CHAPTER V

The Kitchen, Chips With Everything and The Four Seasons

Most of the plays of Arnold Wesker are chiefly concerned with problems and questions related to humanity. Wesker's vision manifests not so much that eternal fatalism of the Jewish sensibility traced by some critics, as the liberal hamanist awareness. Wesker himself says, "It seems to me that what I have always been is a simple, old fashioned hamanist." Wesker comes close to life, deals with actual problems, feels strongly about them, and wants to convince his audience about them. Wesker is, of course, the solitary post-war British playwright who is consistent in his search and questions. Unlike Osborne and Shelagh Delaney, he is not satisfied with the presentation of the symptoms of the social disease. Nor is he content like Tennessee Williams to lay bare the ulcerous areas of the social body. He is not interested in the question of man's place in the scheme of universe, nor is he concerned about the dissection of the motives and instincts of his characters. Throughout his dramatic career he asks only one question -- what are the avenues and areas of self-realization in a modern industrial society?

I

The most pervasive and unifying concern that runs through most of Wesker's plays could hardly be more basic -- the search for a systematic sense in life, for an interpretation that is at least workably inclusive yet also life affirming. The lack of this though scarcely articulated, bewilders the cooks in The
Kitchen, caught in their enervating routine and groping in unresponsive isolation for an alternative. A sense of uncertainty is a characteristic feature of the kitchen world, which has aptly been described as "a capitalist microcosom with the proprietor standing in for God". In this play Wesker presents, as the microcosm of the world, the stifling hell of an overcrowded kitchen, using a mixture of realistic and symbolic techniques. In it twenty-nine actors recreate the life of a large restaurant kitchen as the staff prepares to meet lunch time rush. Wesker feels intensely for the kitchen staff who execute a complex mime of their tasks in this very mad house. In fact, Wesker himself has worked as a kitchen porter and pastry cook before turning to playwriting. He himself says: "The world might have been a stage for Shakespeare, but to me it is a kitchen, where people come and go and cannot stay long enough to understand each other; and friendship, loves and enmities are forgotten as quickly as they are made."  

His revision of The Kitchen took place after I'm Talking About Jerusalem and reflects his disenchantment with modern life. In the bustle of the kitchen we see a knife fight, a miscarriage and finally a cook (Peter) who runs amok and breaks the kitchen up (p.67) -- all of which illustrates what could happen when "people are cooped up, constantly frustrated and limited entirely to the dreariest least stimulating, practicalities." Wesker's skill helps to capture the intensity and frenzy of the workers who have to prepare and serve thousands of meals a day. What
makes *The Kitchen* memorable is that Wesker sees in his men and women the people of the world, with their dreams, their conflicts, their loves, their hates, their inability to get along together. Behind the daily grubby work there is a message: Men struggle without knowing why. They grope for love, which more often than not, passes them by.

In a lengthy *Introduction and Notes for the Producer* Wesker explains the sense and purpose of the play. He tells us:

> This is a play about a large kitchen called the Tivoli. All kitchens, especially during service, go insane. There is the rush, there are the pretty quarrels, grumbles, false prides, and snoberry. Kitchen staff instinctively hate dining-room staff, and all of them hate the customer. He is the personal enemy. (*The Kitchen*, p.9)

Wesker himself concedes that the whole play is an endeavour to recreate the atmosphere of the kitchen in the order to demonstrate a particular point. We note that the central tension of the play is certainly not built around any clash of personality, but is focused in the tempo of activities in the kitchen. The cooks work there for eight hours a day, but even then they are treated coldly by the proprietor. As Peter says, "We work here eight hours a day, and yet -- it's nothing. We take nothing ... And the Kitchen don't mean nothing to you and you don't mean to the Kitchen nothing." (*The Kitchen*, p.48)

A remarkable correspondence between the atmosphere in the
kitchen and the life of the characters determines, in a way, its peculiar appeal. We know the characters only when they work in the kitchen. It is not just that everything else they do has to be fitted around their work — they are what they are because of their work and they express themselves most directly in the way they work. The results of working too long under these conditions are seen in the chef, who has grown apathetic and in the three of the cooks, who are invariably drunk by the end of the play. Peter has naturally explosive and erratic temperament — and this, of course, is exaggerated by strain of the conditions in which he works. Similarly, it is both a real consequence of the heat and noise of the kitchen and functionally appropriate to the play that the other cooks' characteristics, should under pressure, be heightened to a greater or lesser extent. Even Michael, the least assertive of the cooks, is "infused with a kind of madness" (p.11) that is common to this profession.

Dimitri is a Cypriot kitchen porter. He prefers to work in a kitchen, instead of a factory, thinking that "in a factory a man makes a little piece till he becomes a little piece." (p.20) Though rejecting the dehumanising factory routine, Dimitri points out the identical effect of work in the kitchen:

> Listen you put a man in a plate-room all the day, he's got dishes to make clean, and stinking bins to take away, and floors to sweep, what else is there for him to do — he want to fight. He got to show he is a man some way. So, blame him. (The Kitchen, p.20)
And kitchens like the Tivoli are not all that different from a factory in their deadening routines, adverse and enervating working conditions. In the Tivoli, even the quality of food "is not so important as the speed with which it is served." (p.9) The overwhelming heat, speed, noise, smells and curtailed or elliptic human interactions of the kitchen illustrate in the course of the play just how little the very divergent personalities of the pollyglot staff mean or matter in the pursuit of meal-mongering.

