characters the unknown is always the unknowable System which limits their choices silently, yet forcefully. Arden's plays are immediate and political because they deal with a predominant question in politics today—how can the individual maintain his sense of independence and individuality when confronted by a growing, uncontrollable System that cloaks itself in the guise of security and peace?

Such a question arises for Arden because of his sense of contemporary man, a man who is more a Gravedigger than a Hamlet. Beyond the political implications of Arden's plays lies the intriguing search for an understanding of the nature of man. Ultimately, Arden's characters are not heroes, not only because heroism is impossible in today's society but because heroism is itself a myth. Each of his characters (except Musgrave, who is consumed by his Logic) is aware of his own fallibility. Lindsay dons the robes of authority to defeat Armstrong, having failed to defeat him man to man. Krankiewicz admits before he dies that he must now declare his identity. King John is keenly aware that he will die from eating too many peaches and cider before he has defeated the Barons. Butterthwaite cries out that
he is not a donkey but an ordinary man. Lord Nelson's entire story is summed up as a conflict between his role as hero to society and his role as a common man to his wife and lover. If heroism were possible in today's society, the conflict between individual and System might resolve itself differently. Because it is not, however, the individual is left only with himself, reduced by the System to an ordinary human capable of suffering and dying. That, in the final analysis, is the only answer Arden gives in his plays: 'a man is a man of a' that.'
CHAPTER V: FOOTNOTES


5Taylor, op. cit., p. 75.


8Taylor, op. cit., p. 72.


10Ibid., p. 37.

11John Arden, Armstrong's Last Goodnight: An Exercise in Diplomacy (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965), III. xv. 120.


14 Ibid., I. iii. 35-36.  
15 Ibid., I. iii. 33-34.  
17 Ibid., I. iii. 18.  
18 Ibid., I. iii. 24.  
19 Ibid., III. vii. 92.  
20 Ibid., pp. xi-xii.  
21 Arden, Armstrong's Last Goodnight, op. cit., p. 11.  
22 Ibid., I. vii. 56.  
23 Ibid., I. ii. 26-27.  
24 Ibid., III. xv. 120.  
25 Ibid., I. vii. 51.  
26 Ibid., III. xiv. 119.  
27 Ibid., III. xvi. 122.  
29 Ibid., III. iv. 132-33.  
31 Ibid., I. 14.  
32 Ibid., I. 31.  
36 John Arden, Live Like Pigs, ibid., i. 105.  
37 Ibid., xii. 157.
CHAPTER VI: THE THEATRICAL BALLADS OF JOHN ARDEN

The plays of John Arden elude categorization because they appear on the surface to have no formal similarities: the style of *Live Like Pigs* seems vastly different than that of *The Hero Rises Up* or even *Armstrong's Last Goodnight*. Critical disagreement, noted in the previous chapter, does not help reduce the confusion. Certainly the plays diverge from the realistic-naturalistic vein in which Wesker and Osborne usually write; beyond that, however, traditional labels and styles are unsatisfactory tools of analysis. Because some of the plays contain short narrative scenes loosely tied together with songs, Arden's style is frequently labeled Brechtian.

Although he admits that his work is analogous to the Brechtian technique, Arden has written that he is creating ballads for the theatre. In May, 1960, he wrote an article for *Encore* magazine, in which he suggested the possibility of using ballads in the theatre. It is evident that he is also expressing his own stylistic preference for them.

What I am deeply concerned with is the problem of translating the concrete life of today into terms of poetry that shall at the one time both illustrate that life and set it within the historical and legendary tradition of our culture. I am writing in English (British English) and primarily for an English (British English) audience. Therefore I am concerned to express my themes in terms of British (British English, but not exclusively) tradition... The bedrock of English poetry is the ballad.

Defending the traditional ballad themes against the charge of being trite and overworked, Arden asserted,
there is scarcely any limit to the amount of meaning and relevance a writer can insert into them. They are themes which can carry any strength of content from tragedy through satire to straightforward comedy, and neither be drowned in it nor seem too portentous. Social criticism, for example, tends in the theatre to be dangerously ephemeral and therefore disappointing after the fall of the curtain. But if it is expressed within the framework of the traditional poetic truths it can have a weight and an impact derived from something more than contemporary documentary facility.  

Finally, Arden indicates both the potential use and value of the ballad tradition in the theatre.

This kind of theatre is easily misunderstood. I have found in my own very tentative experiments that audiences (and particularly critics) find it hard to make the completely simple response to the story that is the necessary preliminary to appreciating the meaning of the play. Other habits of playgoing have led them to expect that they are going to have to begin by forming judgements, by selecting what they think is the author's 'social standpoint' and then following it to its conclusion. This does not happen in ballads at their best. There we are given the fable, and we draw our own conclusions. If the poet intends us to make a judgement on his characters, this will be implied by the whole turn of the story, not by intellectualized comments as it proceeds. The tale stands and it exists in its own right. If the poet is a true one, then the tale will be true too.  

Only Ronald Hayman has accepted the ballad, in part, as the structural basis of Arden's plays, yet he too is unwilling to reject a strictly Brechtian analysis. "Funnily enough the most Brechtian characteristic in Arden's work is his dependence on the tradition of English ballad opera." While he occasionally relates elements of a particular play to the ballad tradition, Hayman does not study any single play as a theatrical ballad, nor does he define the formal structure and techniques of ballad writing. As a consequence, his structural criticism is scattered, uncertain and unsatisfying.

That John Arden is in fact writing theatrical ballads is the thesis of this chapter, which proposes to analyze Arden's plays
systematically from this point of view. It is not suggested here that
Arden is unique in his use of the ballad form, only that it is the
most useful definition of his structure. The major characteristics
of the traditional ballad form are identified, with some attention
given to the poetic variations on the ballad by nineteenth-century
Romantic poets. These characteristics are then compared to the
ballad technique of John Arden, both to establish that he is a ballad
writer and to note in his plays both the commonalities with and
divergences from the traditional ballad form. A final section sum-
marizes the relationship between the ballad form and the political con-
tent of Arden's plays. The plays which serve as primary examples of
Arden's ballad writing are Serjeant Musgrave's Dance, Left-Handed
Liberty, The Workhouse Donkey, Armstrong's Last Goodnight, The Hero
Rises Up, Soldier, Soldier, and Live Like Pigs.

Ballad Characteristics

The definition of a literary genre is usually a futile effort,
bogged down by semantics, personal preferences, and shadings in
emphasis. The ballad is no exception to this. It is, if anything,
more surrounded by ambiguity than other literary forms because a
great deal of its intrinsic nature lies within its origin, about which
no hypotheses can ultimately be proved. The ballad of tradition would
appear to have originated in a very particular type of society, from
which it derives its most distinctive elements.

The condition of society in which a truly national or popular
poetry appears explains the character of such poetry. It is
a condition in which the people are not divided by political
organization and book-culture into markedly distinct classes,
in which consequently there is such community of ideas and
feelings that the whole people form an individual. Such poetry, accordingly, while it is in its essence an expression of our common human nature, and so of universal and indestructible interest, will in each case be differenced by circumstances and idiosyncrasy. On the other hand, it will always be an expression of the mind and heart of the people as an individual, and never of the personality of individual men. The fundamental characteristic of popular ballads is therefore the absence of subjectivity and of self-consciousness.  

Most scholars of ballads agree that within this kind of society the ballad emerged from some kind of choral improvisation or dance. Gummers, for example, states that the "making of the original ballad is a choral, dramatic process. . . ."  

Regardless of the specifics of its origination, however, the element of oral transmission, enhanced and enriched by the use of song, is of utmost importance. "Something like half of our ballads," estimates Gerould, "seem to have been sung with refrains." Friedman concludes that ballads "are properly inseparable from song or recitation." The oral tradition in the ballad provides, according to most scholars, an accepted test of the authenticity of a ballad. Unfortunately, it raises more questions than it answers: while oral transmission creates characteristics different from other poetic forms, it also means that the ballad may undergo changes in the transmission. Major additions or subtractions are believed to have resulted from loss of memory or the personal preference of the balladeer. As Gummere has concluded, "It is clear that ballad structure. . . . is not stable." The identification of ballad characteristics, therefore, must be seen within this framework of uncertainty with regard to the origins of the ballad and about the extent to which they have been amended through transmission.
While the precise origin of the ballad remains obscure, ballad scholars find agreement on some structural and stylistic components of the ballad. The central definitive element of all ballads of oral tradition is that they must tell a story that begins at or near the climax. Background, atmosphere and motivation are never the thematic focus of a ballad, nor are they given concentrated attention within a ballad. Gerould's definition of a ballad emphasizes these points.

A ballad is a folk-song that tells a story with stress on the crucial situation, tells it by letting the action unfold itself in event and speech, and tells it objectively with little comment or intrusion of personal bias. Henderson agrees, noting that the ballad differs from epic verse "in that, while it is confined to a single episode, it is concerned with the thing done or the event that happened rather than with the personality or personalities." Finally, William Morris Hart's study of Professor Child's ballad commentaries concludes, "It is clear that to Professor Child's mind it was necessary that the ballad should tell a story." Although Hart does not identify the opening of the ballad at the climax of the story as a definitive element, he proffers another characteristic which is similar.

Necessary as the story is, however, it is seldom completely told in the ballad; something is left to the hearer's imagination. These omissions, he later adds, are most characteristically the introductory information, the conclusion and transition material.

