The Wesker Trilogy is a significant exploration of the impact of the Communist movement in Britain on a working-class family in the East End through two generations, from 1936 to 1959. In fact, the trilogy is the only endeavour of the new generation of dramatists to comprehend and interpret the climate of social and political changes in Britain from the anti-Fascist thirties to the Labour government of the fifties. It can also be interpreted as a dramatic story of defeated individuals endeavouring to realize themselves in a fast changing society which remorselessly casts aside as left-outs those who do not accept its values and practices.

The drama moves on two levels — the political movement as it affected two generations of the East End Jewish family of the Kahns, and the search for fulfilment of the different personalities. In the background of this broad canvas, the drama of individual characters struggling to establish their identity and fulfilment gains a peculiar poignancy. The two different levels cross each other most fruitfully in the first part of the trilogy, Chicken Soup with Barley (1958), but in Roots (1959) and I A'm Talking About Jerusalem (1960) they gradually drift apart, the political facts serving as a more bright, colourful canvas influencing motives and activities of people in a remote way.

The printed program for The Wesker Trilogy issued by the English Stage Company contains some pertinent material about the
entire project. According to the program, these three plays (Chicken Soup, Roots and Jerusalem), although each is complete in itself, together form a trilogy. But, however, it is to be noted that the trilogy, undoubtedly a single unified work, does not follow any particular chronological form. Nor does it have all of its characters appearing in each of the three plays. Chicken Soup, the first play of the trilogy, introduces Sarah and Harry Kahn, their children, their relatives as well as their friends. Roots, the second part of the trilogy, is the story of Ronnie Kahn and his girl-friend, Beatie. But it is to be noted that Ronnie is an off-stage figure and his presence is created entirely through Beatie. Jerusalem is about Ada and Dava Simmonds, though Sarah and Ronnie also appear in it. The idea of the characters as mere political entities is profitably modified as we observe their varied independent responses to the same political situation. This saves the trilogy from being a mere political play and focuses our attention on its genuine exploratory character. Wesker himself points out that the plays deal with different theories of socialism. Chicken Soup with Barley handles the Communist aspect, Roots is concerned with the personal aspect, I A'm Talking About Jerusalem is a sort of study in William Morris kind of socialism. These three plays catapulted Wesker to the forefront of the British stage.

The trilogy is slow moving, rich in atmosphere, sociologically authentic. The characters are quite credible. The theme deals with those who care, or try to care in a world
that is indifferent. They are plays about the struggle to implement vision; caring for the whole world shrinks to caring for one's own family. Hero and heroine set out with youth and ideals and come home with weariness and bitter knowledge; only two idealists survive—Sarah and Ada, the mother and daughter. Sarah and Ada are the real heroines; they cannot change the world themselves, but they lessen the significance of the men's defeat because they carry the seed of hope. Wesker does not allow defeat to encompass his ultimate socialist hope. "Even for Wesker the idea of a trilogy on the working class looking back as far as 1936 for the causes of present-day effects was bold and getting it produced no mean achievement."

Chicken Soup with Barley, Roots and I Am Talking About Jerusalem seem at first sight to make up a trilogy in the very loose sense that each in some way involves Ronnie Kahn. The connection of Roots with other two plays of the trilogy, however, is peripheral, as regards plot, and in sharp contrast as regards subject matter. The heroine, Beatie is engaged to Ronnie Kahn, who appears in the two parts of the trilogy but remains unseen in Roots. Though each of these three plays in its different way tackles social and political problems of great importance, they are linked together with a common human theme. In the next place, the gap between idealism and practice is central to all these three plays, and the sense in which they can lay most claim to the title of trilogy is as three different and, in general, disillusioning experiments in practical socialism.
II

*Chicken Soup with Barley* is about the disintegration of a politically conscious family—the Kahns. In this particular play, we see the struggle of individuals to realize themselves in terms of social and political activities. *Chicken Soup* sets the stage not only for the later dramas in the trilogy, but also for the political atmosphere of the times. "Wesker's instinct has worked admirably in leading him to concern himself with the changing orientation of his characters towards communism over a twenty-year period." The Spanish Civil War, the International Brigade, the working-class movement in Britain, the Fascist march in London—bring to us the political reality of the thirties. The broad exciting sweep of the day seems more truthful and authentic in juxtaposition with the stable family environment in the East End basement flat of the Kahns.

When the play opens we meet Sarah Kahn, vital, emotional and staunchly socialist; Harry Kahn, her husband, less staunchly socialist; Cissie, Harry's sister and a trade union organiser; Hymie, Sarah's sister; Ronnie and Ada, the two Kahn children. In 1936, when the play opens, the Kahn family and their friends know what there is to fight for and what to fight against. The Spanish Civil War is on and Dave, who is later to marry Ada Kahn, is about to go out and fight in it. Meanwhile there is trouble from the Fascists near home. The Jewish Communists effectively endeavour to block the Fascist blackshirt march through their streets. Sarah and Harry Kahn nag at each other, and Dave and
his friends discuss the possibility of volunteering for the war in Spain on loyalist side. Talk about socialism fills the air. British police violence is castigated.

This is a lively family, they have ideals. They are close to the Communist movement. They are aware of the conflicts of the day. But, however, their elation at their success is counterpointed by a quarrel within the Kahn family. Sarah, the mother is strong and militant. Harry, the father, is an apathetic weakling who shies away from the dangers of street fighting to take refuge in his mother’s flat. Indeed, "It is Sarah Kahn who is at the true centre of the play." She is caring about everything, fussing about everything, taking upon her shoulders every responsibility of the family.

