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Editorial's word

Iraqi Teacher's Day

The teacher is a starting point for the course of the human civilization. By the teacher Japan flourished, and by the teacher Singapore also made great strides in progress to be one of the developed countries after being a marshland.

Asked about the secret behind Japan's advancement, the emperor, one day, said: we have started where the others ended; we have learned from their mistakes; we have given the immunity of the diplomat to the teacher as well as the minister's salary. As a result, the teacher has become Number Two Man in Japan after the emperor.

In Singapore, a leader named Lee Kwan Yew appeared who highly appreciated the teacher. He said with modesty, "I have not made the miracle in Singapore, I have done my duty to my country, I have allocated the state resources to education, I have upgraded the teacher status from the lower ranks of society to their proper place; They have created the miracle which the population are experiencing now; any official who likes his country and cares for his people with do as I did." It has only a few days till the teacher's yearly income exceeded 50 thousand dollars besides the other material and moral privileges.

In this way, wherever progress is made across the world, for example in Finland, Germany, Australia, you will find that the leading factor is the teacher. On the contrary, when you look for the reasons of the countries' decadence and backwardness, it will be due to the weak level of education, poor level of teachers along with their own vulnerable social status. The failed teacher will build a decadent generation. The failed countries will create a backward society given that they neglect education and pay no attention to the teacher who lives under the poverty line, targeted by the haters in such underdeveloped countries.

In Iraq, today about 370 thousand teachers are leading the hardest living conditions while they are performing their duties at miserable places unworthy of their educational career and the state's potentials. The state took care of

everything but the teacher, the generation builder and the civilization creator. If we want the good for Iraq and to be part of the developed countries, and if we want the happiness for our people, we need first to begin paying heed to the teachers, and we need to value and appreciate them in line with the poet Ahmed Shawqi:

Stand up in respect for the teacher The teacher is almost a messenger

**مسرحية ارنولد وسكرز (المطبخ): مسرحية بالوعة المطبخ عند الواقعية
الاجتماعية للطبقة العاملة**

*Arnold Wesker's The Kitchen: a Kitchen-Sink Drama of
Working-Class Social-Realism*

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الملخص

ارنولد وسكرز (١٩٣٢-٢٠١٦) هو مسرحي انكليزي غزير الإنتاج وينتمي لموجة المسرح البريطاني الجديد في الخمسينات من القرن العشرين و الذي برز كردة فعل للتغيرات الاقتصادية، السياسية و الاجتماعية التي ظهرت بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية. و يعد هذا المسرحي ممثلاً "لدراما بالوعة المطبخ" و هو نوع جديد من الدراما ظهر في أواخر الخمسينات و بداية الستينات و يتعامل مع شخصيات الطبقات العاملة في محيط عملهم. ظهر هذا النوع الأدبي في مسرحية جون اوزبورن "انظر الى الوراء غاضباً" (١٩٥٦). قدم وسكر شخصيات من الواقع و التي تعبر عن الغضب، الازدراء و الإحباط تجاه الفشل الذي اصاب المؤسسات و الأنظمة السياسية و الاجتماعية في بريطانيا بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية. تستهدف هذه الدراسة التمثيل الواقعي لمجتمع الطبقة العاملة في المسرح البريطاني نتيجة الحرب العالمية الثانية. و تحاول هذه الدراسة ايضاً تحديد مميزات "دراما بالوعة المطبخ" في سياق مسرحية ارنولد وسكرز "المطبخ".

الكلمات المفتاحية: دراما بالوعة المطبخ، الواقعية الاجتماعية، الطبقة العاملة، ارنولد وسكرز، "المطبخ".

١ - جامعة كربلاء/ كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية.

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Abstract

Arnold Wesker (1932-2016) is a prolific English playwright who belongs to the New Wave of British theatre that emerged as a reaction to the social, political, and economical changes in the wake of World War II. Wesker is also a representative of Kitchen-Sink drama, a new type of drama that deals with the lower working-class characters in working-class settings. This genre, which surfaced in the late 1950s and early 1960s, was introduced into the British theatre with John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956). Wesker presents realistic characters who express anger, disdain and frustration towards the failure of the social and political systems and institutions in post-World War II Britain. This study tackles the realistic representation of the working-class society in the British theatre in the aftermath of World-War II. It also attempts to identify the features of Kitchen-Sink drama in the context of Arnold Wesker's *The Kitchen*.

Keywords: Kitchen-sink drama, Social-realism, working-class, Arnold Wesker, *The Kitchen*.

Introduction: A Historical and Cultural Background of Kitchen-Sink Drama and Its Main Characteristics

The post-World War II (1939-1945) era for Britain was devastating; British cities and towns were destroyed. There was instability, austerity and cultural decay. The Welfare State⁽³⁾ promised the British society financial security, prosperity and improvements in employment, healthcare, housing and free secondary education. But its reforms failed to meet the aspirations of the British society.⁽⁴⁾

The post-war generation was influenced by many political events, such as the Nationalization of the Suez Canal in Egypt, the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 against Russia and, most considerably, the collapse of the British Empire after the decline of its colonial and imperial powers. Likewise, in Britain, there was a protest against the use of nuclear weapons, referred to as

'The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament'. All these political events, in addition to the economic disintegration have contributed to radical changes in

³- The term refers to a system in which the government is responsible for the welfare of its citizens by providing free social services, such as health care, child care, pre-schooling, education, employment and housing, and it is based on equal opportunities and distribution of wealth. The Welfare State in Britain initiated in the 1940s. Derek Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State: a History of Social Policy Since the Industrial Revolution* 5th. ed. (London: Palgrave, 2017), 1.