A third element of the ballad form, in addition to the narration and concentration on the climax of a single episode, is that the narration is almost always impersonal and objective. Gerould
believes an "impersonal attitude to the events of the story" to be one of three key qualities of the true ballad. Henderson finds that ballads are "largely destitute of moral aim." Gummere describes the ballad as "traditional, objective, impersonal." The purpose of this objectivity is to enable the listener to concentrate on the narration, which further diminishes any emphasis on character or motivation. A ballad writer, therefore, must tell a story, and not be didactic, subjective or personally involved.

Beyond these three elements, other ballad traits are accepted neither as universal characteristics, nor as tests of authenticity for balladry. Gummere, for example, insists on "incremental repetition" as the true test of a ballad. The term refers to concentrating on one or two points in a story, then suddenly 'leaping' on to the next. This element of cumulative iteration, however, has been challenged by Gerould as a test of authenticity. Other techniques in ballad writing have been given emphasis by some scholars but ignored by others. The most exhaustive listing of ballad characteristics is Hart's compilation of Professor Child's comments of Child and brought them together to provide a useful set of criteria for analyzing ballads. True ballad language is not extravagant, exaggerated, over-refined, prosaic, cynical, sophisticated, sentimental or trite. The ballad style is characterized by coherence, brevity, artlessness, commonplaces, repetitions of the entire message and lyricism. It is beyond the scope of this study to pursue each of these individually; they serve, however, as a useful sketch of ballad language and technique. They identify hallmarks of the traditional ballad: simplicity, both in language and plot; objectivity on the part of the
narrator; and repetition and iteration, suggesting choral, mimetic or dance origins.

In the last hundred years the ballad has undergone a considerable transformation which has resulted in many ballad elements being greatly modified or eliminated. Ballad imitations, however, are nothing new, dating probably from a short time after their initial development. As early as the sixteenth century, the broadside ballad, which markedly compromised the purity of the oral ballad, became popular. It was of "a topical... mode of publication." Most of the characteristics of the ballad of oral tradition cannot be applied to the broadside, which was often highly subjective and sentimental. The nineteenth century witnessed a revival of interest in the ballad, with imitations and modifications undertaken by the dominant literary figures of the time, most notably Coleridge, Wordsworth and Keats. Each of these poets, however, blurred still further the distinguishable features of the ballad. In Wordsworth's transmutation "of the ballad, the emotional, subjective element predominates over the narrative." He was as fascinated by the mood, atmosphere and feelings generated by his stories as by the stories themselves. Similarly, Coleridge subordinates "the story to the dramatic elucidation of character, but with intenser research into states of guilt and acute anxiety." Keats' most famous literary ballad, "La Belle Dame sans Merci," employs "a modified ballad stanza; the abrupt opening also suggests the ballads, as does the revelation through dialogue; but in everything else the poem is a romance episode." Friedman's study, The Ballad Revival, brings the use of the ballad form up to date.

The most subtle changes worked upon the ballad measure have
been a result of its growing use for lyrical rather than narrative purposes, the emotional, personal tone of Housman, Yeats, and Frost tending to give the stanza a more aerated texture. Emily Dickinson's poetry had been largely of this strain.

Thus, recent imitations of the ballad have blurred still further the definitive characteristics of the ballad form, making it extremely difficult to establish criteria for assessing the theatrical ballads of John Arden.

In summary, the ballad of oral tradition tells a story, usually with an abrupt, dramatic opening at or near the climax of a single episode on which it exclusively concentrates. Neither descriptive nor prescriptive, it moves quickly to the crisis, iterating only key points as in the refrain of a song. Characterized as it is by simplicity and objectivity, the ballad seldom provides background information or character motivations. It is thus distinguishable from other poetic forms, particularly the epic or romantic poem. Poets of the last hundred years, however, have vastly transformed the ballad from a simple, objective narrative into a variety of permutations seldom simple, often subjective, and increasingly concerned with atmosphere and motivation. It is within this context of the poetic liberties taken with the ballad by recent poets that Arden's interest in the ballad must be approached.

The Ballads of John Arden

To identify the plays of John Arden as theatrical ballads would seem to avoid critical attack for three reasons. The foregoing has established that a neat definition of the term is not readily available. Further, critics have accepted the term in recent poetry,
compromising still further any agreements reached about the nature of the ballad of oral tradition. Beyond this, however, some modification of the term can be expected when it is applied to drama, a genre which effectively eliminates the possibility of incremental repetition. If the only definitive element left to the original use of the term is that a theatrical ballad tells a story, the playwright can hardly lay claim to the ballad label because most plays (and novels, for that matter) tell a story. It is necessary, therefore, to analyze the structure of Arden's plays to determine whether they in fact have any significant relationship to the ballad of oral tradition.

Arden is, above all, concerned with telling a story. As with the ballads, Arden's plays are not as concerned with motivation, background or setting as with the resolution of a critical situation. Little is known of Arden's characters even after they have been seen in a critical moment of their lives. The characters in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* have almost no history, no name and few discernible motivations to explain their actions as the play progresses. Allegorical in tone, the play tells the story of an individual confronting the System; it is not concerned with why he confronts it nor whether anything was changed as a result of his effort. *Left-Handed Liberty*, more episodic than Arden's other plays because of the requirements of historical authenticity, is nevertheless primarily concerned with telling the story of what happens to John and his Barons after the Magna Carta. While character motivations are more detailed than in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, they are revealed only as requirements of the plot (i.e., to explain political maneuvers), not as developments of character. None of the characters in *The Workhouse Donkey*, save
Butterthwaite, are given any background. Nothing is really known of them except their involvement with the System. Butterthwaite's political history is given only to enhance his image as an Emperor and to legitimate his claim to be greater than the System. Although he has been in a workhouse, neither the psychological nor social consequences and motivations of that background are treated. The story is that of a man falling from power, not an explanation of why he is falling. In Armstrong's Last Goodnight, only Lindsay has been given a fully developed character. He interacts with McGlass, his lover and the audience to provide an understanding of his character, background and motivation. In contrast, Armstrong is a poetic image more than a dramatic character. Although both his family and followers are with him constantly, there is little exchange between them to develop Armstrong's personality. He is a spirit battling the reason of Lindsay, which explains why Lindsay's character is more detailed than Armstrong's. Nothing is known either of the background or motivations of the Sawneys and Jacksons in Live Like Pigs. As Arden has stated, he is interested in what happens when their two contrasting lifestyles come together. The bizarre characterization of Old Croaker, the complicated relationships Blackmouth has with the women in his life, the unnamed officials, Mrs. Jackson's transition from bourgeois to animalistic—none of these are given developed motivations or delineated backgrounds; they are of secondary importance to the story. As with Arden's other plays, the focus is on the what of the story, not the why or how. Soldier, Soldier is perhaps Arden's most balladlike play, with its unnamed soldier who comes into town
from nowhere, affects the life of a woman whose husband is missing in the war, and then leaves. Neither setting nor motivations are given importance; all that matters is what happens to the soldier and the young woman.

Because of the comparative lengths of the drama and the ballad, the playwright must of necessity include more details than a balladeer. Consequently, it is not suggested here that Arden includes no motivational details in his scripts, only that they are subordinate to the narration. The test is whether material is primarily provided to enable the story to progress or to enable the audience to appreciate the characters better. Because of the sparsity of detail for most characters, the frequency with which they are given no names, the unlocalized settings and the emotional detachment with which most of the characters are treated, the conclusion is inescapable that Arden's first purpose is narrative.

In his article on ballads for the theatre, Arden insists that one element requisite to theatrical ballads is that they deal with traditional ballad themes or "simple basic situations." Using these themes, which "are always the same" in traditional poetry, Arden links their strength to his own particular political emphasis. The ballads were repeated and revised for hundreds of years, then served as the basis for new ballads, and Arden believes that theatrical ballads must tap the almost archetypal roots of the ballad themes and infuse them with contemporary dramatic content. Each of Arden's plays tells a story which focuses on one individual and his efforts to overcome the System. Similar to ballads in their concentration on the actions of
a single individual (which insures that the stories do not become overly complicated), the plays all contain "traditional" themes (although they are not always the predominant storyline of the play.) Soldier, Soldier and Serjeant Musgrave's Dance both treat of a girl left behind by her boyfriend who went off to war. Melodic, ballad-like songs of lost love, soldiers in uniform who try to make love to the girl, the absence of anyone else in her life, her desire to get away from her drab existence—all these traditional elements heighten the ballad line in the plays. Of course, Serjeant Musgrave's Dance is primarily concerned with Musgrave's goal, but Annie's plight is central to it, because it illustrates the horrors of war. Armstrong's Last Goodnight and The Hero Rises Up both present legendary figures whose heroic deeds and demise are recounted. Armstrong is given legendary status both through the recounting of his deeds and at the end of the play when Lindsay tells that the tree where Armstrong was hung never grew again. Lord Nelson is, of course, presented as a hero, that being the subject of the play. Left-Handed Liberty re-creates at least one legendary figure, King John, although presenting him in a kinder, more sympathetic light than commonly given him. In addition, Arden has included four episodes in the play which do not have historical material to support them. Three of these are traditional stories of love: the young knight's love for the King's beloved (as in Camelot), the affair between the Goldsmith's wife and the parson (as in Canterbury Tales), and Lady de Vesci's relationship with John (as in tales of the amorous affairs of almost every king). Live Like Pigs has a traditional theme, which Arden himself has identified in his article on ballads.
England was a free country
So free beyond a doubt
That if you had no food to eat
You were free to go without.