With the second act in 1946 — ten years after the first — we witness the passing away of the glow of idealism that brought them all so close. The Labour government has given the Kahns a better flat in Hackney but has taken away that enthusiasm which characterised and enriched their life in the East End. It is now a life of petty struggle to make both ends meet, without any great cause to fight for. Even when the industry is booming with work, Harry manages to be chronically out of work, leaving the whole burden of the family on the shoulders of Sarah. The perpetual quarrel between Harry and Sarah, which was the only discordant note in the family, seems to have become more embittered with the passage of years. By the immediate post-war period, only Sarah and Ronnie still retain their original
socialist inspiration. They are still committed and still optimistic. Harry's wavering commitment has sunk into an apathy to which he is soon physically harnessed by his first stroke. Sarah's faith sustains another blow when Ada, their daughter, declares that she has no faith in political activity, is tired of living in the jungle of an industrial society and determines, when Dave comes back, to live the simple life in the country. Aunt Cissie, formerly a trade union organiser, is living on her pension. Hymie is in business. Prince works in a second-hand shop. Monty, disillusioned by the Stanlist killing has left the party. His wife is pregnant and he hopes that his greengrocer's business in Manchester will bring in enough to pay for a university education for his son. So diagrammatically the course of Chicken Soup could be plotted along the horizontal axis of Sarah's steadfastness, the hopeful starts of other characters along parallel straight lines plummeting downward as the action proceeds.

The process of disillusionment that started with the second act is complete in the third act, which opens in 1955. Sarah's life is now spent between caring for invalid Harry and filling in the National Insurance forms. Ronnie, who had been working as a cook in Paris, returns to attack Sarah with his own loss of socialist faith in the wake of the Hungarian uprising of 1956. Ronnie is boiling over with indignation about the action of Soviet Union in quelling the revolution in Hungary. His faith and ambition are broken. He accuses his mother of blindness,
political blindness. He cannot comprehend what has happened to her dreams. He cries out to Sarah, "Why do I feel ashamed to use words like freedom and democracy and brotherhood? They do not have any meaning anymore." (Chicken Soup, p.71) Ronnie further tells his mother, "you are a pathological case, Mother__ do you know that? you are still a communist!" (p.73) Sarah, too, is hurt, but she disagrees with Ronnie. She feels that all her life she has worked with a party that meant glory, freedom and brotherhood. She aptly argues, "If the electritian who comes to mend my fuse blows it instead, so I should stop having electricity? Socialism is my light, can you understand that? A way of life?" (pp.73-74) She is choosing, rhetorically, the hopeful socialist way of life, suffering with her eyes open the often brutal inadequacies of fellow human beings like her husband. The play's title is an unobtrusive affirmation that, for all that there is a dead weight of men like Harry, there are also women like Mrs. Bernstein with the chicken soup that once saved Ada's life. And though Harry's selfishness has been aggravated by his close relationship to the family he left, Mrs. Bernstein's kindness is greater for being disinterested. And against Ronnie's nihilism Sarah pits all her energy and desperately cries out, "You have got to care or you will die." (p.75) Certainly it is not so much her arguments as her simple and grand faith in an ideal that makes her the only positive character in the play. In spite of her completely shattered personal life, she refuses to accept defeat at the hands of fate
and this obstinate refusal gives her a sort of tragic dignity we associate with greater characters. But then the focus shifts from public politics to her private need to fight the kind of apathy she associates with Ronnie's father. Sarah tells Ronnie how Harry's weakness could literally have caused Ada's death. When Ada had diptheria and Sarah was pregnant with Ronnie, it was a neighbour who saved Ada's life by giving her chicken soup with barley. Meanwhile Harry was seen spending his relief money at Bloom's eating salt-beef sandwiches.

Thus on the social level we see how the disillusion sets in, and how the revolution turns sour. On the personal level we see how the family falls apart. We see that the mother is strong and the father is weak and the children seem to follow their father and fall away. Dave and Ada feel that they have destroyed themselves by living for others when those others are neither heroic, deserving not grateful. Ronnie loses his faith after Hungary, but Sarah, who grew up in revolutionary times is able to keep hers. Harry, who has suffered from his stroke for fourteen months now is "like an autumn leaf" in a strong wind. He informs his son, "you can't alter people, Ronnie. You can only give them some love and they will take it."(p.56) Ronnie who is not an old and beaten man, refuses to listen to his father's advice. But in time Ronnie learns that there is something in what Harry has said. But Sarah complains that cold and calculating people cannot teach love and brotherhood. To her communism is primarily an expression of love, not of economic theory. She dismisses her
sister-in-law Cissie, as cold. "People like that cannot teach love and brotherhood", says Sarah. (p.29) Sarah is advised that love comes later but she bluntly refuses to believe this and insists, "you have to start with love. How can you talk about socialism otherwise?" (Chicken Soup, p.30)

But the question is how can Sarah make this claim when she is so intolerant of her husband's weakness, so quick to nag at him and complain about him to others in his presence. There are, as I do ponder, two answers to this question. Firstly, her nagging is purposeful and helps Harry into becoming a good man, husband and comrade. For Sarah love is active, challenging and even aggressive. Secondly, she wants that one personal failure should not anyway vitiate the value of personal testament she presents to her son, Ronnie. The point of life she tells him is to keep on fighting believing, and above all caring, no matter how disillusioning the results. And it is Wesker's defiant motto, put into the mouth of this turbulent and majestic emblem of endurance — an affirmation of faith in the possibility and power of love, which is not altogether convincing — but without it this play would be profoundly defeatist play.

It is noteworthy that the playwright has used Sarah "very effectively as a central figure, modulating between family squabbles and the wider arena in which she carries on her fight against apathy." In the first two acts Sarah's anger and vigour are characterised more by physical actions, gestures and short comments. In the third act, however, her medium of expression is
words. Perhaps the years of suffering have made her more introspective and she finds words rather than action more suitable to project her views and personality. The impassioned speech of Sarah at the end of the play do not come to us as something unwarranted and foreign, for the playwright prepared us for this throughout the third act.