Alfredo is an old chef about sixty-five. He despises his work, but gets on with it all the same because that is what workers are supposed to do. Peter suggests ironically that Kevin should follow Alfredo's example: "Be like Mr. Alfredo. Nothing disturbs Mr. Alfredo. Mr. Alfredo is a worker and he hates his boss. He knows his job but he does no more no less and at the right time." (p.36) Kevin spends most of his time being disturbed by the mad rush of the work and people around him. He says, "It is no place for a human being." (p.47) Since circumstances combine to grind the characters down to the uniformity of their professions, it is all the more remarkable that one can sense the underlying differences between individuals even when they are most completely submerged in the grind of routine. Peter, of course, is more clearly individualised, and the strength of his characterization lies in its unattractiveness, hysterical-sounding laughter, a boisterious, sardonic humour.

Peter, who according to Wesker, "is the main character", ...
emphasises the place's omnipresence: "This — this madhouse it's always here. When you go, when I go, when Dimitri go — this kitchen stays. It will go on when we die, think about that." (p.48) The question of human alienation in an industrial society is touched by Paul. For those such as Paul's next door neighbour who is a bus driver, there is dislocation not only between various of their own thoughts, but between their own and anybody else's point of view. As Paul puts it:

And the horror is this — that there is a wall, a big wall between me and millions of people like him. And I think — where will it end? And I look around me, at the kitchen, at the factories, at the enormous bloody buildings going up with all those people in them, and I think, Christ, christ, christ! (The Kitchen, p.52)

Mr. Marango, the proprietor is an old man of seventy-five. As Wesker comments: "The machine he has set in motion is his whole life and he suspects that everyone is conspiring to stop it." (p.12) He does not assume his true significance till the very end. He cries after a cook (Peter) has run amok with an axe and smashed the gas lead, "I don't know what more to give a man. He works, he eats, I give him money. This is life, isn't it?" (p.68) The point, of course, is that there could, indeed, be much more and when Mr. Marango fails to realise this thing, we have to sympathise. Peter shakes his head at his boss, gesturing that he cannot explain if Mr. Marango does not know. And
as the curtain falls Mr. Marango cries out, "What is there more? what is there more?" (p.69) But, however, it is to be pointed out that Wesker's stage direction to the original version added, "that there must be something more." But if, in fact, the characters have no more to their lives than what the play shows, then the proprietor can do no more.

Thus we see that the hectic chaos in the kitchen wonderfully reflects, at the visual as well as on conceptual levels, the senseless living of everybody there, except Mr. Marango. But even Mr. Marango's life is hollow in essence. As Peter says:

He is a man? He is a restaurant. I tell you. He goes to market at five-thirty in the morning; returns here, reads the mail, goes up to the office and then comes down here to watch the service ... Till the last customer he stays. Then he has a sleep upstairs in his office. Half an hour after we come back, he is here again till nine-thirty, may be ten at night. Everyday morning to night. What kind of life is that, in a kitchen! Is that a life I ask you? (The Kitchen, pp.28-29)

But, however, Wesker is not only criticising Marango, the boss, who is dominating the life of the workers, but his more potent attack is directed to the machine itself, the organised chaos which is reducing people to mindless nonentities. Wesker's premise in the kitchen is that all the world is a kitchen, and all men
and women merely cooks, waiters and scullions. The conclusion follows from the premise, but the premise is never tested against reality, only stated, and herein lies the most obvious weakness of the play.

It is noted that Peter's sensibility is keener than that of his associates. He can observe things at an empirical level but lacks that intellectual power which probes things and works a valid framework of understanding. Is Wesker demanding here that negative dissatisfaction and disenchantment are not enough for the liberation of the working-class, but a more conscious understanding in depth of capitalist corruption is a prerequisite for any fruitful programme? Peter's craving for a meaningful life touches a positive core only once in the play when he asks his friends, during the break period after the lunch-hour rush, what they want from life. Dimitri dreams of the independent life of a radio mechanic, Kevin of happy sleep, Hans of money, Raymond of women and Paul craves for human understanding. But Peter says, "I can't dream in a kitchen." (The Kitchen, p. 61)

In The Kitchen, unlike many of Wesker's later plays, there is no contrast between an ideal and a necessary departure from it. In Chicken Soup, Jerusalem, Golden City and The Four Seasons, the ideal is indicated at the beginning of the play and the development is concerned largely with the departure. But in The Kitchen, there is no such clear glimpse of an ideal and no such definite pattern of departure from it. We get all the indications we need of a scale of values from the references to
good work and bad work. The satisfaction of making a portable radio with one's own hand (p.19) is contrasted with the joylessness of working in a factory devoting the whole time to one component piece, making a "little wire" or fixing a "knob". (p.20) The possibility of good cooking is contrasted with the mass-production cooking in which only speed and quantity count.