The subject is whether the individual has the right to break moral
and social restrictions prescribed by society and to live as he
wishes. A great many ballads carry such a theme, although they do
not develop it as a theme, but focus only on the story. The Workhouse
Donkey is probably the least traditional of the plays under con­
sideration here, yet it contains a traditional love triangle, includ­
ing the rich boy and poor girl who are prevented from marrying by
their parents. The main storyline has traditional overtones in that
it retells the heroic deeds of an "Emperor" as he goes into his last
battle.

Another of the critical elements of the ballad of oral tradi­
tion is the objective, impersonal stance of the narrator. All ballad
scholars have noted that the storyline is never interrupted by the
personal comments of the narrator, but moves swiftly without subjec­
tive interference. A true ballad is "destitute of moral aim;"28 the
narrator is neither didactic nor moralistic. Arden appends this
slightly, stating that "if the poet intends us to make a judgement
on his characters, this will be implied by the whole turn of the
story, not by intellectualized comments as it proceeds."29 That Arden
is neither subjective nor moralistic is an oft-repeated statement of
critics. As detailed in the previous chapter, Arden is greeted with
bewilderment and hostility because he does not appear to take sides,
or even let his audience take sides to the point of identifying
closely with the characters. It is because he seems consciously to
obstruct empathic involvement that Arden has been labeled Brechtian. Rather, he is holding closely to the technique of ballad construction, offering no moral lessons that might impede the development of and concentration on his stories. His purpose is to tell a 'true tale,' and let the audience draw its own conclusions. Musgrave and the Soldier are never given enough background to permit the audience to relate closely to them; they do not exist independently of their stories. Nelson and King John are obviously independent of their plays, yet Arden's craft tarnishes the historical image of Nelson and restores that of John in order that the audience will view the two more objectively. The Hero Rises Up comes closer to being a study of a philosophical and political question (what is heroism?) than a story about an individual, yet the audience is still left to conclude for themselves whether Nelson is a hero. The heroic deeds of Butterthwaite and Armstrong are detailed, yet precisely because they are heroic deeds and not the actions of ordinary men, they do not permit empathic involvement with the characters. Finally, Arden balances admiration for the Sawneys' freedom of lifestyle and honesty with a vicious indifference to other people. In all these plays, Arden has at least one character speak directly to the audience, preventing the same empathic involvement that can come in realistic drama. In short, he determinedly and successfully holds to his purpose of avoiding moral conclusions about his characters and his plays.

A fourth characteristic of ballads is concentration on a single compressed episode with abrupt, dramatic openings and sudden transitions. The ballad stresses the crisis rather than the inciting
incident or denouement, and shifts readily from place to place to pick up the story at each of its critical moments. No scene is important in and of itself. A character's motivation in any given situation and smooth transitions of place and time are both subordinated to the plot. Arden, in theory, recognizes this element of ballad construction.

The poets see their people at moments of alarming crisis, comic or tragic. The action goes as in Japanese films— from sitting down everyone suddenly springs into furious running, with no faltering intermediate steps.30

Translating this technique into dramatic terms, however, is more difficult to achieve than to discuss. If a playwright concentrates exclusively on the moment of 'alarming crisis' he will probably have written a short one-act, or a play that extends into a psychological study of motivation (as in the plays of Strindberg). What he must use are stories which jump from moment to moment, all of them crucial to the growth and resolution of the story. Dramatic motion must be persuaded by what happens next rather than why is this happening now.

The dramatic style of John Arden fits this pattern. His plays are episodic and scenes dart across the stage in rapid succession, promoting the plot, savouring a moment only for its contribution to the crisis, providing background only if it explains what is happening now. Consequently, Arden's style is characterized by roles which appear in one short scene, with little or no character development. Major characters who have had long, consistently successful lives are captured at the time of their single defeat. Armstrong, Butterthwaite, Musgrave and Nelson have each survived in the System for years, but Arden portrays them only at the moment of 'alarming crisis' in their
lives. *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* opens with the crossing of the soldiers into the town, establishing the isolation of the town and introducing the characters. The play then moves abruptly to the confluence of opposing forces—townspeople, soldiers, and officials. Musgrave expects to have two or three days to establish his case, but the entire action is condensed into a single evening and early morning. The play, however, breaks the ballad style in that it has a concluding scene after the crisis has passed. In contrast, *Left-Handed Liberty* does not readily meet this criterion of the ballad style, probably because of the need for historical re-creation. Nevertheless, the play manages to focus directly on John's struggle against the System through hundreds of political machinations by barons and monarch alike. The scene with the Goldsmith's wife and the parson viola is the criterion because it is pertinent to the subject of the play, but not to the plot. The play concludes abruptly with John's death. *The Workhouse Donkey* opens with the arrival of Feng, moves quickly to Butterthwaite's downfall, pausing at the end only momentarily for a reconciliation of the forces within the System. For all its involutions of plot, the play holds strictly to those moments which contribute to the downfall of Butterthwaite. Each of the scenes which do not deal with Butterthwaite illustrates the myriad of personal motivations put in motion by him and which together combine to cause his defeat. *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* begins with the breakup of the peace conference, precipitating the conflict between Lindsay and Armstrong. The former immediately establishes his plan of action and carries it out. The play ends abruptly with Armstrong's death and the statement of the legend of the tree. Only the subplot
of the evangelist impedes the narration. Likewise, the story of Lord Nelson, after the Prologue, chronicles his victory at Naples, his triumphal return, the Danish battle and Trafalgar. The focus of the entire play is the military victories and personal defeats of Nelson which both make and break his heroic image. Emma, Nisbet and Lady Nelson remain subordinate to the plot. The Sawneys and Jacksons, in *Live Like Pigs*, are involved in a crisis compressed in time. The disintegration of their neighborhood occurs within a four-day period. Despite the fascinating creations of Blackmouth, Col, Rosie and Old Croaker, Arden does not tarry with their development, but concentrates on the story of their conflict with the Jacksons.

The structure of a play does not readily lend itself to the realization of the ballad characteristics of an abrupt opening, sudden transitions, little or no conclusion and emphasis on a single, compressed episode. Nevertheless, Arden has come close to realizing these elements of a ballad despite the demands of the theatrical situation. He develops few subplots, he provides few preliminaries and he launches the main character directly into the action that precipitates his fall. The characters are all found at a moment of alarming crisis. The numerous scenes are short, encapsulated and suggestive of rapidity of action. The plays' conclusions are usually abrupt and never provide neat moralistic explanations. Although Arden's purpose is to dramatize the conflict of an individual against the System and therefore is not strictly narrative, he nevertheless prevents that purpose from interfering with his story. That purpose emerges after the play, not during it.

Also heightening the ballad quality of Arden's plays is
extensive use of songs. These songs, structured like the chorus of a ballad, are directed to the audience to remind them that they are being told rather than witnessing a real event. The themes of many of these songs are traditional stories of lost love, soldiers gone to war or sexual adventures. Almost all the other songs serve a function similar to that of a Greek chorus, stating the play's theme, introducing or concluding a scene, or increasing the sense of drama at a critical moment. Most of the songs are written in a fairly simple metre in order that folk tunes can be adapted for the production.

The function of the songs in Serjeant Musgrave's Dance is to intensify the balladlike quality of the play. Of the eight songs, five deal with lost love, the army or war. Two others are doggerel verse and one is an improvisation that emphasizes the emotion and intensity of the scene. Left-Handed Liberty, which utilizes a considerable amount of verse, has only three songs, one of love, one which states the theme of the play and one of doggerel verse. The most extensive combination of song and verse is found in The Workhouse Donkey, which contains eleven songs. Five of the songs serve to reveal character, as in Butterthwaite's 'workhouse donkey' song, and the laments of Boocock and Sweetman. Two others both reveal character and intensify the emotion of the scene. When Blomax reveals to Wiper that he knows about Gloria's abortion he sings of her, but the song also comes at a critical moment for both men.

Big Gloria is a gorgeous girl
And keeps many more employed
Whose gorgeous curves for gorgeous money
Are frequently enjoyed,
And where and how that money goes
Is fruitless to inquire,
For bare and fruitless ever must be
The fruits of man's desire.31

Two songs in the play have traditional love themes, and the other two
have a choral function of concluding a scene. Armstrong's Last
Goodnight, with its legendary hero and rustic setting, has eight
songs, of which five are on themes of love and sex. Each is balladlike
in its construction, as is this song of First Armstrong and the Maid.

FIRST ARMSTRONG (sings). Och aye--
She met wi' him in the kitchen
Wi' the strae strewn on the flair,
Beside the fire he laid her down
His fingers in her hair.