Sarah herself is the standard by which the alienation of other characters is measured — and especially since stubborn resistance to change is one of her idiosyncratic traits — changes little over the years. It is easy but deceptive to take other characters' estimate of Sarah as authoritative. Monty Blast has a ready explanation of her, "For her the world is black and white. If you are not white so you must be black. She cannot see shades in character — know what I mean? She cannot see people in the round." (p.62) Thus Monty's Sarah sounds like a stereotype intended to be a stereotype. But any such impression is inconsistent with her last long speech to Ronnie: "And he calls me a pathological case! Pop,Pop... And you want to be like them, like your father? I will fight you then." (PP.73-74) When Monty blames his disillusion on atrocity stories about Russia, Sarah asks, "And you believe the stories now, Monty?" (p.61) But, however, to Ronnie Sarah later admits, "You think it does not hurt me— the news about Hungary?" (Chicken Soup, P.73)

One thing is to be noted that the progress of disillusionment is suddenly and temporarily halted when Sarah faces Ronnie at the last scene. The element of disillusionment
has hitherto been corrupting and overpowering every positive human element. Suddenly, at the conceptual level we find ourselves witnessing the confrontation of the positive and the negative. The play ends with a broad loose assertion that one must care for others, and that is the only way to spiritual salvation. For the moment we almost tend to believe in the super-human regenerative strength of Sarah to assert the cancerous growth of family disintegration and breakdown of ideals. For the last time the emotional structure of idealism which kept together the Kahns seems to have asserted itself in the midst of cold facts and spiritual chaos. Thus at the conceptual as well as structural level the final scene gives a new depth to the unity of impression, as in a symphony the point and the counterpoint meet to raise our feelings to a different level.

The political position of the family in *Chicken Soup* was the position of Wesker's own family, and Wesker explained his early political involvement in that context: "I was a member of the Young Communist League for a short while, and coming from a communist background one is always involved in political activity." The author's note to *Chicken Soup with Barley* reads:

*Chicken Soup* was not written as an anti-Soviet play and the author insists that no theatrical, film, television, or broadcasting company should present it as such. He would further remind all concerned that an attack against the Inquisition is no more an attack on
Christianity than the indictment based on recent Soviet admissions is an attack upon Socialism.

An important feature that strikes one about *Chicken Soup* is the wide variety of characters. The close-knit texture of the play itself, its movement of action, the interconnectedness between the private lives of characters and their political activities work at satisfactory levels. In this play the playwright is naturalistic in handling dialogue and situation, in the conception of characters. One might call it naturalistic technique only in a limited sense, for the blend of realism with it gives it an extra dimension not associated with naturalism. The picture of slow disintegration in the family has been depicted with equal capacity. Thus we can say that Wesker has not only set the stage for the Kahns in *Chicken Soup*, but he has done more than that. He has also awakened the British working-class people, at least those who hear his voice. But it is to be noted that whereas John Osborne in his early career has concentrated on individuals and their personal problems—their sexual conflicts, their love affairs—Wesker has wrestled with politics and ideals.

III

The second part of the trilogy *Roots*, is an important part of the trilogy. Its links with the other two plays are, however, at first sight rather tenuous. Thus Beatie Bryant connects up with the Kahns only as the long-standing girl-friend of Ronnie, and hopefully his future wife. Ronnie Kahn, present in spirit
though absent in person, is the character who links Chicken Soup with Roots, itself set in 1959. Judging by his abundantly quoted opinions, he has recovered much of his resilience and optimism between the two. Roots and I A'm Talking About Jerusalem approach the same subject — the life of a money-starved rural society — from almost opposite formal directions. In both plays the subject is presented in deliberately anti-romantic terms, so as to emphasise how alien the circumstances of the twentieth-century agriculturalism are to the world that Dave and Ada Simmonds want to recreate in their rural retreat. The social fabric of the twentieth-century England, its economic foundation and its sense of practical and moral purpose have disappeared.

Roots is concerned with the personal aspect of socialism. In Roots socialism as such is only a subterranean rumble; it is not socialism but education in the broader sense, that is the theme, it helps to suggest the die-hard conservatism of the country mind, its impassivity, its refusal to awake to new sights, new sounds, new ideas, new feelings and its satisfaction with itself. It is as though everything that really matters in the countryman's life is static, belief and love in particular. The play most clearly expresses Wesker's sense of dismay over the indifference of the working-class towards ameliorating itself and finding its own voice. Bernard Levin in his introduction to the Penguin edition of Roots points out that the villain in the play is:

The society that treads these people into the dirt and
then affects to despise them when some of it gets into their clothes and won’t brush off. It is, of course, a fiercely political play, despite its very overtly political references. Mr. Wesker, I take it, is a Socialist, not because he thinks working-class people are the best in the land, but because he does not. The play, after all, is called Roots, and not because that was the first word that came into Mr. Wesker’s head. If the roots are poisoned, the plant will not flower; if the plant flowers, there must be healthy roots below.