It would be relevant to compare the conclusion of The Kitchen with that of Roots. No answers are offered in The Kitchen and the sombreness of the play's vision strikes us all the more forcibly when this is compared with the positive conclusion of Roots. Roots was to end as Beatle Bryant found herself shaken by a failed love-affair into a full realisation of priorities and influences shaping her life. But in a similar position in The Kitchen, Peter's jilting by Monique incites him to an act of destruction. He smashes the crockery and breaks the gas leads to the serving counter. He cuts his hands and is covered with blood. Mr. Marango rushes about, looking with dismay at his wrecked kitchen and asks: "Why does everybody sabotage me?" (p.68) This act of destruction by Peter is no more than an instinctive emotional response at this or that aspect of his own or his comrades' condition.

It is noteworthy that violence is not far from the men who work in the kitchen. They work and sweat and fight in the kitchen. But it is the failure of the will to communicate that is dividing the kitchen staff against each other. The action of the play shows it very well. Alfredo is "a typical cook in that he
will help nobody and will accept no help; nor will he impart his knowledge." (p.11) Peter will not give his cutting board for a minute to Kevin: "Oh, no, no, no my friend. The plate-room, the plate room, in the plate-room, you will find them. This is mine." (p.45) The Chef refuses queries about whether the menu should say "plaice" or "sole" by saying, "I don't know anything about it." (p.29) Even Mangolis the porter won't clean a stainer. (p.30) As the stage direction comments, "In the kitchen it is each man for himself now." (p.45) The separation of the cooks is more evident because of the great range of nationalities in the kitchen. English, Irish, Germans, Italians, Cypriots, Maltese, Jews— all mix here naturally and, within their own marked-out areas of interest and precedence more or less amicably. Misunderstandings arise because of an imperfect grasp of English. Thus the kitchen becomes a boiling pot in which generally separate and separable kinds of racial tensions are to be found in a confused agglomeration. The first quarrel of which we hear is caused by Peter having called Gaston "a lousy cypro" the previous day. (p.18) The waitress Violet calls Peter, "You Boche you. You bloody German bastard", (p.67) which infuriates Peter beyond measure. The Jewish vegetable cook Bertha tells the Cypriot Nicholas that "the lavatory is your country" and is herself called "a cow." (p.23)

The large number of characters are handled with a natural skill. The dialogue is written with a sureness of touch and is never really superfluous. Dialogue here, perhaps more than in
any other Wesker's play, never really loses direction and is contributive to the atmosphere. There is a balance between the two long working sequences divided by an interlude. It is to be pointed out that the interlude was written in at the suggestion of the director, John Dexter, who said it was essential to divide the two working sequences with something that would contrast them. This imaginative scene situated between the rush of the morning and evening has the quiet power of contrasting two different qualities of life — the life of fulfilment and the life of aimless drudgery. Gossip about last night's fight (PP. 17-18), the anger and irritation of the lunch-hour rush, attempts at feeble jokes, Peter's forced "Hyah, Hyah, Hyah" laugh (P.43), the quarrels about dates with waitresses, the bickering about foreigners, the panic of pretending to be absorbed in work when the boss arrives, a scream from the steam room where a cook (Hans) knocks over a pot of hot water and burns his face (P.23) — the way Wesker organises these elements makes us believe in him totally as a chronicler of group life.

To some critics The Kitchen appears to be unrealistic. For instance, John Russell Taylor considers The Kitchen so crude and melodramatic that it "leans over uncomfortably far into the realm of farce." Taylor asks, "What sort of London restaurant serves 1,500 lunches in two hours every day, with waitress service and presumably a seating capacity of around 500?" Wesker's answer to this cutting remark is a simple one. Wesker says, "There is no such kitchen in London, because the kitchen in mind was based on
the one in Paris, to which all the facts apply." On the other hand, according to V.S. Pritchett The Kitchen "has a virtuosity and a force which recall O'Casey, O'Neill and moments of Gorki." Pritchett goes to the extent of considering The Kitchen to be the best of Wesker's plays because it is the best theatre, even if less ambitious than the others. I do not agree with V.S. Pritchett when he calls The Kitchen to be the best of Wesker's plays. I think that a glaring drawback of The Kitchen is that Wesker analyses the main characters in a note to the producer. We come to know these characters through these notes, not through their action or dialogues on the stage.

II

Another aspect of humanity that has been a source of constant concern to Wesker is that of class system and racial tensions and national prejudices. Thus Chips With Everything deals primarily with social relationship between the ruler and the ruled. It is, in fact, a serious, powerful and systematic attack on class system. It is a chilling depiction of military life, and it portrays the officers, the conscripts, and the Royal Air Force with theatrical vividness. This service life is offered as in The Kitchen, as a microcosm of the social and economic system. But whereas the cooks are free to go, servicemen are not. Here the air force hierarchy in a training camp for national servicemen as much represents "all the world" as the kitchen. But the world of national servicemen is more truly analogous to society in its stratified class system. There
is a clear cut division of the personnel into officers and men and again they are subdivided into ranks.