⁴- Alastair Davies and Alan Sinfield, eds., *British Culture of the Postwar: An Introduction to Literature and Society, 1945-1999* (London: Routledge, 2013), 54.

society and left many people, especially the young generation, restless and bewildered. The impact of the post war dilemma has disillusioned their existing morals and beliefs, losing any hope of reformation within the governmental institutions. Under these circumstances, the social and political outlook of theatre was changing according to the sociopolitical status of the period. It is within this historical context that a number of literary movements have emerged.⁽⁵⁾

After World War II, there was a revival of the English theatre; a New Wave of British theatre arose as a reaction to the social, political, and economical changes resulting from the war. This era witnessed the rise of one of the important theatrical movements called Kitchen-sink drama, also known as Kitchen sink realism.

Kitchen-sink realism refers to an artistic and cultural movement in art, novel, theatre and television, and which appeared in Britain in the late 1950s. It employs social realism to describe the lives of the lower working-class in domestic settings and domestic labor not necessarily kitchen-related activities. This genre made its greatest impact in the cinema.⁽⁶⁾

The term 'Kitchen-sink' originated from a painting by John Bratby ⁽⁷⁾ which contains an image of a kitchen sink. Then the critic David Sylvester wrote an article in 1954 entitled "The Kitchen Sink" about a new tendency of British artists known for painting scenes of working-class in a realistic style. The term was then applied to the 'New Wave' of British plays which have been mostly adapted into films and presented on television. John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956), which has been considered a 'turning point' in the history of British theatre, was the first in this genre.⁽⁸⁾

Chambers and Prior have called these plays 'working-class drama'. Such plays are 'anti-bourgeois' with new style and content and give a realistic presentation of the life of the working-class.⁽⁹⁾ This drama has been described

⁵- Elaine Aston and Janelle Reinelt, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Women Playwrights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 38.

⁶- John Graves-Smith and Ian Chilvers, *A Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art* 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), s.v. "Kitchen sink realism," 370.

⁷- John Bratby is a British painter and writer and a member of the Kitchen sink School of the 1950s. He is best known for his paintings of domestic life in the 1950s. Catherine Jolivet ed., *British Art in the Nuclear Age* (London: Routledge, 2017), 9.

⁸- John A. Walker, *Glossary of Art, Architecture & Design since 1945*, 3rd. ed. (G.K. Hall, 1992), s.v. "Kitchen sink realism," 374.

⁹- Colin Chambers and Mike Prior, *Playwright's Progress: Patterns of Postwar British Drama* (London: Amber Lane Press, 1987), 40.

as the 'Renaissance of the British drama' and is also affiliated with the Elizabethan period, thus, labeled as the 'New Elizabethan Age'.⁽¹⁰⁾

This drama shares common distinctive features which distinguish it from the earlier drama. Most of the playwrights of Kitchen-sink drama are from the lower-middle and working classes. Among these playwrights are John Osborne (1929-1994), Arnold Wesker, and the novelists Kingsley Amis (1922-1995), John Braine (1922-1986), John Wain (1925-1994), Alan Sillitoe (1928-2010) and David Storey (1933-2017). These writers usually manifest negative emotions such as anger, distress, protest, and rebellion against the post-war reforms, the class barriers and the harsh conditions of the British society.⁽¹¹⁾ Thus, they were labeled as "Angry Young Men"⁽¹²⁾.

It is worth mentioning that these plays are branded by newness of content and themes. Class distinction and the working-class have not been dealt with seriously before the late fifties. Working-class has become a major issue in the post-war period along with other taboo themes like sex, abortion, homosexuality and other topics. This 'low-life' drama has pursued new contemporary themes such as social inequality, materialism, labor, breakup marriages, homelessness, poverty, class conflict, and limited education opportunities, along with the exploration of man's alienation from other human beings. It has also ridiculed leading political and social figures, wherefore, adopting new dramatic techniques and attitudes.⁽¹³⁾

Until the 1950s, English drama portrayed the lives of the clergy, the ruling and the middle-classes in the verse dramas, the Victorian dramas, the well-made plays and the Avant-garde theatre that dominated the British stage from the 1930s to the 1950s. The main playwrights of the time were Noël Coward (1899-1973), T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), J. B. Priestley (1894-1984), Terence Rattigan (1911-1977), and Christopher Fry (1907-2005). The drama of this period entertained a limited audience from the upper-middle-class and the elite and not the poor common man nor the working-class.⁽¹⁴⁾

¹⁰- John Russel Brown, *Theatre Language: A Study of Arden, Osborne, Pinter and Wesker* (London: Penguin, 1973), 5-7.