Laurence Kitchen has made one strong point about *Roots* by saying, "Instead of luxuriating in outworn proletarian gestures of protest, it faces the fact that ignorance, not poverty, is the enemy now to be grappled with in Britain." *Roots* is more directly about the brutalisation of man by mass culture. The play is set in Norfolk and deals with country people living at some distance from London. It is an endeavour to depict the self-realization of a Norfolk girl viz. Beatie Bryant. She establishes her identity not in terms of revolutionary acts, but in discovering her potentials, her power of expressing herself. Whereas *Chicken Soup* covers a span of twenty years, involving great social and personal changes, *Roots* takes into account only a fortnight in the life of Beatie. She is the girl who has been an intimate friend of Ronnie Kahn, working in a London restaurant for the past three years, subjected to Ronnie’s ideas of socialism, art and culture.
In *Roots* Wesker develops his ideas of a proletarian culture. In part it is presented as argument and in part it is dramatised. Wesker's idea of keeping Ronnie off the stage is quite successful. Ronnie is undoubtedly more important in *Roots* than in *Chicken Soup* or *Jerusalem*. But it is to be noted that Ronnie's presence is created completely through Beatie — partly through the way she quotes him but mainly through what she shows us of the influence he has had on her. The reader is anxious to know whether Ronnie will arrive and marry Beatie. This is why it becomes absolutely imperative to see Beatie against her family background. Beatie coming from a family of farm labourers, constitutes a strong protest to the petty, self-centred living of the Bryants. Consciously she can only parrot Ronnie's ideas in set phrases and cliches, but she is genuinely resentful that her mother did not give her any idea, "What a kind of life did you give me? ... You did not open one door for me." (*Roots*, p.127) Mrs. Bryant is unable to understand Beatie's mind and says: "I fed you. I clothed you. I took you out to the sea. What more d' you want. We're only country folk you know. We ent got no big things here you know."(p.127) These words of Mrs. Bryant sound like those of Mr. Marango at the end of *The Kitchen*. Thus this communication gap is, at different levels, the theme of *Roots*.

As a matter of fact, the cultural life of Beatie's family is measured against the yardstick of what Ronnie has taught Beatie — books versus comics, art versus entertainment, discussion versus chatter, mental activity versus mental
stagnation. First of all the conflict between the two ways of life surfaces in the argument about comics. When Beatie goes to the house of her sister viz. Jenny and her brother-in-law Jimmy, she commences reading a comic from a pile and she becomes reminiscent of how Ronnie got riled when she used to read comics he brought for his nephews. He would get annoyed and ask, "Christ woman, what can they give you that you can be so absorbed," (Roots,p.88) In order to hoodwink Ronnie, Beatie used to get a copy of 'Manchester Gurdian' and sit with that wide open and a comic behind. Ronnie would say, "Playing an instrument is fun, painting is fun, reading a book is fun, talking with friends is a fun __ but a comic? A comic for a young woman of twenty-two?" (p.89) Jimmy scoffs at the people who enjoy books, painting and classical music and Beatie, shifting the conversation back from generalities to her personal experience, describes how Ronnie has helped her to get unemployment benefit. After standing upto the officials on her behalf, he had explained to her, rather pontifically, that words are bridges _ "What can you talk of?" he would ask. (p.90) "Go on, pick a subject. Talk, use the language. Do you know what language is? Well, I had never thought before __ have you? __ It is automatic to you, is not it like walking?" (p.90) He would say as though he were telling her a secret, "Well, language is words, it's 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!" (p.90)

After an argument about strikes and farm labourers and wages
as compared with busmen's wages, culture is linked with politics when Beatle's challenges force Jimmy into expressing the countryman's resistance towards any attempt to change his life. "You got a boy who's educated an' that and he's taught you a lot may be. But don't you come pushin' ideas across at us __ We are all right as we are." (p.94) This makes Beatle to admit that there is a similar quality in her. Ronnie who likes to discuss everything encourages Beatle to ask questions. But Beatle, as she herself says, "I am like mother, I am stubborn," (p.94) so she cannot ask questions. Ronnie would get mad and say, "Why don't you ask me woman, for God's sake why don't you ask me?" (p.95) It is after this, in her simple, touching account of how she pursued Ronnie for three months with compliments and presents, that Beatle talks explicitly about socialism on an impersonal level:

He was interested in all the things, I never ever thought about. About politics and art and all that, and he tried to teach me. He is a socialist and he used to say you could not bring about 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 did not understand much. All the time he is trying to teach me but I can't take it Jenny. (Roots, p.95)

In Act Two, in which Beatie is at her mother's house, the argument about culture is resumed over a song. While Mrs. Bryant
is peeling potatoes and Beatie is whipping the yolks of four eggs to make a cake. Beatie sings a folk song about a coalminer's wife. Mrs. Bryant indicates that she prefers "I will wait for you in the heavens blue." (p.114) When Mrs. Bryant admits that she does not know the words of the song, Beatie recites them for her trying to demonstrate that they are third rate. When Mrs. Bryant asks Beatie what makes that song third rate and those friendly bits of opera and concert first rate, Beatie's answer is that she herself does not know this much. She further adds that she herself had asked Ronnie the same question: "What makes a pop song third rate?" (p.115) And Ronnie would say: "Give yourself time woman. Time, you can't learn how to live overnight... Talk and look and listen and think and ask questions." (p.115) But Beatie does not know what questions to ask or how to talk. When Mrs. Bryant switches off the radio, Beatie turning violently on her mother says:

Mother I could kill you when you do that. No wonder I don't know anything about anything. I never knewed anything about the news because you always switched off after the headlines. I never read any good books because there was never any in the house. I never heard anything but dance music because you always turned off the classics. I can't ever speak English proper because you never talked about anything important. (Roots, pp.126-7)

Beatie further accuses her mother of neglecting her. She
did not care that Beatie should take evening classes and learn something other than waitressing. Mrs. Bryant, as Beatie does feel, did not care what job Beatie took up or whether she learned things, and she did not even think that it was necessary. Beatie, here is spokesman for all the girls who have suffered in the same way — most of them without even realising that they were suffering. But Beatie becomes less of an individual in talking like this and by giving so much valuable space to the argument. Wesker, who is fully capable of giving us a detailed and theatrically viable picture of how farm labourers live in Norfolk, is throwing away his chance of doing so. Knowing too well that they do not spend their time in arguing about culture, we are left in ignorance of how they spend it. Certainly there are many incidents in the play in which the central argument is bypassed, but the play is shaped by it and the other incidents seem partly selected in order to provide contrast. After this Beatie tells her mother that she is going to teach her something picking up a gramophone record and plugging in a pick up, she plays Bizet L' Arlesienne suite. In fact, what she says echoes Ronnie's culture = Socialism equation. Quoting Ronnie she says, "Socialism is not talking all the time, it is living, it is dancing, it is being interested in what go on around you, it is being concerned about people and the world." (Roots, p.129)