The play starts aptly by showing how the habit of servile conformatism is inculcated. Discipline is used to check down the liveliness and individuality of individuals. The Squardon Leader tells the recruits:

You are here to learn discipline. Discipline is necessary if we are to train you to the maximum stage of efficiency, discipline and obedience. You will obey your instructors because they are well trained, you will obey them because they can train you efficiently, you will obey them because it's necessary for you to be trained efficiently. (Chips, P.22)

Each man needs to be pressed into a pattern. Corporal Hill tells the conscripts:

We will count our way along. We will count together, and then may be will all act together. I want everything to be done together. We are going to be the happiest family in Christendom and we are going to move together, as one, as one solitary man. (Chips, P.20)

The pattern must also be imposed on their minds. That is why drill is such an important feature of recruit training.

In Act one, Scene one we see nine recruits in a hut. They are "subdued, uncertain, mumbling." (p.13) The Drill Instructor tries to terrorise them into submission. He promises the recruits "hell" if they resist and "a good time" if they conform. (p.14)
He himself comes from the working-class, but his technique to gain power over his men is very much like the technique the officers adopt with Pip, the hero who soon demonstrates qualities of leadership. At first, Pip inspires the other conscripts to resist authority, but later on he yields and puts the uniform of an officer trainee. Wesker implicitly tries to say that so often happens in a society governed by hierarchy — the leader cares for and remains loyal only to his talent for leadership.

The action of the play centres on one of the latest batch of conscripts. Pip, who stubbornly chooses to stick to square-bashing with the fellow-occupants of hut — refuting the officer training to which, as the son of a rich ex-Brigadier banker, his upbringing should apparently incline him. Rather Pip tries to incite a mutiny against the unfair and irrational air-force system. Pip first stands out from the group in scene two, the Naafi scene. He arouses the curiosity of the other when he tells them: "My father is a banker, we idolize each other. I was born in a large country house and I am scorching rich," (p.15) and "My father was also a general." (p.16) But he tells them that he does not want to become an officer. He demonstrates his qualities of leadership and imagination when he persuades the conscripts to raid the coke yard, which is protected by wire netting and a patrol. This raid is organised to provide the hut stove with coke at a time when without Pip's initiative all the men in the hut would have been shivering round an empty stove. The job is carried with military precision. It involves a kind of relay
race with chairs, buckets and stools to get the raider back and forth over the wire netting in between a sentry's regular appearances. The raid on the coke yard is a very complicated task and is planned and directed by Pip alone, so that afterwards the others are full of admiration for his initiative. Talking to the other conscripts Charles says, "you would't have done it wothout Pip." (p.46) There is no more "exhilarating moment" than this in which Pip organizes the conscripts to raid the coke yard.

In Act one, Scene four, we see the conscripts sitting in a lecture hall. They have to listen to their officers. The Wing Commander tells them,"We are simply the men who must be prepared ... Already the aggressors have force far superior to ours." (p.21) The Squadron Leader speaks to them only for a minute or two. He informs them, "My task is not only to ensure respect for authority, but also to foster the feelings of self- respect and personal honour which are essential to efficiency." (P.22) The Pilot Officer represents a section of the power structure hated by Wesker. He tells the conscripts:

All I shall require is cleanliness. It's not that I want rigid men, I want clean men. It so happens, however, that you cannot have clean men without rigid men, and cleanliness requires smartness and ceremony... your huts must be spick and span without a trace of dust,because dust carries germs, and germs are unclean. I want a man clean from toe nail to hair root. I want him so clean that he looks unreal. In fact I don't want
real men, real men are dirty and nasty, they pick their noses _ and scratch their skin. I want unreal super-real men. (Chips, P.23)

The Physical Training Instructor demands fitness:

I want your body awake and ringing. I want you so light on your feet that the smoke from a cigarette could blow you away, and yet so strong that you stand firm before hurricanes. I hate thin men and detest fat ones. I want you like Greek gods. You heard of the Greeks? (Chips, P.23)

In the next scene, the Pilot Officer visits the hut orderly. In a sensitive passage, the Pilot Officer remembers his father who was an "electrician" and used to play the piano "beautifully." (p.25) The Pilot Officer makes a tentative move to seduce Andrew. The Pilot Officer places his hand on McClure's knee in a friendly gesture. Michael rejects the offer. Finally, the Pilot Officer reveals himself and warns Andrew not to trust him: "Don't ever trust me to be your friend... I warn you not be fooled by good nature, we slum for our own convenience." (p.25)

It is during a Christmas Eve party that Charles overhears the officers taunting them, and he asks Pip what is going on. Pip commences to arouse the men about him. But Andrew still does not trust him. Andrew feels that Pip is a part of the Establishment. He tells Pip:

I've known a lot of people like you, Pip. They come drinking in the pub and talk to us as though we were
the salt of the earth, and then, one day, for no reason any of us can see, they go off, drop us as though that was another game they was tired of. I'd give a pension to know why we attract you? (Chips, p.34)

Before Pip can give a satisfactory answer to the question put by Charles, the Wing Commander asks the conscripts to enjoy on their own lower level. He asks his men to perform "a dirty recitation, or a pop song." He says, "I am sure there is a wealth of native talent among you, and now is the chance for you to display it in all its glory, while the rest of us sit back and watch and listen." (p.35) In other words, he tries to organise an impromptu talent show. He laughs at them but is surprised when Andrew proceeds to recite a religious poem by Robert Burns. Though Andrew announces it as a poem by Burns, but what he recites is "actually the anonymous seventeenth-century dirge called A Lyke-Wake Dirge." The Wing Commander urges them to do something more fitting for inferior men. Pip sneers what the Wing Commander is trying to do. Pip moves to the guitarist and succeeds in persuading him to sing an old peasant revolt song, "The Cutty Wren." (pp.37-8)