MAID (sings).
And first he pu'd the emerauds aff
And then the diamonds bricht
That hing upon her lovely halse;
He didna need their licht!32

Two songs which are improvisations and a third which reveals character
also have ballad characteristics: incremental repetition, short metre
and rhyme. Soldier, Soldier is also strongly rooted in the ballad
tradition; its storyline could itself be the subject of a ballad.
Predictably, four of the five songs are of sex and love, while a
fifth heightens the emotion of the scene. The Hero Rises Up, sub-
titled a 'melodrama,' includes songs in every scene. The songs serve
every function for which Arden has employed them in other plays--
traditional thematic material (love, war, death), improvisations on
the moment, revelation of character, statement of theme, intensity of
emotion and the choral function of introducing, concluding or explain-
ing action. An example of the use of song to intensify the emotion of
a scene is found in Act I. Nelson has won the Battle of Naples and
conquered Emma. The two begin to dance, while supporters of the dead King are murdered. Allen is unable to contain his emotions in prose, and breaks into song to express his horror at their indifference to politics. In _Live Like Pigs_, one of Arden's earliest plays, the songs had not been integrated into the action, but introduce each scene, thematically highlighting its purpose. In addition, there are two songs of doggerel verse and one song of war which appear in the immediate action of a scene. Arden has instructed directors of _Live Like Pigs_ to insure that the songs blend into the action. As with all the songs in his other plays, the songs are not simply Brechtian devices to alienate the audience from the action but are integral to the action itself. In this case, they direct the audience's attention to the line of action in the ensuing scene. As with a Greek chorus, they state the theme, thus permitting the audience to concentrate on how the story develops theme.

In addition to the use of song, verse is extensively utilized (except in _Live Like Pigs_) to heighten the poetic quality of the plays and thus to provide a further link between ballads and the plays of John Arden. Structurally, the verse is either rhymed, blank verse or doggerel. It serves the same functions as the songs in the plays: stating a traditional theme, improvising on the moment, intensifying the emotion of a scene, stating the theme of the play and introducing, concluding or explaining action. With each play he has written, Arden has increasingly used verse. There are no verse speeches in _Live Like Pigs_, only three in _Serjeant Musgrave's Dance_. Two of these three treat traditional themes, while the third is an improvisation on the moment. The latter is typical of Arden's use of verse in this
capacity. Musgrave forces Sparky to repeat why they've come to the town.

SPARKY (incoherent with recollecting what he wants to forget). I'm doing here? I'm doing... Serjeant, you know it. 'Cos he died. That wor Billy. I got drunk. Four days and four nights. After work of one night. Absent. Not sober. Improperly dressed.

He tries to turn it into one of his jokes.

Stick me in a cell, boys, Pull the prison bell Black Jack Musgrave To call the prison roll--

The television play, Soldier, Soldier, is Arden's first extensive use of verse, with most of the Soldier's speeches in verse, as well as those of Mary and Parker whenever they talk with the Soldier. The dual function of this verse is to de-emphasize any realism of setting and to heighten the ballad qualities of the play. Because the plot is itself the subject for a ballad (the lost love of a girl whose young husband has gone to war), the material is ideally suited to verse. Although Arden returned to a more restricted use of verse in Left-Handed Liberty, he introduced a new element to his characters' verse, a classical quality of declaring to an audience what is about to happen and that what will happen must happen. In other words, the verse reveals a sense of inevitability which the characters express concerning the direction of the play's action. Pandulph's speech at the end of Act I illustrates Arden's use of verse to conclude a scene, to reveal character and to express a fateful sense of inevitability about the action.

Storm breaks in among the perfect circles, Every day a puff of wind or a rumble of thunder Declares some vain attempt to declare--what?
Very busy very busy very busy.
Whatever it is, it will be vain,
It will be some broken blunder:
But we who preserve the circles
Preserve their unfaulted music,
And we who are privileged to hear it
Can do no more than wonder
When presumptuous persons, particularly Bishops,
Believe that they with their own false notes can steer it
Into a new tune.
Why, they do not think that God speaks through their Charter?
This month is the twelve hundredth and fifteenth June
Since God did speak.
Who would dare to seek
For the marble fingers of Mount Sinai
Crooked around that serious young man's pen?
Blood bones and water
To be laughed at hereafter
Or brittle glass windows to be broken by broken men. 34

Verse is extensively used in The Workhouse Donkey, primarily to reveal character and to intensify the emotion of a scene. Four of the five major characters, Feng, Boocock, Sweetman and Butterthwaite, speak in verse to explain their personalities. Again, the verse both declares intentions and predicts outcome, thus providing a sense of fate, of inevitability and of irreversible action. Feng's speech in the opening scene is typical.

FENG. Then I will tell you mine. I am here
To keep the law. And therefore must begin
By testing at all points the law you keep
Already, and how you keep it. Public houses
Are indeed one point. But only one. And who
Frequent such public houses, or such clubs,
Or hotels if you call them so, or what
Or where--is neither here nor there! Provided
That the law is kept. And where not kept
I should be glad of relevant information,
Or none at all. I do not know you, sir.
I do not know this people. And I must test
The whole community according to
The rigid statutes and the statutes only.
I can assure you now without vainglory
My testing will be thorough. 35

Included in Armstrong's Last Goodnight are six verse speeches, two
of love, two improvisations and two which reveal character. These latter speeches, Lindsay's statements of how he will defeat Armstrong, are also identifiable as those of a classical hero, for they are self-willed declarations to the audience of the reasons why an action must take place. Finally, the verse in *The Hero Rises Up* uses all the same structures and functions as those employed in the other plays. Because the play relies heavily on song, the verse serves additionally to provide smoother transitions between song and dialogue.

In conclusion, Arden has written theatrical ballads to the extent that the ballad characteristics he has employed are a sufficient approximation of the ballad form. Whether Arden has used enough of these characteristics and used them appropriately enough to warrant the ballad label on his plays is, ultimately, a matter of personal judgment. Given that he is working in a different artistic medium, he has taken the central elements of the ballad as identified earlier and constructed a theatrical form remarkably similar to the poetic ballad. His plays tell a story of people at moments of alarming crisis in their lives. The themes are traditional, including the predominant theme of all the plays, the struggle of an appealing central character to overcome impossible odds (against the System). The action moves swiftly, often abruptly. An objective playwright, Arden refuses to side with any of his characters, but rather tells his story directly, without attempting to bias the audience. Finally, he has made extensive use of both verse and song to heighten the poetic resonance in his plays. The songs are often directed to the audience to increase the sense that they are being told a story. Both the verse and song lyrics are often written in a manner similar
to the ballad form, although some of the verse is more reminiscent of classical drama than of the ballad. Regardless of the degree of success accorded Arden in creating ballads, the theatrical ballad form best summarizes the style and structure of his writing. It includes all the elements of his plays and provides relationships between them. It does not arbitrarily impose a critical label on the plays, but is the outgrowth of Arden's own statements about drama.

Conclusion

The adapted ballad form, then, is the theatrical style which best explains Arden's technique. Yet, other critics have insisted that Arden is a Brechtian-styled writer. Indeed, the plays of Brecht can as readily be analyzed as ballads as those of Arden. There are, for example, important similarities between the ballad form and the Brechtian style: emphasis on telling a story, episodic structure, use of traditional themes, and songs. One critical difference between Arden and Brecht remains, however: Arden is objective, permitting his audience to draw whatever conclusions from his story it may wish; Brecht is didactic, telling his audience directly the moral of his story. Arden's purpose as a playwright is to please his audience. The songs, lyrics, verse and direct addresses to the audience are all intended to bring the audience into the play, while Brecht uses such techniques to keep his audience from empathizing with the story. In his preface to *The Workhouse Donkey*, Arden identifies the characteristics of theatre which he believes need emphasis if it is ever again to be catholic:
Although he has not included these in each of his plays, they nevertheless suggest the thrust of Arden's theatrics: to break away from intellectualized drama, to encourage enjoyment for its own sake and to identify those elements of life which we all share or want to share (if only vicariously) and place them in the theatre. Thus, despite the technical similarities between Arden and Brecht, their purposes diverge.

Arden chooses the ballad form because it fits his concept of theatre: to tell a story that will appeal to all audiences. Traditional ballad themes appeal to him for their universality, their simplicity and their popularity. They permit him to include within them his own material and ideas. He can set his plays in a historical context to give the perspective of distance to his ideas, yet maintain integrity to his form, because the ballad is always a tale of past deeds. The theatrical ballad increases the episodic structure of the plays, thus reducing concentration on motivation, character, background and setting. Often characters are not named because they are only part of a moment, not part of the whole story. Arden can suggest, as he does for most of his plays, that the setting should remain simple because all that is important is the story. The theatrical ballad emphasizes plot, lyricism and audience contact, and de-emphasizes subjectivity. Almost half of the plays' songs deal with stories of

noise
disorder
drunkenness
lasciviousness
nudity
generosity
corruption
fertility
and ease.36
lost love, soldiers gone to war or the woes of army life. Thus, the ballad form affects the lyrical moments of the plays as well as the direction of the story. The ballad structure allows Arden to experiment: it gives him greater flexibility of dramatic structure than a naturalistic play, better enables him to utilize contemporary theatre trends than classical drama and insures him more opportunity to work with language than the structure of contemporary social dramas. In short, the ballad is ideal for the formal and stylistic needs of John Arden, in spite of the difficulty of translating it into the dramatic medium.