The climax of Roots comes when Ronnie's expected arrival fails to materialize. Beatie has already called her sister and brother-in-law, her brother and sister-in-law at her home to
introduce them to her lover. At that time they receive a letter from Ronnie. We come to know from the contents of the letter that Ronnie is not going to marry Beatie. Mrs. Bryant reads the letter aloud as though it were a proclamation:

If I were a healthy human being it might have been all right but most of us intellectuals are pretty sick and neurotic — as you have often observed — and we could not build a world even if we were given the reins of government — not yet any-rate. (Roots, p.142)

Beatie finds herself in an ambivalent state. She has not yet assimilated the “humanist-socialist wisdom” Ronnie has been trying to teach her, yet she has rejected the narrowness of Bryant’s way of looking at things. And when she says that she hates her mother, she not only gets slapped across the face but gets the tables turned on her as well. Her mother says: “Go on — you say you know something we don’t, so you do the talking. Talk — go on, talk gal.” (p.145) At this moment of great pressure Beatie speaks. This time she does not speak in the clitches and ill-digested terms of Ronnie; she has a genuine voice now and the curtain falls on her discovery of her mind. She admits to her mother. “You are right — the apple don’t fall far from the tree, do it? You are right, I am like you. Stubborn, empty, with no tools for nothing. I got no roots in nothing.” (p.145) In fact, this prepares the ground for Beatie’s discovery that she can talk. Suddenly Beatie realizes that she is now doing her own thinking. “I am not quoting no more,”
she announces triumphantly, and her life is now ready to begin: "I am beginning on my own two feet — I am beginning."

V.S. Pritchett while appreciating Beattie’s final speech says: "This is one of Wesker’s best moments." It is here that Beatie learns to be articulate.

The play is called Roots because its characters have none, "roots" here meaning a nourishing culture, capable of stimulating the mind, developing the feelings and generally promoting responsiveness. We can say that this play is about search for roots. The Bryants may well have lived in their East Anglian neighbourhood for generations, but they are disassociated from the system they work for and unconcerned with movements and advances of value to humanity generally because they know nothing about them. Rather than belonging to a community, the Bryants drift wherever tides beyond their control take them. Therefore, the conflict in Roots is between a life denying environment, in this case agricultural, and a stimulating one — that is Beatie’s earlier, off-state life with Ronnie. Though her family will "continue to live as before", Beattie has, in Wesker’s words, been "saved from fire", and may in time help to save others.

Thus we may unhesitatingly observe that Beattie’s development more or less controls the play’s internal structuring. In fact, "it is on the effectiveness of Beattie Bryant that the play stands or falls. She is shocked by Ronnie’s defection into awareness and articulacy.” She feels that Ronnie’s views about the farm labourer are not true and that their condition is their own
bloody fault because they take "the easiest way out."(p.147) Thus we see that Wesker is here giving positive suggestion for ameliorating the lot of working-class people, instead of protests against the Establishment. Beatie is here standing as a transformed personality, discovering her latent powers, as well as a representative of the working-class. Beatie's discovery of her power of expression may well be taken as Wesker's hope that the working-class may one day find their own language to demand a culture of their own in which they can participate and not remain passive recipients at the end. Wesker ponders that it is only by making the dumb mass of Proletariat better educated that a real revolution would be brought in Britain. Education would give them an awareness of their life, awaken them to the value of refinements of cultured living. It is not only the trade union movement that ensures socialism in a country; it is the dissemination of knowledge and education that would make them fit for cultured life. Wesker's contention is that socialism does not merely mean an equitable distribution of the fruits of culture. "You could not bring socialism to a country by making speeches, but perhaps you could pass it on to someone who was near you", (p.9) believes Wesker like Ronnie. Thus Wesker's solution in terms of socialism is that of an artist rather than a propagandist or a moralist.

But it is to be noted that Wesker is not interested in Beatie only as a developing individual. Through her, or rather through Ronnie as she relays, Wesker offers a critique of modern
British society that her family represents. Beatie continuously talks to her unlettered and inarticulate family of Ronnie and of his cultural and social ideas and ideals. But Beatie is unable to make an impact on their minds, and Wesker shows through their actions and seeming apathy, how difficult it is to awaken the farm-labourers to the wider world, to classical books, to great music, to politics. In response to the Bryants persistent failure to communicate, we get the idea that words are "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." (p. 90) In response to their small-mindedness, we are told that it does not matter if people are ill-educated, as long as their minds are large and inquisitive, as long as they are generous.

It is noteworthy that the first two acts try to build up a picture of the everyday life of the Beals and Bryants __ in fact, of the routine in which Beatie was once caught up. We note that Beatie is articulate at last and Ronnie's thinking has become her own. Then Beatie has an exemplary function, which ends by diminishing the natural life in her. She has been transformed from a woman into a spokesman for the Wesker virtues. But it also remains for us to account for the attitude of Beatie's family towards Beatie and Ronnie. I think that her family cannot altogether be blamed when they refuse to listen to her ringing evangelicalism. It is not obligatory for them to respond to the presumptuous challenges of a boy (Ronnie) they do not know or to agree with a girl (Beatie) who sounds much more bombastic to
We note that the play (Roots) takes fire when Ronnie's letter arrives. Upto this moment Wesker has captured the atmosphere of a labourer's home. He has drawn in broad terms, the characteristics of a handful of selected people who are types rather than individuals. In this play the characters do not even chat much. Throughout the play there is no sign of intense living from any of the characters with the exception of Beatie's bursts. The conversation of Jenny and Jimmy Beales consists mostly of three or four word sentences and there are long silences in which the housework goes on without anything being said. Their sense of humour is keen and dry. They talk in fits and talk quickly too. Their slow rhythm of thinking is echoed in their repetitious way of talking, for example Jenny says: "Now shut you up Jimmy Beales and get that food down you. Every time you talk, look, you miss a mouthful: That's why you complain of pain in your shoulder blades." (p.87) Beatie's conversation is so very persuasive that it overshadows the massive and intransigent nature of the social problem to which her escape is the exception.