"The Cutty Wren" comes of triumphantly. Rebellion projects itself on the stage. The working-class men show themselves capable of flaring up. The Wing Commander, realising that war has been declared, endeavours to isolate Pip from the other conscripts. He calls Pip to his side and asks, "Why are you fighting me, Thompson? We come from the same side, don't we?"
The Wing Commander can not understand Pip. He tells Pip, "Listen, lad, perhaps you have got a fight on with your father or something, well that's all right by me, we all fight our fathers, and when we fight them we also fight what they stand for. Am I right?" The Wing Commander asks for a truce, "Let Your time here be a turce, eh? Answer me, boy, my guns are lowered and I'm waiting for an answer." In fact, the Wing Commander is inviting Pip to become one of them, "We need You." In Act Two, Scene Two Corporal Hill continues to train the new men. He demonstrates how to handle a rifle and warns them that death is a terrible thing. Smiler does badly in the drill and Corporal Hil calls him, "nasty squirming imbecile!" Smiler is later on sent to the guard room where he is tormented by sadistic guards. The Establishment is beginning to realise that Pip is dangerous and that even men like Smiler may rebel. Therefore, in Act Two, Scene Four, Pip is asked to see the officers in the Wing Commander's office. The Squadron Leader and the Pilot Officer are also there. The Pilot officer, who had failed to win Andrew, now speaks for the Establishment :"The Air Force is no place to carry on a family war, Pip. This is not a public school, it's a place where old boys grow into young men, believe me." Pip does not want to be an officer, rather he wants to be "an administration orderly." He says that he does not enjoy the company of the officers: "Certain standards are necessary, Sir." Pip tells the Pilot
The crisis comes when during the bayonet practice (Act Two, Scene Five) Pip refuses to attack the dummy, he stands still. All the other recruits have participated in the bayonet practice. Corporal Hill tells Pip, "I'm charging You with failure to obey a legitimate order issued by an N.C.O. in command under Her Majesty's Air Force, and may God help You, lad." (p. 57) But Pip does not impress the other conscripts by refusing to attack the dummy. Andrew tells Pip, "Don't go making heroic gestures and then expect gratitude." (p. 58) In Act Two, Scene Seven, the Establishment goes on the attack once again. The Pilot Officer tells Pip:

We listen but we do not hear, we befriend but do not touch you, we applaud but do not act to tolerate is to ignore... your mates are morons, Thompson, morons. At the slightest hint from us they will disown you... you can't fight us from the outside. Relent boy.

(Chips, p. 59)

Pip repeats his decision "I WILL NOT BE AN OFFICER." (p. 59) The Pilot Officer exposes the inherent weakness in Pip's character with trenchant clarity:

"Thompson, you wanted to do more than simply share the joy of imparting knowledge to your friends; no, not modesty... What then... What then... Shall I say it? Shall I? Power... we know you and I, we know, Thompson. (Chips, p. 60)
Pip responds to this only by saying, "Oh, God." The Pilot Officer really succeeds in breaking down Pip when he tells Pip, "you're destroyed, Thompson. No man survives whose motive is discovered, no man. Messiah to the masses!" (p.60)

After this confrontation, Pip is given another chance to go through the bayonet practice session. This time he obeys the orders of Corporal Hill, "with a terrifying scream he rushes at the dummy, sticking it three times, with three screams." (p.60) Pip has thus capitulated. He joins the officer class he has failed to beat. As the transformation takes place Pip tells Charles, "We are not hard men." (p.67) The rebellion is over. Smiler who had run away returns—tired, haggard and defeated. The Pilot Officer hands over a list to Pip from which Pip reads out the postings of the other conscripts. Six of them are made Administration Orderlies, one is sent to a typing pool, and Smiler is made to do three extra weeks of recruit training. (p.67) The final scene shows the passing out parade. Even in this scene Corporal Hill says, "I want to see them all pointing one way, together — unity, unity." (p.68) But the unity needed for efficient militarism is double-edged and can prove to be dangerous if turned against the minority of rulers. Ossia Trilling reports that it is perhaps the only play in Britain in which the National Anthem is played at the climax to an audience who "remains seated throughout."

But the question that needs to be answered is whether or not Pip is really concerned with power. It appears that basically
(though perhaps unconsciously) Pip wants a "reversal that will give him power, not destroy the power structure itself." The American critic H.U. Ribalow says, "The Pilot Officer probes Thompson's mind and reveals it, both to Pip Thompson and to the audience." Wesker, himself, however gives a different interpretation — that the Pilot Officer is corrupting Pip into believing that his real concern is power, thus undermining his confidence and arguing him out of action. In a letter to H.U. Ribalow, Wesker points out that "Pip was not really concerned with power but he is tricked into believing he was." This interpretation, however, shifts a sizable load of blame off the character of Pip onto the subtle maneuvering of the authority, albeit Pip's weakness remains a potent factor. I believe that Pip has been using the other conscripts in a personal power struggle against authority. The transformation of Pip into an officer registers the triumph of corruption and Pip's decided rejection of his temporary working-class friends. The opposing values in the ruler-ruled conflict are leadership on the one hand and unity on the other — and Pip's failure to transform his allegiance from one to the other is his defeat.