The question remains, then, to what extent does the content of Arden's plays relate to the theatrical ballad form? The previous chapter established that the central storyline in Arden's plays is the attempt of an individual to overpower the System within which he lives and use it to his own purposes. In each case, the individual has appealing features of independence, vitality, self-confidence and will-power, all of which are in such proportion as to border on the heroic. The System, in contrast, is awesome in its moral authority, political power and social control. It is inert until challenged, then brutal in its indifference. The conflict is universal, simple and appealing, as are the traditional ballad themes. That Arden does not award victory to the hero does not take him away from the ballad tradition. One of the most common ballad stories is that of two lovers who die because one is married and the spouse kills them. The victory of the System in no way lessens the relationship of Arden's plays to the ballad form. It is, rather, the kind of social
criticism of which Arden wrote,

... if it is expressed within the framework of the traditional poetic truths it can have a weight and an impact derived from something more than contemporary documentary facility. 37

Arden's plays conclude that heroism and individuality of a high order are not possible in today's structured society. His dramatic structure, the theatrical ballad, is an ideal vehicle for the expression of that view.
CHAPTER VI: FOOTNOTES


2 Ibid., p. 128.

3 Ibid., pp. 128-129.


7 Gordon Hall Gerould, The Ballad of Tradition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), p. 120.


9 Gummere, op. cit., p. 79.

10 Gerould, op. cit., p. 11.


12 Hart, op. cit., p. 781.

13 Ibid., p. 782.

14 Gerould, op. cit., p. 8.

15 Henderson, op. cit., p. 29.

16 Gummere, op. cit., p. 68.

17 Ibid., pp. 71-85.

18 Gerould, op. cit., p. 105.


20 Friedman, op. cit., p. 44.

21 Ibid., p. 274.

22 Ibid., p. 276.

23 Ibid., p. 300.

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24 ibid., p. 344. 25 Arden, op. cit., p. 128.

26 ibid. 27 ibid.

28 Henderson, op. cit., p. 29.

29 Arden, op. cit., p. 129. 30 ibid., p. 127.


33 John Arden, Serjeant Musgrave's Dance (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), i. iii. 34.


35 Arden, The Workhouse Donkey, op. cit., i. ii. 27.

36 ibid., p. 9.

37 Arden, "Telling a True Tale," op. cit., p. 128.
Arnold Wesker is neither as politically polemical nor John Arden as politically ambiguous as the critics would have everyone believe. Their politics is both more defined and confined than is commonly assumed. In Wesker's plays, the tension between a fervent socialism and the humanistic desire to accept everyone has been ignored. In Arden's plays the inability to identify the political predispositions of the playwright has confused those who would have Arden be a polemicist. Insofar as Wesker and Arden are prime examples of political drama in England from 1956 to 1966, the inescapable conclusion must be that the period was hardly saturated with political debates and counterattacks, stormy audience receptions and inflamed political passions onstage. In part, this results from the fact that those plays which are political are not at the same time polemical: they do not argue the viewpoint of a single party or faction to the exclusion of all others, nor do they elevate the play's thought above its plot. Wesker's socialism is so thoroughly steeped in humanism by the time it reaches his audience that it lacks the propagandistic, committed attack of a Waiting for Lefty. Wesker's plays do not seek to entrap an audience but to enfold them. Arden, likewise, avoids political doctrine and philosophy altogether, offering instead his vision of the consequences of the growth and power of the political System.
To study the drama of Arnold Wesker and John Arden is to ask a series of questions about the relationship between politics and drama. Are the plays of Arden and Wesker successful as political drama? Are they didactic? Do they 'serve the people,' as socialists would have them do? Are their plays, like others of the movement, 'period' pieces precisely because of their politics? Insofar as the plays are political, are they then relevant only to English audiences? Have their plays achieved attention because of their politics or in spite of them? Is there a single dramatic form best suited to political content? On a more theoretical level but equally apropos are some aesthetic questions raised by this study. What is the effect of a political play? Should a political play be assessed on the basis of its politics or its theatrics? When is a political play propagandist or polemical? Can a playwright effectively integrate his political beliefs into the framework of his plays? All these questions elude conclusive answers. To assess the effectiveness and importance of Wesker and Arden and to place their plays in the political context of modern British drama, however, they must be asked. This chapter discusses these questions, not with an eye to answering what others have failed to answer, but with the hope that new guidelines may be suggested as a result of this study. Before undertaking this, however, some background to the issue of political theatre is necessary.

**The Issue of Political Theatre**

The issue of political theatre is an old one, with roots stretching back to the sixteenth century debate over whether theatre should please or instruct. The question whether theatre can or should
be political is not as clearcut as that debate, but is similar in
that it forces consideration of both the function and potential effect
of theatre. In Britain, two giants of the drama, Shaw and Galsworthy,
both advocated a theatre of social and political awareness. Although
neither was polemical to the point of ignoring the essence of their
characters, they established a tradition of social concern and politi­
cal discussion in the theatre to which both Wesker and Arden are deeply
indebted. Galsworthy epitomizes the theatre of social concern, as is
illustrated in this summary analysis of his work by R. H. Coats.

We find, then, in Galsworthy's plays a state of social
misery and unrest, largely brought about by (a) unbalanced
personal egoism and group self-centredness; (b) undue
dominance of the acquisitive and possessive dispositions
in the wielding of social power, the determining of social
judgments, and the allocation of social punishments and
rewards; and (c) the general lack of imaginative sympathy
and a communal sense of the social organism as a whole.

Coats, however, is quick to add that Galsworthy did not find in politics
any relief for the social ills he describes. A strongly naturalistic
playwright greatly indebted to Ibsen and Brioux, Galsworthy was a
social playwright, not a political one (as defined in this disserta­
tion.) His primary concern was the social evils which were the
consequence of the economic and class system in England. Although
he rarely brought either the social evils or the economic system in
political focus, he is nevertheless seminal for establishing in the
British theatre the tradition of dramatizing social problems and
expressing his own personal outrage at them.

George Bernard Shaw, on the other hand, did not shy away from
politics; if anything, he revelled in it. Yet he also revelled in
social, economic, religious and philosophical questions as well. Shaw
championed the discursive plays of his era, especially those of Henrik Ibsen. In *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, he wrote,

> Formerly you had in what was called a well made play an exposition in the first act, a situation in the second, and unravelling in the third. Now you have exposition, situation, and discussion; and the discussion is the test of the playwright. The critics protest in vain. They declare that discussions are not dramatic, and that art should not be didactic. Neither the playwrights nor the public take the smallest notice of them.

Shaw was adamant in his support of a theatre that instructs against that of a theatre that gives pleasure.

> But the great dramatist has something better to do than to amuse either himself or his audience. He has to interpret life.

This statement captures an essential element of Shaw's drama, his greater concern with Life than with living. His plays are never confined to either a political or social issue, but always encompass the potential progress and development of mankind. As Robert Brustein has said, Shaw's dramatic revolt was the result of his dissatisfaction with man and society.

> Though he shares the rebel's hatred of reality, however, Shaw is more sanguine about his ability to change it, which is why he offers a detailed program of reform, aimed at moral, political, and religious salvation. Still, if the gospel of Shavianism is optimistic, social, and progressive, the implications of Shaw's revolt are negative, individualistic, and disintegrative.

Although not exclusively political, Shaw established the prerogative of the playwright to enter the realm of political ideas with the intention of persuading his audience to his viewpoint.

Shaw's dramatic credo serves as the starting point in the twentieth century for the argument about whether theatre can or should be political. That argument became more pronounced and heated because
of the plays of Bertolt Brecht, who rejected an Aristotelian theatre of emotion in favor of a didactic theatre of reason.

Briefly, the Aristotelian play is essentially static; its task is to show the world as it is. The learning-play is essentially dynamic; its task is to show the world as it changes (and also how it may be changed). . . . The latter theatre holds that the audience is a collection of individuals, capable of thinking and of reasoning, of making judgments even in the theatre; it treats it as individuals of mental and emotional maturity, and believes it wishes to be so regarded.

With the learning-play, then, the stage begins to be didactic.5

Both Shaw and Brecht not only preferred a theatre of political ideas and discussion but they insisted on it. The certainty of their convictions and the popularity of their plays has kept the issue from disappearing for lack of attention or lack of support for the affirmative side of the debate.

Support from the plays of Shaw and Brecht has been necessary because the majority of critics (and American audiences) object to the intrusion of political issues and philosophies into the drama. They assume some kind of aesthetic continuum on which political plays are to be judged. Robert Brustein, who is normally sympathetic to committed drama, proves that even he believes there are limitations on the extent of political commitment in drama when he decries the fact that "the theatre of commitment. . . is again becoming a theatre of naked slogans and raw emotionalism. . . ."6 In Modern British Dramatists, he suggests that "What most of the great modern dramatists have understood. . . is that whatever his personal affiliations, the writer must remain independent in his art—that even political plays must be free from partisanship. . . ."7 Gerald Rabkin identifies this same aesthetic concern in Drama and Commitment when
he says,

The most difficult single problem that the Theatre Union had to face because of its ideological commitment was the discovery of plays that were both politically aware and dramatically sound.8

Eric Bentley, in stating the case against political theatre, confesses sadly that the theatre is "an institution that has very little effect on politics."9

Socialist critics are predictably more insistent on the need for a political theatre. Bertolt Brecht, who coined the epigram "art is never without consequences," wrote that "for art to be 'unpolitical' means only to ally itself with the 'ruling' group."10

Art critic John Berger explicates his artistic credo in Permanent Red.

First, you must answer the question: What can art serve here and now? Then you criticize according to whether the works in question serve that purpose or not. . . . The question I ask is: Does this work help or encourage men to know and claim their social rights?11

Although he does not require an artist to concentrate exclusively on social and political issues when working, he nevertheless expects the final product to have some kind of social and political relevance. Similarly, philosopher Ernst Fischer, in The Necessity of Art, articulates a socialist aesthetic that demands social consciousness on the part of the artist if not direct political involvement on the part of his work. Contemporary art, he believes, must promote the reunification of mankind and identify the path toward the new socialist society.