Roots is often praised for its documentary qualities. Although there are obviously many plays of greater documentary realism, offering a slice of life with less form and less plot content, Roots definitely belongs in the mainstream of their tradition, along with, for example, Hauptmann's Before Sunrise and D.H. Laurence's The Daughter-in-law. For in this play
documentary naturalism is not among many possible production styles, but one that is essential to the play's manner and meaning. It is the efficient dialectical structure of Roots that puts it in a wholly different category from Look Back in Anger. This underlying dialect demands certainly, the most careful realisation in speech and action. The dialect is accurately rendered and the observation is quite good. The naturalism of Bryants' and Beales' casual conversation seems faultless enough. However, some of Beatie's speech moves away from this faithful realism and justifies Wesker's remark that none of his plays are or can be simple slices of life. The set speech of Beatie shifts away from the naturalism of the interchanging dialogue into the sphere of Beatie's thoughts and back again — and the transitions are managed in a good manner. The first two acts are successfully built up. Beatie's discovery of her mind is startling and unexpected, but dramatically satisfactory and convincing. Both these scenes indicate the strong romantic tendency, although Wesker remains faithful to the naturalistic framework.

IV

Jerusalem like Roots and Their Very Own and Golden City is in varying degrees an ironic title. "The Jerusalem" of the title is not the Jerusalem in Israel but the new Jerusalem of William Morris, who believed in the idealism of socialism. Clearly enough the title was drawn from William Blake's lines: "Till we have built Jerusalem/In England's green and pleasant land." We
discover in the course of the play how their utopian dream is doomed to failure. Robert Muller aptly feels that Wesker has the "honesty of innocence to put the blame for Dave's and Ada's failure on their own weakness as well as on a hostile society."

Jerusalem is closer to Chicken Soup than to Roots both in its choice of characters and its extended time-scale. Yet the intermediate work is a helpful introduction to it, setting the East Anglian scene into which Ada and Dave Simmonds arrive as strangers and from which they depart disenchanted, as well as suggesting that silence can be as potent and meaningful a mode of communication as words. For the compulsively talking Kahns in Chicken Soup, silence is the exception; for the hearth-bound Bryants of Roots, it had been the general rule.

Jerusalem traces the failure of craft socialism of a vaguely William Morris type in a rural setting and moves in time to the defeat of the Labour government in 1956. It is, in fact, a revulsion against industrialism, a conflict between a commercial socio-economic system and the traditional idea of man's individual fulfilment in harmony with his work, leisure and environment. It is wrong to say that Jerusalem is a parable, an imaginative account of two dreamers conceived in the mind of the playwright. It is dedicated to Della and Ralph — the sister and brother-in-law of Wesker. It is based on their experience in their rebellion against mechanised man in urban squalor. Robert Muller pays a tribute to Wesker's passion when he writes: "One has to go back to Strindberg and Toller to discover a parallel
faith in personal experience as the raw-material for didactic dramaturgy."

Whereas Roots covered a short period (just over two weeks) the present play covers about ten years. Dave and Ada go to Norfolk to learn how difficult it is to build a new Jerusalem, which can be seen as an early version of Their Very Own and Golden City. The play ends in 1959 with the election of a Conservative Government and Ronnie's bitter cry about caring.

Jerusalem is really about a man's effort to escape the grind of our mechanised economy, our teeming cities, or hunt for wealth and status. It continues with the theme of disillusionment expressed in the failure of a personal experiment in Roots. This particular play is a study of two complex characters whose complexities manifest yet disguise themselves in the taking of apparently objective decisions. It is concerned with the way of life Dave and Ada try to build together in Norfolk, away from the rush and hubbub of industrial civilization. Dave and Ada feel that the society that had driven Dave to fight in Spain cannot be reformed. So they reject the industrial rate-race to live out the reformed life themselves, in the country — where Dave can set up a carpenter's shop beside his cottage. The opposition they meet from their relatives, friends, and even from Dave's own apprentice, wears them down, until finally, craft carpentry unable to co-exist with the products tailored to the mass market, they are forced to return to London. Throughout this play — and in contrast with Sarah, who though the only exemplar of communism left at the end of Chicken Soup, was still
part of an organised mass movement — Dave and Ada are alone, unsupported, sole participants in their particular social experiment. James Gidin is of the opinion that this play "does not depict the failure of social ideal. Rather the play presents the failure of two individuals, of Ada and her husband, to shape their lives in terms of the William Morris kind of ideal."

