CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION
Arnold Wesker like Charles Osborne, Harold Pinter, is one of the distinguished playwrights who appeared on the British literary scene in the 1950s. Coming from the working-class background without university education and belonging to the East End Jewish community, he came with a bang with his *Roots* which was a major success. His next play *Chips With Everything* proved to be another success and he was described the greatest post-war playwright and the most promising and exciting young dramatist to come into the British theatre in the postwar period. Wesker followed up the above plays with a trilogy which was about the working classes of his days and the causes which led to the contemporary situation. The trilogy *The Chicken Soup with Barley, Roots, I am Talking About Jerusalem* were performed individually and as a group to the admiration of important theatre critics. The appeal of the plays lies more in their content than dramatic quality.

The working-class theme suddenly became popular after *Look Back In Anger* gave it currency in 1956. The working class context of Osborne’s and Wesker’s plays had wide appeal as a fresh, new perspective for London’s audiences. As Wesker had not attended Oxford or Cambridge his success as a playwright created a sensation in the media, in part because he stood for the open society Britons wanted to create in the postwar era and for hope at a time when Britons needed to read about successes.
A good deal of social experience is expressed in his plays that came out through restlessness, disorganization, and frustration. In the play *Chicken Soup with Barley* Wesker echoes the need for compassion, the power of activism against repression and a search for a clearly defined role for the individual. It maps the decline of the Kahn's family and by implication, other Jewish, socialist families like the Kahns. Wesker marks the disintegration through the failing health of Harry Kahn and its effect on his wife, Sarah, who tries to nag him into being more of a fighter. Wesker portrays the Kahn's struggle for democratic rights and middle-class security in a heart touching manner.

The Wesker's uncomplimentary depiction of working classes is seen in the play *Roots*. He speaks about the Norfolk dialect, their humorous ignorance of medicine, their lack of common sense and social graces. Wesker's treatment of the Norfolk people stemmed from some giveings about some of the working classes and his ambivalent feelings about the communal, rural values that once suppress individualism and discourage self-improvement and personal ambition. In the play *Roots*, Beattie Bryant has been persuaded by Ronnie that the working classes can improve their quality of life through education, not so much in the way of better jobs and opportunity for employment but through a richer daily routine. Beattie's willingness to assume responsibility for her own education becomes
Wesker’s message about the work ethic intended not only for the working classes but also for the middle classes.

*I'm Talking About Jerusalem* once again raises the question about the role of the individual in society. Jerusalem does qualify the optimism of *Roots*. The survival of Dave and Ada, living to fight another day is more encouraging, who become corrupted and disillusioned as well as defeated. Social experiment is the central concern of the play, where Jerusalem is still trying to relate this concern to the Kahn family’s position.

Wesker speaks of the food consciousness in the trilogy. Most of the time we find Sarah in the kitchen making something or the other. As Wesker worked as a pastry cook he portrayed Ronnie as a cook in Paris. ‘Food is essential to all human activity,’ Wesker explains ‘when you invite people as guests, you touch them through food. And in the preparation of food there is a kind of ceremony, isn’t there?’

Although Osborne himself does not come from a working-class family, his hero Jimmy Porter, seethes with class resentment against his wife and her privileged family. Wesker’s early characters do have origins in the working class and express this class’s discontent and so they do not glorify young rebels who are alienated and disaffected without knowing why Wesker’s Ronnie Kahn is simply frustrated and rebellious. He is more of a traditional hero, fed up with a stultifying system and ready to throw it
over for something new. Ronnie is clearly more idealistic and optimistic than Jimmy Porter, albeit frustrated and angry.

Wesker's working-class characters were embraced by many Britons of the 1950s as a metaphor for their own class discontents. The postwar economy had been massively disappointing. Wesker's plays were more readily adopted by university and college students, teachers and technocrats – an increasingly large group of the disaffected seeking a voice for the counter culture. Recognizing and embracing the leftist themes, especially his campaign to ameliorate the working-class condition, many young intellectuals began linking Wesker's plays to the trendy socialist theatre of the time.

In 1981 Arnold Wesker noted with some pride and astonishment that more of the central parts in his plays were written for women than for men. He has portrayed 22 women characters. The women he represents are very different in age, background and temperament.

Wesker's interest in strong parts for women began with the earliest plays, which drew heavily on the influence of his mother Leah Wesker for the values she taught him about people to care for one another and to share whatever there is. She passed on to her son the very "Jewish" and humanist values of reaching out to help people in need. Leah Wesker also taught him the more basic qualities of individual strength, which he perceived as
unwavering determination, an unconditional love for family, strong conviction, and a good sense of humour.

Leah Wesker is best portrayed in the trilogy, where her character, Sarah Kahn represents quintessentially female traits. He moulded Sarah as a dominant figure in *Chicken Soup with Barley*; she is politically active, forever helping to organize demonstrations and arranging the lives of those around her according to Marxist-Leninist principles. Throughout the three acts, Sarah remains firm in her convictions and her determination to do something, but gradually the children begin to follow, so it seems, in their father’s footsteps. As Wesker loved his mother deeply, he developed many roles for women out of a love for her, but he also recognized her character flaws. He felt quite uncomfortable about his mother’s embarrassment when seeing herself in the trilogy, especially in the scenes with family fights and the suggestion in *Chicken Soup with Barley* that Sarah’s confrontations provoked Harry’s stroke.