But even the highest attainable consciousness of the individual will not be able to reproduce the totality in the 'I'--will not be able to make one man encompass the whole human race. And so, just as language represents the accumulation of the collective experience of millennia in every individual, just as science equips every individual with the knowledge acquired by the human race as a whole,
so the permanent function of art is to re-create as every individual's experience the fulness [sic] of all that he is not, the fulness of humanity at large.12

Other socialists are more demanding, endorsing the belief that art should not only deal with political and social questions, but should be subservient to the needs of society. "The greatest mission of writers is to serve the people,"13 asserted Nikita Khrushchev during his rule in the Soviet Union. In the United States, socialist pressure on writers was especially evident during the Depression. Writing of the period, Walter Rideout recalls that much of the socialist community demanded that writers "should deal with the more obvious aspects of the class struggle, melodramatize their characters into good workers versus evil bourgeoisie, and end on a carefully affirmative note whether the internal logic or the novel demanded such a conclusion or its opposite."14 Ernst Fischer comes close to this view of the artist.

Art is itself a social reality. Society needs the artist, that supreme sorcerer, and it has a right to demand of him that he should be conscious of his social function.15

Eric Bentley, taking a more temperate view, at least recognizes the potential effect of a theatre that presents political ideas.

The political theater is not solely of political interest. It is through politics that the modern drama occasionally becomes a People's Theater. The political shade of the message is a matter for a political discussion. What is of more interest here is the fact that political theater can by touching the spectator's everyday interests rouse him from his torpor till he becomes alert, inquisitive, and then pleased, angry, contemptuous, or whatever, according to plan.16

Because many of the advocates of political theatre in the United States and Britain are socialist, the debate is often reduced to a partisan political dispute. The Brechtian theory, shared by
other left-wing writers, that non-political art is political because it endorses the status quo only solidifies this partisan element. Socialist pressure on artists to serve the people further enhances the volatile and polemical atmosphere within which political theatre is assessed, because non-socialists wrap themselves in the banner of artistic freedom whenever art is asked to 'serve' anything. However, socialist advocacy of an art that serves the people should not permit critics to dismiss the entire issue on partisan grounds. There is no proof that all political theatre is socialist theatre, nor that all political theatre must serve the people. The plays of Arden prove the former, while some of the plays of Wesker validate the latter.

Yet another confusion in the debate is the blurred distinction between committed theatre and political theatre. The two terms are predictably equated in socialist literature, yet they are by no means one and the same. In part, the confusion derives from the notion that all committed theatre is political. Bentley is persuasive in suggesting that all committed art is "radical. It is a literature of protest, not approval, of outrage, not tribute." However, he is quick to add that radical does not perforce mean political. Jean Paul Sartre's famous plea for commitment in art concludes with a definition of commitment that is hardly confined to a political philosophy or party.

Each character will be nothing but the choice of an issue and will equal no more than the chosen issue. It is to be hoped that all literature will become moral and problematic like this new theatre. Moral—-not moralizing; let it show simply that man is also a value and that the questions he raises are always moral.

Even the socialist Brecht at one time suggested that his work was not really committed art.
The main subject of the drama must be relationships between one man and another as they exist today, and that is what I'm primarily concerned to investigate and find means of expression for. . . . I show them in parables: if you act this way, the following will happen, but if you act like that then the opposite will take place. This isn't the same thing as committed art.19

The other reason for the confusion is the reverse assumption that all political theatre is baldly committed. Clurman dispels this misconception, however.

What I was really driving at was that a play didn't have to deal with obvious social themes in order to have social significance. People who were concerned with such topics as 'revolution and the theatre' tended to seek social significance only where it was advertised, so to speak; and to do this might be to overlook some of the important work that our time might produce.20

It is therefore essential to remember in this discussion that the term 'committed' does not necessarily imply 'committed to politics,' nor that commitment has only one artistic avenue of expression, viz., didacticism. Insofar as the theory that all artists are advocates has aesthetic legitimacy, the proposition that all committed art is didactic is negated.

The last disagreement contributing to the confusion regarding political theatre is whether to consider the commitment of the artist himself, or only the commitment he expresses in his work. Walter Rideout identifies this issue.

... some left-wing critics did argue that subject matter, the expression of proletarian existence, was the chief characteristic distinguishing the proletarian novel from the usual 'bourgeois' one. Other critics polarized around what was, in terms of tradition in the American radical novel, a more usual definition. They maintained that the only important consideration was the conscious ideology of the author, whether he attempted, whatever his class origin, to work out in his fiction a Marxist analysis of society.21
John Howard Lawson comes close to suggesting that it is the ideology of the writer, not the content of the play, that is the factor which determines the political commitment of the playwright.

His work cannot be the product of ideas which are exclusively personal, because one cannot detach thinking from the objects of thought. His work cannot be exclusively a reflection, because he is not a blank mirror. He interprets his environment, not only in the form of what he sees or thinks he sees, but in the form of what he wishes and believes.\(^2^2\)

Gerald Rabkin concludes "that political commitment in itself is an inadequate test of esthetic effectiveness."\(^2^3\) Yet he relates the plays' commitment so closely to the ideology of the writer that he clings to the possibility of considering the playwright's ideology when analyzing the play's ideology.

Marxist condemnation of art which is not a weapon is obviously absurd; yet so too is the contrary assertion that all art which demands political action has abrogated its function. The crucial fact is how the writer utilizes his commitment: whether, as in the case of Lawson, it is obvious excrescence which has little relation to the artist's experience or whether, as in the case of Odets (and we might add Brecht, Silone and Malraux), the organic structure of his work is dependent upon and rises from the artist's political convictions.\(^2^4\)

In *The Writer and Commitment*, John Mander doggedly insists that the only consideration of commitment must be that which appears in the work itself.

Brecht's commitment, like that of any other artist, must be sought in the work itself, not in Brecht's views about his own work.\(^2^5\)

The remainder of this study adopts Mander's position in the belief that it is futile to impose externally a political commitment on a play that may not have been intended by its author. To do that is to risk missing completely the essence of the play. Critical
assessment of Wesker's plays is a case in point: in the search for political meaning, some critics have missed the humanist thrust of the early plays and the thematic similarity of the later plays to the earlier ones. The essence of theatre lies in the immediacy of the play for the audience; the audience does not think of what the author has said outside of the theatre, but is instead interested only in what is said at that moment in the play. Although reading a play affords the luxury of comparing source material at the same time to the play itself, such material can serve only as a guide to enhancing one's understanding of the ideology or commitment of that play; it is not a blanket with which to smother the play's unique meaning. The reading of dramatic material must never lose touch with its basis in theatre and in the theatre the audience responds to the playwright through the play, not through what is said in the program notes.

Aesthetic Implications of the Political Plays of Wesker and Arden

The relationship of politics and drama, then, is saturated with ambiguity, acrimony and confusion; the ambiguity derives from unsatisfactory definition of terms, the acrimony from the general debate itself and from pleas for artistic freedom, and the confusion from the tendency to accept socialist theories of political theatre as definitive of all political theatre. To offer a suggested relationship between politics and drama that is devoid of these three it is pertinent to review the work of Arnold Wesker and John Arden, in order to explicate the aesthetic implications of their political plays, and in the process to establish the groundwork for a more objective
and concrete treatment of political theatre. The most effective method of review is to answer a series of aesthetic questions raised by their plays.

First, are their plays successful as political drama? This question presumes that a successful political play is one that persuades its audience to modify, alter or reinforce its political behavior or philosophy in consequence of the politics of the play itself. It is extremely doubtful, however, that this is a valid test of a political play's success. If other plays are judged on their ability to make an audience think or feel, a political play should be required to do no more. A political play is one that illustrates or discusses an individual's or a group's effort to gain and exert influence, or to obtain and exercise power in the administration of government and the making of public policy. It is not, as already noted, necessarily a play of advocacy. In addition, those plays which do advocate a political posture should not be dismissed for their inability to convert. Even if the playwright himself expressly confines his success to political persuasion, he cannot ignore the serendipitous effects his play may have on an audience. A play that fails politically may yet be successful artistically. Beyond that, however, it is impossible to determine whether a play is successful politically because audience reaction is never fully known. Since both Wesker and Arden have been less than receptive to critics' assessment of their work, reviews are equally unsatisfying as a determinant of success.

This dissertation has established that the plays of Arnold Wesker are neither as politically charged nor as didactic as most
critics have implied. Nevertheless, the early plays are clearly infused with a socialist atmosphere and philosophy. Wesker's plays could be considered successful as political drama because they have been interpreted as political, at least establishing that the playwright made his point. There is, however, no indication that any direct action was taken as a result of any of his plays. Centre 42 was, almost certainly, the outgrowth of Wesker's personality rather than his plays. Whether individuals changed their political philosophy because of the plays cannot, of course, be answered. It is therefore fruitless to use such a critical standard.

In contrast to Wesker, John Arden would appear to be a failure in political terms, for the critics seldom capture the political message of his plays. None have seen the political implications of the struggle between the individual and the System. Those who find political material in some of the plays (particularly *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* and *The Workhouse Donkey*) are usually baffled by the author's treatment of it. Again, there is no way of gauging audience reaction to Arden's plays to determine whether any have been persuaded to modify, alter or reinforce their political behavior by one of the plays. The inescapable conclusion is that his plays must be assessed in theatrical rather than political terms.