The moment which is dramatic and touching comes nearly at the end of Act One when Sarah shows how personally she takes what Dave and Ada are doing. In her view Dave and Ada are running away from socialism to an ivory tower. She ponders that Dave is taking her daughter away from her because he dislikes her (Sarah). But for Dave it is an experiment in Socialism on a level of personal and family relationship. Dave is right to find something inadequate in the kind of socialism whose sole aim is to make the worker owner of a machine that would sap his spirit under any economic system. Dave is, in fact, tired of the impotence that seems to be the corollary of copious debating and he reacts particularly against the Kahn family's compulsive talkativeness: "I talked enough! You bloody Kahns you! You all talk, Sarah, Ronnie, all of you. I talked enough. I talked enough. I wanted to do something." (Jerusalem, p.205) On the other hand, Ada, unlike the other Kahns is temperamentally opposed to discussion — is occasionally angered into outbursts, but quickly withdraws, and if not provoked does not easily find words for her more personal feelings. Ada, paradoxically, is quite articulate about her inarticulacy: "Everybody says I am
cold and hard. People want you to cry and gush over them." (p.194) Ada is like her mother in strength and indomitability at least. "I shall survive every battle that faces me too", says she. (p.195) The Simmonds' testimony is unobtrusive because it substitutes deeds for the suspect words and so the other characters find it hard to extract from them anything that sounds like a manifesto. Ronnie wants the world to know his sister's solution, but Dave is unco-perative, "I am not going to make speeches, Ronnie" (p.162) and when a misunderstanding arises Ada wants to abandon explanations, which annoys Sarah. Such a refusal to rationalise inadequately in words is consistent with their dour, isolated experiment within a hostile society, whereas verbal communication is obviously essential to Sarah's communal, aggressive vision of socialism. Therefore, Sarah sharply rebukes her daughter, "And stop it! Impatience! What's the matter with you all of a sudden. Don't explain! Nothing she wants to explain. No more talking. Just a cold English you-go-your way and I will-go-mine! Why?" (p.164) But for Ada this taciturnity is later translated into guilt when her sick father accuses her: "You hate me and you have always hated me." (p.193) Ada breaks down uncontrollably on hearing this.

But, however, this must not be construed to mean that the Simmonds' experiment has been by any means a simple self-indulgence. It has been lived according to a firmly held principle, and was to have been the living proof of that principle's viability. To Ronnie, the experiment justified
socialism and showed its governmental failures to be incidental not inevitable: "Well, thank God, I thought it works." (p.215) But Sarah mocks him. "Did you expect the world to suddenly focus on them and say __ Ah, socialism is beautiful, did you silly boy?" (p.215) On the other hand Dave sees himself not as a one man revolution but as a voice crying in what Sarah considers a wilderness. To be precise, the Simmond's practical experiment is to live out an active testimony __ not words __ "At least something more than just words." It is in this sense that Dave is truly a spokesman for his own Jerusalem.

When Dave and Ada go to Norfolk, various peripheral characters appear to confront them __ all of these except Ronnie and Aunt Cissie, seeking sometimes from the kindest motives, to undermine their motives. Dobson complains that "the countryside smells like a cow with diarrhoea." (p.179) Sarah complains that there is no sanitation or electricity in the countryside. In the first scene Sarah asks, "What is socialism without human beings, tell me?" (p.164) and "What is wrong with socialism that you have to run to an ivory tower?" (p.164) And at the end she asks Ronnie, "I am always telling you, you can't change the world on you own __ only no one listens to me." (p.210) Changing the world is an ambition Dave and Ada always deny, but Dave has earlier quoted a variant __ "May be Sarah's right, may be you can't build on you own." (p.216) __ which is, indeed, the real question in the play.

More emotionally and less theoretically Aunt Esther
complains that Dave and Ada do not discuss their troubles any more. She ponders that they have changed and become more reserved and uncommunicative. She tells Dave, "Never mind about madness — but you have changed. You are not the same. Once upon a time we could talk to you. You got troubles? So tell us what is the matter — you think we are going to laugh? " (p.205)

Dave's confirmatory rejoinder is, "We are tired Esther, leave us alone, yes?" (p.205) When opposed time and again he bursts out:

Ten years I spent here trying to carve out a satisfactory life for my wife and kids and on every side we have had opposition. From the cynics, the locals, the family. Everyone was choking with their experience of life and wanted to hand it on. Who came forward with a word of encouragement? Who said we may be have a little guts? Who offered one tiny word of praise? ... Of course, we need a little praise. Or may be you want me to buy it from you! Like in the market. Here, two half crowns for a half minute of praise. Five bob for a few kind words saying we are not mad. Here y' are — take it! Take It! (Jerusalem, p.207)

Libby Dobson, Dave's old army friend contributes an attack from the theoretical side. Libby used to stand to him in the position that Dave still stands to Ronnie and Ronnie's later sense of betrayal at the moving out is similar to Dave's feeling of betrayal by his former comrade and mentor. Apart from his personal bitterness, however, Libby has pertinent objections to
offer which are apparently unanswerable — which remain, at least unanswered. These objections firstly cast doubt about the Simmonds' independence of the society they have rejected. And when Ada repeats to Libby their well-worn protest that they have no ideas about changing the world, Libby asks, "Then there's no much point doing this sort of thing, is there?" (p.181) And Libby accuses Dave and Ada with some justice of dilettantism. Unless every object the Simmonds use from cold water pipes to wine bottles is a handmade artefact, they are condoning not condemning, and participating in rather than rejecting the workings of capitalist society.

The illusory nature of their independence is dramatised less explicitly by two other characters — colonel Dewhurst and Sammy. According to Dave's classification of their opponents into "the cynics, the locals, the family," (p.207) the colonel belongs along with Sammy among the locals. The colonel influences the action when Dave steals some unwanted rolls of lino, flusters himself into denying it, and is dismissed by the colonel, for whom he has been working while saving to start his carpenter's shop. Ada calls the stealing of unwanted rolls of lino a "ridiculous blunder." (p.187) She further calls this stealing one of the "habits of factory life." (p.187) She tells Dave. "By Christ, Dave — your ideals have got some pretty big leaks in places — have't they?" (p.188) On the simplest level this deliberately ambiguous episode shows that Dave as an employee is as dependent as any factory slave. As John Russell Taylor
observes, "The play really begins in Act II with Dave's dismissal for stealing linoleum."

Thus the opposition from all sides wears them down and they are forced to return to London. Sarah Kahn is happy to have her family, with her once again. Thus the rustic dream is over. What Wesker wants to say is that even on an individual level, an idealistic life is affected by the non-idealistic society that environs it. In this play Wesker attempted to throw over naturalism and even realism altogether in favour of a far more adaptable and adventurous means of dramatic expression. John Dexter, the director, has said this play "was for me a long farewell to naturalism, atmosphere and illusion."