More influenced by his wife he created the character of Beattie in *Roots*. In the first act while reproving her family, she seems to comprehend of what Ronnie has taught her, nor does she seem care. Being in love with Ronnie, she mouths most of his words without thinking much about them. In the act 2 she strains to win over her family since her own explanation of his arguments is too superficial to be persuasive. By the end of the act 3,
however, she has found her own voice and begins to articulate her clear understanding of Ronnie’s arguments.

Wesker portrays his sister Della in his play *I’m Talking About Jerusalem* as Ada. Ada is somewhat short-tempered and sharp tongued with her family. Ada in the long run turns out to be nearly a repetition of her mother. Ada’s character and her mother’s character are treated entirely sympathetically in the trilogy.

In *The Four Seasons* Wesker picturises Beatrice as a wounded woman by a failed marriage and love affair.

These women-mothers, sisters, wives, mistresses – wait to be given significance by the males they serve. As subordinates, their role is often over simplified and their characters are, more often than not, relegated to cultural stereotypes out of a received male tradition of theatre. Wesker portrays dedicated wives, loving mothers, saucy mistresses and embittered single women all of whom appear somewhat two-dimensional and could have become much more interesting if their author had afforded them some complexity and expression. These women are almost entirely realized through and on account of their relationships with men and it is difficult to see them as fully rounded people with needs of their own and a drive to exercise real control over their own futures.
Wesker's characters do little to illuminate the alienation and mistrust that women feel, or their frustrations, or their role in the moral community. What Wesker tells about disillusionment and abandonment has a universal truth to it. Moreover, he is clearly fascinated by women and a bit awed by them, so he never seems to tire of exploring the battle of the sexes and their need for each other. He complained in his "London Diary for Stockholm" (1969) that no one had given harmful recognition for the "emotional truth" of his characters, particularly his women, who emerge stronger and more sympathetic than his male characters (SS, 162). Wesker seems incapable of giving them full rein to be themselves. In the plays of the 1970s he cloned female versions of himself, isolated and very much the rebellious victim, deliberately silenced by others and vulnerable. The women in those plays with unconventional family relationships similarly lack complexity, breath or real interest as people.

The impulse to write in the first place came because of his brother-in-law, but writing must also have been attractive because of Wesker's evident responsiveness to language. His mother had come from Transylvania, his father from Russia, and they spoke English as their common language at home-Yiddish was not spoken unless by visitors. So the older generation spoke imperfect English with variations, and each with different variations, a background that focused attention on the problems of language it couldn't be taken for granted. Wesker himself speaks without a
trace of London or other accent, which he attributes to the influence of his elder sister Della who went to a good local school. Wesker based on trilogy, "Ronnie, who represents his own younger self asks his sister (Della) 'Why do you talk posh and use long words?' and fifteen-year-old Ada retorts competently 'I don't talk posh. I talk properly because than they might think properly. A capitalist is some one who wants to keep the workers ignorant and illiterate so that he can manipulate them.' Apart from foreshadowing Wesker's later views on culture - no making a virtue out of the second rate - this relates to his interest in words as instruments of power as well as of communication.

Wesker's Norfolk dialect and usage of language is depicted well in \textit{Roots}. Ronnie suggests Beattie to use the language. For him language is words that act, like bridges

\textbf{Beattie:} What can you talk of? he' ask. 'Go on, pick a subject. Talk. Use the language. Do you know what language is?' Well I'd never thought before - her you? - It's automatic to you isn't it, like walking? 'well, language is words,'; he'd say, as though he were telling me a secret. 'Its' bridges, so that you can get safely from one place to another. And the more bridges you know about the more places you can see?' [to Jimmy] And do you know what happens when you can see a place but you don't know where the bridge is?
Beattie: Exactly! You see, you her a row! Still. Rows is all right I like a row. So then he'd say: 'Bridges! Bridges! Bridges! Use your bridges woman. It took thousands of years to build them, use them! ... (90) p

The Norfolk dialect has definite accent and intonation and this not difficult to know.

When the word 'won't' is u^tg j^)'jv|is left out. It sound the same but the 'w' is lost.

Double 'ee' is pronounced 'i' as in 'it' – so that 'been' becomes 'bin,' 'seen' becomes 'sin' etc.

'Have' and 'had' become '88101 as in 'head.'

'Ing' loses the 'g' so that it becomes 'in'

'Bor' is a contraction of neighbour.

Instead of the word 'of' they say 'on'

Their 'yes' is used all the time and sounds like 'year' with a 'p' – 'yearp'

'Blast' is also common usage and is pronounced 'blust' a short sharp sound as in 'gust.'

The cockney 'ain't' becomes 'ant' – also short and sharp.

The 't' in 'that' and 'what' is left out to give 'thaas' and 'whaas.'