A second question akin to the first is whether these plays are politically didactic. As explained in Chapter IV, Wesker's plays have a didactic quality because their characters are didactic, and that, in turn, is because they are imbued with a humanism that must be expressed and shared. The plays do not preach action, nor force
political decisions from the audience while in the theatre. Wesker writes a political doctrine; he dramatizes a political philosophy which itself clearly intends to persuade. Yet his primary interest is the actions of people who either believe or reject socialist philosophy. His focus is therefore greater than politics, as shown by the fact that the humanistic message becomes the true thrust of his later plays. In short, his early plays are didactic, but they teach more about humanism than socialism. It is therefore dangerous to use the term 'didactic' in a political context because the audience may learn from a play more than a political message.

In sharp contrast, Arden's plays are neither didactic in intention nor in effect. Arden presents his audience with insights into the nature of political behavior regardless of the philosophy behind that behavior. His plays warn against the loss of political freedom through the impersonalization and bureaucratization of the System. They are a reminder of the perpetual conflict between the rights of the individual and the requirements of the society, and the persistent need to keep the two balanced. Finally, they are a reminder that political activity is undertaken by human beings who are, for all the political trappings with which they may have surrounded themselves, nothing more than human beings. Arden's plays thus prove that all political plays are not didactic, nor need they be. If the purpose of a playwright is to dramatize the workings of the political System and the people in that System rather than to dramatize a political philosophy, then the play neither is nor should be didactic.
Since Wesker professes socialism, it is pertinent to ask whether his plays, as well as those of Arden, 'serve the people.' Many socialist critics apply this standard to all art, insisting that the artist promote the unification of all mankind (by identifying and attacking the elements of capitalism which fragment and divide society), offer constructive criticism of socialist society and ideas or identify the path to the new society. Wesker's plays in varying degrees meet these standards. His main characters advocate communication as a means of breaking down barriers between people, his plays expose those socialist leaders who are committed to maintaining themselves in power rather than to promoting socialist ideals, and he offers some indication of what the new society will be like and how best to achieve it. At times, however, his cynicism is greater than his ideals: Ronnie remains unconvinced in Chicken Soup with Barley, Peter breaks down in The Kitchen and Andrew becomes an embittered man because of his compromises in Their Very Own and Golden City. Jeremy Hawthorne's attack on The Four Seasons, noted in Chapter IV, is probably correct in asserting that that play does not meet the critical standards of true socialist criticism. Although Wesker's answer is persuasive to non-socialists, it stretches the socialist ethic considerably in order to include the play within the socialist rubric. The play is at best a limited identification of the path to the new society. Neither does The Friends meet this socialist criterion. Of the other plays, the argument can at least be sustained that they promote the unity of mankind and occasionally offer constructive criticism of socialist leaders.
Arden's plays must be judged unsatisfactory by socialist critical standards: they fail to achieve any of the goals outlined above. While they may serve the people by alerting them to the dangers of the political System, they do not serve the proletariat by alerting them to the dangers of the capitalist political System. Arden's focus is political activity devoid of doctrinal preferences and prejudices. This socialist critical standard, therefore, is not applicable to all political plays and is of utility only to socialists.

Are the plays of Wesker and Arden, like others written in the late 1950's, 'period' pieces because of their politics? The question merits an answer because political drama always risks dating itself when it deals with immediately topical political subjects. John Russell Taylor, to illustrate the point, has suggested that Look Back in Anger seems dated today.

... Jimmy Porter and his milieu seem, even at this short distance of time, as inescapably 'period' as the characters in The Vortex, quintessentially 'mid-fifties'... 26

MacBird, for example, is a play that will probably never be produced again. The play's entire conceit, that Lyndon Johnson bears some similarity to MacBeth, is both irrelevant and repugnant in light of recent events. An extreme example, the play nevertheless illustrates the difficulty of dramatizing contemporary political events and problems. At least two of Wesker's plays are probably casualties of this phenomenon. Chicken Soup with Barley, with its focus on the evolution of a Jewish family from 1936 to 1956 and its topical references to Stalinist policies and the Hungarian revolt, is in danger of becoming dated. I'm Talking About Jerusalem, despite the fact that commune living has become popular in the United States, is infused with the
aura of the 1950's both because of its uncompromising commitment to a political lifestyle and its references to contemporary events. Although commitment is as much a part of today's politics as it was in the 1950's, the style of that commitment has changed radically because of political assassinations, the youth movement of the late 1960's and the heightened awareness that commitment does not by itself provide solutions. Just as ban-the-bomb rallies seemed 'right' fifteen years ago but not today, so do socialist experiments of the kind undertaken by Dave and Ada somehow fit that period rather than today's. Wesker's other plays, however, do not suffer from topicality. Their thematic material, dialogue and characterizations are not bound by time. Their political philosophy is as relevant and immediate today as it was fifteen years ago. Because his focus is socialist lifestyle and strategy rather than socialist activities and tactics, the plays remain of immediate interest to their audience.

Similarly, the plays of John Arden have no sense of the 1950's about them. Most are not even set in that period, but are historical drama, thus immediately eliminating the problem of dating altogether. Beyond that, however, their political subject matter is so closely related to larger questions about the capacity of the human animal that they will probably never date themselves. Like the Roman plays of Shakespeare, they offer insight into the political activities of Man rather than the activities of specific political men and specific political philosophies. Underlying some criticism of political plays is the notion that they will date themselves and are therefore not great art (which, as everyone knows, is of interest and value to all ages.) Arden and Wesker illustrate the silliness of this notion.
They have the potential to survive far longer than many nonpolitical plays of their era.

If the politics of the plays does not limit their relevance to a single time period, does it limit their relevance to English audiences because they alone would understand the political references? The question applies only to Wesker, since Arden's plays do not dramatize immediate or contemporary political events or philosophy. In the case of Wesker, however, it can be argued that his politics is peculiarly British, thus limiting the appeal of his plays to British audiences. The argument is supported by the fact that none of Wesker's plays have been a commercial or critical success in the United States. It is difficult to believe, however, that socialism, with advocates and political parties all over the world, could geographically confine a play's appeal. That many Americans respond negatively to anything that smacks of socialism is no reason to challenge the universal appeal of any socialist play. Indeed, the counter-argument would be made by socialists that socialism advocates world unity and therefore has intrinsic universal appeal. Further, this dissertation has established that Wesker's plays are as humanist in orientation as they are socialist (although Wesker would argue that the difference is moot), and the English certainly have no corner on humanism. The political plays of both Wesker and Arden therefore lead to the conclusion that political theatre does not a priori limit its audience appeal because of its politics; to the contrary, politics may increase its potential audience.

Have the plays of Arden and Wesker achieved attention because of their politics or in spite of them? In other words, do political
themes provide and sustain notoriety for a play or playwright? No ready answer can be given since it is impossible to determine the reasons for the attraction of a play. However, The Wesker Trilogy unquestionably owes much of its success to the anti-establishment plays that followed Look Back in Anger. They provided both an audience and a critical climate for the Trilogy. Wesker found himself at the forefront of the new wave because his plays were more openly political (or at least they seemed to be more political) than those of other playwrights; consequently, his plays nourished the very image of political activism in the whole movement which had caused their popularity. Whether Wesker's plays would have been successful had there been no such movement is, of course, unanswerable; in all likelihood they would not. His recent plays have not been as well received as the earlier ones; this is partly attributable to the critics' search for angry political commentary.

John Arden again offers an interesting contrast to Wesker. His plays have never had the same popularity as Wesker's, nor has he been treated as kindly by critics, who are usually baffled by his work. Because he began writing at the same time as Osborne, Wesker and Kops, he was automatically associated with 'the movement.' The association, however, was no more valid for him than it was for Pinter. His technical eclecticism, structural experimentation, stylistic preferences and historical subject matter separated him from the others. After Serjeant Musgrave's Dance, he was accepted less for his politics than for what the critics believed to be his lack of politics.

In a moment of anti-feminism, Eric Bentley once wrote that
"material seeks a form as woman seeks man." Each time a work is written a proper form has to be found."27 A last consideration emerging from the material of John Arden and Arnold Wesker is whether there is a single dramatic form or style best suited to the expression of political material. An affirmative answer would be dependent on a rather strong similarity of all dramatic political material. It is evident, however, that the answer is negative. Wesker's plays are, for the most part, naturalistic, introspective and traditional 'slices of life.' Arden's are theatrical, objective, expansive and unconventional. Wesker's three eminently political plays, The Kitchen, Chicken Soup with Barley and Their Very Own and Golden City, each has its own particular form. The latter, especially, differs vastly from the others in its use of flash-forwards, projections and a sixty-year timespan. John Arden's ballad form is similar through most of his political plays, yet it contrasts sharply with Wesker's forms. Wesker's treatment of political philosophy as against Arden's interest in political Man is itself a significant difference that suggests different formal consequences. The term political theatre, in other words, encompasses too wide a range of possible dramatic material to dictate a single form. The phrase 'political content' is inclusive of tremendous varieties of material such that no single style or form could adequately or effectively express all of them.