The question arises in our mind — why do the protagonists of Jerusalem fail. Dave and Ada fail for two reasons — firstly opting out of modern industrial society is impracticable, and secondly there is a considerable gap between Dave's ideals and his actual way of life. In one sense, Jerusalem is complementary to Chicken Soup: its structural pattern is similar, but the colours of the pattern are reversed. Chicken Soup with Barley begins with a euphoric togetherness, from which most of the characters fall away, leaving Sarah at the end actually and morally alone; but Jerusalem begins with the Simmonds' departure from the family and ends with their return, after a period of solitude, to a life more comprehensible to those friends and relatives they had left.

So I feel that Wesker has taken facts from real life and
made a poetic drama out of them. Based on realism Jerusalem has become a cry for a change in the mechanised life of the city man. Much of the characterization, for example that of the old aunts, is vivid, and the process of Dave's failure is dissected with precision. We feel that Ada is more inflexibly idealistic of the two. But it is to be noted that the gulf between specific experience and the general debate derived from it does not seem too great. The experience justifies the debate rather than being a mere excuse for it, and the debate itself surely has some weight and interest.

We can say that the conclusion of Jerusalem goes some way towards summing up the feeling of the trilogy as a whole. However great discouragement, improbable the gain, virtue consists in continuing to care and continuing to try. To Wesker, Dave and Ada represent all who sometimes feel that they must rebel against the world as it is. One may or may not succeed, but one must continue to try. It is also to be noted that Chicken Soup ends with "you must care," Jerusalem ends with "I do care." And Beatie's eloquence at the end of Roots may be seen as a positive and optimistic blend of the two: "I care and you must care."

From the point of view of dramatic construction, Jerusalem is considerably weak, more like a short story where the action does not develop in dramatic terms but in a descriptive sort of way. The uneasiness with which the play develops betrays that structurally it is pulling in two different directions. The first
and the last, moving-in and moving-out scenes, build up a Chekhovian web of allusions, misunderstanding, warmth and anguish from the texture of the Simmonds and Kahns interaction as a family. Yet this sense of an established way of life is not recreated in the middle scenes which are episodic and chronicle the comings and goings of characters who play their brief roles and depart. So as a Kahn family play, Jerusalem lacks a centre and as an episodic chronicle it is weighted down by a framework of family characterization and atmosphere that is not essential to the Simmonds' experience. Wesker himself was aware of the structural uncertainty of the play and he himself supposed that this play must be considered the most flawed of the three plays in the trilogy. But, however, suddenly in the third act Wesker's undoubted talent blazes to tempestuous life. And in Dave's denunciation of those who have laughed at his efforts to carve out a satisfactory life for his wife and kids, there is a compassionate urgency and vigour not often seen on the English stage. In fact, these moments save the play. Moreover, the play is notable in that stylistically it demonstrates a fuller expression of that romantic trend in Wesker we witnessed in Roots.

V

It also remains for us to account for the opinion of critics about The Wesker Trilogy. Different critics have expressed different views about the trilogy. Some critics like the trilogy while others find faults with it. Thus A.R. Jones
recognises in the trilogy a work of enormous achievement. Jones sees the people in the Kahn family as people not as puppets and he also appreciates Werker's concern for human beings. Without this passionate concern Wesker's characters might have been puppet figures. Laurence Kitchen has found Roots to be a remarkable play. He calls it "one of the most enlightening experiences I have ever been given in a theatre." Of course, there is exaggeration in the opinion expressed by Laurence Kitchen and there are some faults also in Roots. In the first place, I think that Roots moves at a slow pace. In the second place, Wesker has exaggerated the number of ills from which the Norfolk peasants suffer. But even then I believe that Roots is a considerable achievement.

On the other hand there are critics who point out certain defects in the trilogy. Ronald Hayman says that "one of the weaknesses of the trilogy is that it is not only in Roots that Ronnie is more effective in his absence than in his presence." But, however, this is a matter of character, not a symptom of poor plot construction. Of course, Ronnie is intended to be a weak character. But except in Roots, we never know what attitude Wesker wants to adopt towards him, whereas characters like Sarah Kahn and Cissie are very precisely defined by their dialogue. The noted critic V.S. Pritchett is of the view that Roots is a sound play, but he says, "All it has to say is in the third act." To some extent this charge is true but even then the play is saved by the wonderful character of the heroine, her
joyful awakening to life at the eloquence she has learnt from her Jewish intellectual lover. The play is saved by Wesker's humanity, his humour and his remarkable facility at character writing.

Patric Gibbs picked up Sarah's assertion in *Chicken Soup* that without the idea of brotherhood there can be no life: "Since her own life appeared to be in shreds about her, I took this to be ironic, and the whole play to be a study in political disillusion." To some extent the charge is true without the necessary implication that political disillusion is a good thing. It is against Sarah's sustained line of principle that the falling away of other characters make a graph of downward curves. She remains firm and steadfast up to the very end. She even helps her husband into becoming a good man. Kenneth Tynan reviewing the play *Jerusalem* suggested that Wesker's mistake was to equate the privately owned furniture business with the failure of socialism. As a matter of fact, this particular play is a study of two complex characters whose complexities manifest the taking of apparently objective decisions. The Simmonds do not realise themselves how much of their inspiration is emotional, and the result is some confusion in explaining their motives, and some blind spots in planning their movement. At the most we can say that it is an experiment as well as a failure in socialism on the personal level. Kingsley Amis in reviewing the published version of all Wesker's plays admits that he has seen none of the dramas (trilogy and other plays) on stage, but he has read them and
"dislikes" them all. It is difficult to agree with Kingsley. No doubt, there are certain faults and weaknesses in the trilogy and other plays of Wesker, but it is difficult to reject them all in such a way. The trilogy represents a real achievement on many levels.
Notes