In its impulse of social protest, Chips is complementary to The Kitchen, but more powerful for it attacks one of the cherished British institutions, the Royal Air Force. The anti-establishment inspiration which we noted earlier in the trilogy and The Kitchen explodes into a scathing expose of, and attack on, the British ruling class represented by the Royal Air Force.
officers. But Pip is quite different from Peter of *The Kitchen*. Pip is eminently able to meet the clever challenges of the authority and gave a sure direction to rebels. Peter fails because of his lack of clearcut intellectual comprehension of the objective; Pip fails because of his lack of character, his clear choice of his own class. Wesker, in Pip's character represents a very common phenomenon in British public life: the rebellious intellectual, after a heroic gesture of participation in working-class ideals, joining the ranks of the Establishment. This theme relevant to the contemporary situation in Britain and elsewhere, poses the question very much on Wesker's mind: if bourgeois leadership of the masses is adequate to lead them to a fuller happier living?

Wesker's theatrical idiom takes a new edge in *Chips*. Wesker has broken right out of the naturalism of the trilogy. He has found a form that helps him in expressing his ideas and feelings implicitly without indulging in didacticism which was considered the weakness of the earlier plays like *Roots* and *The Kitchen*. In *Chips* Wesker is concerned with a very large group of characters, but he moves skilfully from one locate to another, concerning himself sometimes with individuals and sometimes with the group as a whole. In this play a Brechtian technique of division of action into short independent scenes has been applied successfully. There are eleven scenes in Act One and twelve in Act Two. Some of the scenes are very short, for instance, scene eight of Act Two consists of only about ten lines. But each of
the short scenes is more or less capable of standing up dramatically, independently of the other scenes. Action and dialogue have been compressed into a new economy and precision, remarkably in tune with the atmosphere of military precision and abruptness. The sequence of actions and dialogue support each other to communicate to the audience the central issue of the drama — revolt of the underprivileged against authority and Establishment. Wesker calls the convention he has followed in this play "a kind of stylised naturalism", and in places the stylisation affects the idiom so that impressive, poetic or formal styles of speech fade in and out of the normally naturalistic dialogue without clear-cut division. Smiler's running speech is an exception, which combines stylisation of speech and action.

The technique of the play does not allow the playwright to develop his characters in a rounded fashion which has led John Russell Taylor to describe them as "figures in a political cartoon." The powerful impulse of attack on British class system not only forges a unity of impression in the play, it gives a larger meaning to the motives and actions of the characters, mending their mere political significance and representativeness. The purposive framework of the play somehow accommodates and even justifies inadequate characterization, and sketchy short swift scenes, the growing organisation and rebellion feeding our emotion much more than the characters. As Jimmy Porter's anger in Look Back in Anger has its own identity
and the progress of disillusionment has its own life in The Wesker Trilogy, in the same way the growth and progress of rebellion has its own attraction in Chips. In the context of this statement, perhaps, the demand for a fuller treatment of characters somewhat loses its urgency, and we adjust our sense of appreciation to a different focus. One feels that Wesker was so much captivated by the idea of exposing the small class-ridden world of the R.A.F., of evoking a highly successful dramatic idiom to communicate, even in the rhythm of action, the crisp neat inhumanly disciplined character of the military world, that characterization was of secondary importance to him. Wesker says about the sketchy characters of the officers in Chips With Everything:

I deliberately said to myself, I am not going to make them rounded characters out of any sort of liberal impulse. However rounded I might make them, they still stood for what they did. And even so, the way they spoke and the way they behaved is not caricatured, it is very real.

Different critics have different views about Chips With Everything. Harold Hobson, reviewing the play in London's Sunday Times, said, "This is the Left-Wing drama's first real breakthrough, the first anti-Establishment play of which the Establishment has cause to be afraid. If there is a better play in London I have not seen it." Howard Taubman warns his readers to consider the play "crude propaganda." To him, it
has theatrical virtuousity as well as dramatic power and subtlety.” To Emory Lewis, “It is one of the best plays of the decade,” and Wesker a major twentieth-century dramatist. Kenneth Tynan has the highest possible praise for this play. As he says in The Observer, “a gauntlet of a play has been flung down on the stage of the Royal Court Theatre.” To Henry Hews, the drama is in some respects “a loaded thesis play.” Newsweek calls it “a play with stinging immediacy.” John Dexter, the director has said, “It is the most stimulating play I have ever directed.” On the other hand, John Russell Taylor says that in this play “One is left with the feeling that Wesker has never taken a good clear look at service life, and so the initial assumption of his allegory based on it is false and all that follows from it is correspondingly suspect...” Bamber Gascoigne calls it “a bad play” and labels Wesker’s views as “over-simplified sociology” and “grotesque.”