To understand the form of a play remains, therefore, a crucial task in order to capture a playwright's purpose. Wesker's choice of a naturalistic form for the Trilogy, for example, indicates that his intention is not didactic in a Brechtian sense but discursive in a Shavian sense. Arden's ballad form suggests his predominant
interest in telling a story rather than persuading his audience. Form is consequently central to a correct reading of the playwright and cannot be ignored in deference to exclusive concentration on political content.

**Politics and Theatre**

Any study of John Arden and Arnold Wesker is, ultimately, led to a cluster of theoretical and aesthetic questions regarding the present, proper and potential relationships of politics and theatre. In a discussion of political theatre written in 1960, Eric Bentley charged that theatre has very little capability to influence an audience's political predispositions. Six years later he amended his position, and reasoned that "the ideal audience for the Theatre of Commitment is, I think, neither one set of militants nor the other, but rather a mass of people in the middle, who may be vaguely sympathetic to the cause preached but are a little sluggish and sleepy about it. . . . Could not most of us say we belong to this audience, and does not the Theatre of Commitment have, by that token, a large enough clientele?" Nevertheless, the article concludes with the impression that the pro's and con's of political theatre are still evenly balanced.

And as for the particular kind of play I have chiefly been talking about, if it does not have much effect on the world, it may yet have quite a salutary effect on the theatre, always provided that the world consents to go on existing.

Bentley is an excellent starting-point for a consideration of these aesthetic problems surrounding political theatre because he has perceptively identified both sides of the question, what is the effect
of a political play? On the one hand, critics of political theatre will usually concede (but not always) that theatre can reinforce beliefs already held by those in agreement with the viewpoint of the playwright; beyond that, they claim, it can achieve little if anything. Who has been persuaded to socialism by Shaw or Wesker? Has any performance of the Living Theatre incited genuine political action outside the theatre itself? When has any play or theatre affected a political event or decision of any kind? Because these questions do not permit a pungent retort, the advocates of political theatre tend to shrink. They mumble such phrases as artistic necessity, social responsibility and relevance to the audience, but cannot withstand their opponents' glare unless, like some socialists, they ignore their opponents altogether.

The critics' questions, however, are rhetorical, and do not clarify the phenomenon of political theatre, for it is of little value to ask questions that have no answer. The assumption behind these questions is that no person or event has been politically influenced by theatre because we haven't heard about it; in fact, we would only hear about it if it were as newsworthy as the revelation at Lourdes. Why should it be reported, even in theatrical circles? That no political decision has been influenced by the theatre is an equally foolish argument partly because most politicians prefer to attribute their decisions to their social conscience than to their aesthetic preferences, and partly because few major decisions are made at exactly one moment in time (a prerequisite for establishing a causal link to a theatrical performance attended the night before.) Even if it were proved that a politician has never been influenced in
a decision by a play he saw the night before, it is still possible that he was influenced in the development of his political philosophy by a political drama he saw as a youth. Psychologists and educators currently argue about the deleterious effects of violence on television, something no one considered until the nation realized its potential for being a violent society. Although not as many children attend theatre as watch television, it is still possible that theatre can have a similar influence on a child. There is, of course, no hard data to prove the hypothesis that theatre affects politics or political beliefs, but then there is no hard data to the contrary either.

Beyond this, however, the effectiveness of political theatre has been falsely challenged. The test of effectiveness should not be whether a political play made its audience more Republican, radical or revolutionary, but whether the play had any effect at all. If the play reinforced the beliefs of the already converted, then it is still to be judged a success. The function of a preacher on Sunday is to reinforce; he is seldom dismissed if he doesn't convert a multitude. Political campaigns convince a relatively small percentage of voters to shift party lines and vote differently than they would have had there been no campaign; all those millions of dollars are spent on reinforcing the traditional loyalties of the voter. Why, then, must a political play do more? If the audience at a political play still opposes the idea(s) presented when the play is finished, that cannot be construed as a failing on the part of the playwright. A more proper test is whether that audience considered a viewpoint
it did not hold previously and whether it came to a sharper understanding of its own position. The test for Bentley's 'mass of people in the middle' should not be one of conversion but of involvement. Even if these people missed the political issues altogether and simply enjoyed the play as a play, the playwright must be given his due whether he converted them or not. Ibsen surely failed to convince many of his audience to correct the social ills he identifies in his plays; yet few critics have thought less of him for that failure. Neither should critics think less of a political playwright for the same failure.

Political plays should be judged on their theatrical effectiveness, which includes the political element, not strictly on their political effectiveness, which excludes the theatrical element. A playwright writes a play, not a treatise, however polemical it might be. His success or failure is dependent on the same dramatic elements utilized by other playwrights: plot, character, thought, words, sound and spectacle. Of these, only thought, which includes the political philosophy of the play, can be restrictively political. The playwright has used the other elements as well, and it is the arrangement of those elements which determine the play's success. This dissertation has identified the plays of John Arden as political drama, yet it would be patently foolish to assess them only in terms of their political effectiveness. Arden's political message is not doctrinal but observational. The element of thought is subordinated to the plot. Wesker's plays are doctrinal to the extent that they seek to dramatize a political philosophy. Yet even they cannot be restricted to political considerations, for their philosophy glides
into a humanism almost devoid of political consequences.

Wesker's plays illustrate the additional problem of how to determine when a political play is propagandist or polemical (using those two terms interchangeably). If the plot is subordinated to thought (in Aristotelian terms) in order to give greater emphasis to political content, the play may be labeled propagandistic or polemical. However, only if thought smothers plot can the critic judge a polemical play a failure because it is a polemical play. In such a case, the action and arrangement of incidents is lost, and the audience might as well have attended a political lecture. Although Aristotelian critics might not approve, the polemical playwright can utilize thought as the keystone of his dramatic elements and still conceivably write a play with neat characterization and tight plot. The play can then involve its audience through its dramatic structure as well (or in spite of) its political message. Such a play deserves consideration as theatre as well as politics.

All of these debates and arguments lead, finally, to the central question which is at the heart of this dissertation: can politics and theatre mix? Stated more academically, the question is whether a playwright can effectively integrate his political beliefs into the structure of his plays. The foregoing discussion leads only to an affirmative answer. The plays of Arnold Wesker and John Arden demonstrate that political philosophies and problems can be effectively dramatized without eliminating elements of the drama other than thought, without discarding any concern for dramatic form and without achieving a level of propagandistic fervor that prevents all but the highly converted from experiencing the theatrical moments created by
the playwright and the actors. Even were their plays of such a propagandistic fervor, however, this chapter has maintained that a critical standard that judges a play on the basis of whom it converts is neither valid nor verifiable.

The normative side of the question, of course, is whether politics and theatre should mix, i.e., whether there should be a place in the theatre for political discussion. This dissertation may appear to have taken an 'art-for-art's-sake' position by arguing against critical judgments of political theatre that apply political as well as artistic standards to a play. Such a posture could lead, admittedly, to a rejection of political theatre altogether. The argument, however, was intended only to prohibit partisan politics from interfering with critical assessment of political theatre. Political criticism which attacks a play simply because it doesn't agree with the critic's own politics is what has been challenged here, not political theatre.

Politics and theatre should mix, indeed, must mix if theatre is to maintain its position as a 'mirror to nature.' It is inconceivable that theatre, a public place, should deal with politics, a public philosophy. If theatre can probe the mind of man, surely it can probe the political structures he creates.

Beyond this, however, too many playwrights have insisted that drama reflect the social and historical forces (and, consequently, the political forces) influencing their age to dismiss the notion that most playwrights are apolitical or 'private' dramatists. Not only political playwrights like Shaw and Brecht but also more socially oriented playwrights such as Ibsen and Lorca have opened the door to political theatre by their comments. Ibsen wrote that the task of the
poet is "to make clear to himself, and thereby to others, the
temporal and eternal questions which are astir in the age and in the
community to which he belongs." Lorca holds a similar viewpoint.

... the theatre which does not feel the social pulse, the
historical pulse, the drama of its people, and catch the
genuine color of its landscape and of its spirit, with
laughter or with tears, has no right to call itself a theatre,
but an amusement hall, or a place for doing that dreadful
thing known as 'killing time.'

It is foolish to think that Ibsen, Lorca or men of similar sentiment
could 'feel the social pulse' but not consider politics a legitimate
topic for the stage. The sensitivity to social and philosophical
change, a characteristic of nearly every great playwright, is such
that a case could be made for labeling all of their plays political
in one way or another. To do so would be to return the term to a
meaningless phrase; the purpose, however, is to illustrate that
awareness of political issues and events is not confined to the notably
political playwrights such as Shaw and Brecht.

The immediacy of politics tends to work against the critical
standard that the best plays are those that are for all ages. Once
the political issue or circumstance has passed, the play which dealt
with it is automatically threatened with extinction for being dated.
The plays of Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Ibsen and Shaw, however, prove
that if the playwright is true to his own age he will be relevant to
all ages. Excepting plays that focus exclusively on a single political
issue or event and do not extrapolate from that event to a greater
understanding of politics in general, a political play has as much
capacity to survive its age as any other. The plays of both Arden
and Wesker can be sustained by their recognition of the relationship
between specific political situations and the human political condition in general. If they do not survive their time, it is their craft, not their politics, that will be at fault.
CHAPTER VII: FOOTNOTES


10 Willett, op. cit., p. 151; ibid., p. 196.


24. Ibid.


29. Ibid., p. 231.


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