I personally feel that Chips is a successful anti-establishment play, yet I feel that Harold Hobson and Emory Lewis have over-estimated the play. On the other hand critics like Bamber Gascoigne and John Russell Taylor are quite hostile to Wesker’s play. Since Wesker has served in the Royal Air Force for two years (1950-1952) it is injustice to say that Wesker has not taken a good look at service life in the R.A.F. or to call Chips a bad play. It, of course, “hits hard.” It has become an international success. In England it disturbed the Establishment; in the United States it interested
audiences. I feel that Chips could have become much more popular if Wesker had made Pip's capitulation a bit more tragic.

III

In The Four Seasons Wesker deals with the problem of man-woman relationship. This play has practically no social significance and is almost entirely non-political. Ronald Hayman in an interview asked Wesker about the transition from Golden City to The Four Seasons and Wesker replied, "You could say that The Four Seasons was the story of Kate and Andrew Cobham taking a year's sabbatical off from building the Golden City and spending it in a deserted house." For Wesker also, The Four Seasons is a sort of sabbatical off from composing the drama of social pre-occupation, set in naturalistic style and having strong doses of socialist ideas.

The Four Seasons illustrates the fact that individual suffering cannot necessarily be avoided or cured by social adjustment. Martin Esslin calls the play "expressionistic in form, neo-romantic in content." The play is fully given to the progress and decay of passion between a man called Adam and a woman called Beatrice. There are no other characters than the two lovers. There is no plot and the only simple development — the relationship like the year which the lovers spend together passes through four seasonal stages within the scene divisions of Winter, Spring, Summer and Autumn. In Winter Adam endeavours to break the silence of Beatrice, in Spring they fall in love, in Summer quarrels reminiscent of other quarrels begin, and in
Autumn they part away. In this play explanations are cut down to the minimum. We never know how the protagonists of the play — Adam and Beatrice met or how they agreed to spend a year together in a deserted house. We can't guess how they manage about food and electricity and a water supply. We don't either find out who the house belongs to and why it is left empty for a year. Wesker says that the play "sets out to explore only the essentials of a relationship with deliberately little recourse to explanation or background." (The Four Seasons, p. 118)

Of course we hear a certain amount about their previous relationships — they have both had a marriage and at least one infidelity. Beatrice has been married and divorced, and she has taken a lover whom she lost because of her intense jealousy. On the other hand, Adam betrayed a childhood sweetheart at school "Camp." (p.109) This boyish incident has biased his adult life and wrecked his marriage. But during this one year Adam and Beatrice have relationship with no one except each other. Actually this is a repetition of earlier love affairs, similarly patterned, equally embittered.

There is not as much action in The Four Seasons as in The Kitchen or Chips With Everything. No doubt, Adam and Beatrice attempt to decorate the house. They put white paint on the walls and golden curtains in the windows. (p.85) They cover the old furniture in the same golden material. (p.92) Some cooking and baking are done. We see Adam and Beatrice making the apple strudel. (p.107) They talk, they argue, and they torture
each other. But even then there is not as much action on the stage as in *The Kitchen* or *Chips*. There are long pauses during which no action takes place. For instance, in the First Episode, Adam and Beatrice sit still for a long time. (p.77)

Adam and Beatrice live together for a year but fail to find solace in each other. Wesker is obviously trying to "probe the psyches of contemporary man and woman in the civilized world. He is wondering why an adult, human relationship is so hard to achieve." But, however, the failure of Adam and Beatrice differs from the failure of Ronnie, Dave or Pip, because it is presented not as circumstantial but inevitable. In other plays of Wesker there is somewhere a hint of what could be done to alter events, of possible better choices, as we note in *The Kitchen*. But there is no such hint in *The Four Seasons*. The only changes are the intensification of the worst suffering: "Moments like these remind me that time passes and time passing reminds me of sadness and waste and neglect and suffering." (p.117)

Though Wesker himself says in the Epilogue that "Adam does not represent 'man' nor Beatrice 'woman', (p.118) the names — Adam and Beatrice must carry with them certain connotations. The similarities between Adam-Eve love affair and the couple's early experiences multiply instances of failure, implying universalities. One failure breeds another because it taints and disables. Adam cries, "Beatrice you never recover, never." (p.78) He even traces back his predetermination to his teenage
betrayal of a childhood sweetheart. So in the absence of any subsidiary plotting, of other characters, inessential incidents or any other elaborate illustration of this stark main theme, added resonance can come only from Adam's and Beatrice's reminiscences of their former lives. At the very commencement, hints of a pre-ordained development prepare for what turn out to be actual correspondences: "And now, because there is neither wife nor mistress I sing to you, speak poetry to you..." says Adam. (p.80) He considers Beatrice "a rare woman," and Beatrice replies, "so many people have once considered me a rare woman." (p.81) Gradually some experiences of Beatrice's past life are revealed. She has had a bad marriage. She tells Adam that her husband once said to her, "You are like a queen without a country," (p.85) and she hates queens without their countries. Her lover, who had been "a leader of men" (p.85) had not been indifferent to her, but she had failed him because of her intense jealousy. She says, "I've destroyed a marriage and failed a lover _ I need to be healed." (p.86)

During the Spring section the love of Adam and Beatrice grows. Beatrice becomes poetic in expressing her love. She promises Adam:

When you need me to be you sun, I am your sun. When you need soft winds I shall cover the land with my breath. When you need comfort then I shall offer my breasts and my limbs and my lips. Whatever you call for you shall have. (The Four Seasons, p.95)
With slight tentative movements Beatrice moves her hands to touch Adam's skin. She bares Adam's breast and then unfastens her garments to bare hers, and lets their breasts touch. She calls Adam her "golden eagle." Suddenly love has made her whole and she tells Adam, "I would like to be young again for you; I would like to be shy and pure and untouched for you." (p.95) She is reluctant to hear the truth of Adam's past. She wants to enclose herself with him, away from the rest of the world. Adam recognises that a war is going on between them. Adam says, "I try to believe it cannot be true, not all the time, but it is." (The Four Seasons, p.99)

The conflict of the play is quite clear. Adam and Beatrice are both flawed and blemished. They have gone away together. Beatrice seeks to possess Adam as his wife before Beatrice has done. Adam's wife could not forgive him for his laughter and left Adam for another man. Beatrice is also possessive and she, too, does not like Adam's laughter for it sounds unnatural. Adam feels that Beatrice is oppressive like his wife, "You sound like her." (p.113) Adam and Beatrice start accusing each other of being incapable of love. Adam slaps her face and she raises her hand to attack him but he holds her wrists. They are exposed: "We were not even really friends, were we?" asks Beatrice, and Adam admits "No". (p.115) Towards the end of the play Adam declares, "to know more than one person is to betray them," and Beatrice answers, "on the contrary, to know only one person is to betray the world." (p.116) Finally before Adam and Beatrice
separate for ever, they recall the passing of love, and it does not matter whether the him or her they reject are their present or former lovers, so indistinguishable have they become.

Though Wesker himself calls the play "a story about love coming and dying", it is not a play about love but about jealousy. The jealousy exposed in the play is a jealousy of the mind — the betrayal in question is of all the aspects of love that transcend or extend the physical. Adam and Beatrice fail to live with and for each other because they have failed to live with and for anybody else. Indeed, they are mirrors of each other's pain, but are incapable of helping each other as two images behind the glass. Wesker thus describes the relationship between Adam and Beatrice portrayed in this play as an inevitable development of his "concern with the problem of male-female relationship in his earlier plays." Therefore, we can unhesitatingly remark that in this particular play, Wesker has restricted himself to a narrow, but meaningful conflict: the war between sexes.

As a study in Wesker's development as a dramatic artist, The Four Seasons offers special interest. In all the earlier six plays Wesker exploited the possibilities of everyday speech, set as they were in naturalistic style with a central social theme and strong political motive. His characters were convincing enough as individuals, and their social relevance was never out of focus. In The Four Seasons he creates a very private love relationship. Wesker, apprehending the criticism
that he is departing from socialistic principles or turning away from a preoccupation with real human problems, says in the Epilogue:

The play, far from being a retreat from values contained in my earlier writing is a logical extension of them in that a connection exists between, for instance, Sarah's cry 'love comes first, you cannot have brotherhood without love' and Beatrice's lament that "but without love I have neither appetite nor desire, I'm capable of nothing." (The Four Seasons, pp. 19-20)

But it is clearly a case of special pleading and the logical loopholes in this argument are too glaring — the kind of love that Sarah Kahn craved for and the Adam-Beatrice love relationship divorced from social reality are completely different in character and context. But, however, Wesker puts forward, later a more valid argument: "Deny plays such as this 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."

It appears that in The Four Seasons Wesker makes a strenuous effort at poeticising and lyricising situations, which are superfluous and almost irrelevant. Likewise, his attempt to establish an intrinsic relationship between the seasons and the moods of the lovers, is too superficial and fails to be dramatically functional. One of the cardinal failures of the play has been its lack of any central area of developing
interest, the atmosphere remaining fairly static without any nervous energy to invigorate or interpret moods or situations. In Chekhov, atmosphere has a real personality, functionally contributing to the development and progress of the central theme, strengthening nodal points, underlining contradictory character and progression of events and uniting different strands into a richer artistic experience. But Wesker's atmosphere is flat, colourless, dead, lacking in subtle nuances that could make it more meaningful than a mere lifeless backdrop. Golden City was glorious failure dramatically, but the vigour of the concept was exciting and the playwright was partly successful in projecting the image of a work of great potential. But The Four Seasons, in concept, execution and style is a dismal failure. Wesker's genius is assuredly political in character, dramatically speaking, and an experiment like The Four Seasons, though novel, is costly enough.

The critical reception of The Four Seasons was very hostile. Most of the critics did not like phrases like, "I have a golden eagle for a lover", (p.95) and "my skin breathes." (p.93) Ronald Hayman says, "the essential element of physicality is almost completely missing from this love relationship." I think that the charge is almost true. Only once, during the Spring section, Adam and Beatrice let their naked breasts touch. Wesker does not admit that love is subject to social or economic pressures. There are some very lengthy speeches in the play and at times the play appears to be a debate between Adam and Beatrice. There is
neither humour nor clear cut character portrayal. But, of course, the play marks a radical departure from Wesker’s usual themes and dramatic techniques.
Notes


11. Ossia Trilling, "The New English Realism," *Tulane Drama*