¹¹- Stephen Lacey, *British Realist Theatre: The New Wave in its Context 1956-1965* (London: Routledge, 1995), 25.

¹²- The term 'Angry Young Men' is taken from the title of Leslie Allen Paul's autobiography, *Angry Young Man* in 1951. The Angry Young Men are a *group of educated middle and working-class English writers*, who held a new radical attitude towards life and class distinctions. Mark Hawkins-Dady ed., *Reader's Guide to Literature in English* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996), 271.

¹³- Christine Etherington-Wright and Ruth Doughty, *Understanding Film Theory*, (London: Palgrave, 2018), 128.

¹⁴- Kate Dorney, *The Changing Language of Modern English Drama 1945-2005* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 110.

Consequently, the plays of Kitchen-sink drama are completely different from the previous ones; they depart from the middle-class, provincial setting and the 'bourgeois living-room' or the 'country- house drawing-room.' Instead, the action is located in the poor industrial parts in the North of England and set in contemporary realistic settings which include bedsits, terraces, wooden tables, chairs, gas stoves and kitchen sinks, etc. These settings earn these plays, the title of "Kitchen-sink drama." Hence, these plays depict aspects of domestic life, unlike the classical Victorian dramas which have dealt with the public life of the wealthy and ruling-class. ⁽¹⁵⁾

The typical characters of Kitchen-sink drama are ordinary everyday people, usually young poor middle or working class characters, with low social background living in the industrial parts of England or in provincial towns in gloomy houses, or attic apartments. They usually face depressing conditions and limited employment opportunities. The hero is commonly an 'Angry young man' who expresses negative emotions like anger, discontent and resentment towards the ruling class and its regulations. ⁽¹⁶⁾

Another notable characteristic is that as the writers of Kitchen-sink are demonstrating working-class in a realistic manner, their plays can be considered naturalistic and sustaining autobiographical elements. Simon Trussler in "British-Neo Naturalism" acclaims that writers of the 'New Wave' have selected the style of naturalism mostly because it has permitted them to deliver their social commentary and is compatible with the semi-autobiographical language in which the new writers are likely to weave in their problems. ⁽¹⁷⁾

In this respect, the exploration of innovative topics in the plays of the British New Wave initiated a change in the language of these plays to include "fresh idioms, new patterns of stage dialogue, and new theatrical forms. ⁽¹⁸⁾" Moreover, it is noteworthy to mention that that since the plays of the British New Wave deal with the poor working-class, thus they are mostly characterized by the use of regional accents and simple vulgar and crude language, the same language spoken by real people especially when Lord Chamberlain's authority to censor drama was abolished.

Finally, Kitchen sink drama has social connotations and advocates a leftist political ideology, linked to the theories of Marxism and to British socialism. The

¹⁵- Martin Harrison, *The Language of Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 136.

¹⁶- Peter J. Kalliney, "Cities of Affluence, Domesticity, Class, and The Angry Young Men," in *Cities of Affluence and Anger: a Literary Geography of Modern Englishness* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 120.

¹⁷- Simon Trussler, "British Neo-Naturalism," *The Drama Review*. Vol. 13, No. 2, (1968), 130.

¹⁸- Roger Cornish, and Violet Ketels, *Landmarks of Modern British Drama: The Plays of The Sixties* (London: Methuen, 1985), xi.

playwrights of the genre advocate liberalism and social equality and express social anger and dissatisfaction with the British class structure and postwar reforms of the Welfare state, which failed to fulfill the needs of the British society. (19)

Arnold Wesker's *The Kitchen*: a Kitchen-Sink Drama

Arnold Wesker (1932-2016) is an English playwright and one of the central figures of the post-war New Wave of British working-class writers referred to as the 'Angry Young men' though he has discarded the label. He was later identified as a leading figure in the social protest theatre in the late 1950s called Kitchen-sink drama. Reade W. Dornan in *Arnold Wesker Revisited* asserts that Wesker is "one of Britain's Angry Young Men" who is captivated by "human beings and their familial relationships- their hopes, desires, failures."⁽²⁰⁾

Wesker is the author of about forty-four plays, four volumes of short stories, two collections of essays, a book for young people, an autobiography and other writings. He has written for the Royal Court theatre and has gained popularity for his three plays that came to be known as the Wesker Trilogy: *Chicken Soup with Barley* (1958), *Roots* (1959), and *I'm Talking about Jerusalem* (1960).⁽²¹⁾

Wesker was born into a poor East End Immigrant Jewish family and before writing plays; he has worked in many jobs like carpenter, plumber, porter, bookshop assistant, farm laborer, and a pastry cook. This gave him firsthand knowledge of the working-class conditions and he has employed them in most of his plays.⁽²²⁾

The Kitchen is the first play by Wesker. It is an autobiographical play in two parts and an interlude. It has been inspired by Wesker's job as a pastry cook in a Norwich hotel. It was performed, in a shortened one-act version, without sets, at the Royal Court Theatre in London in 1959, but it was then produced in its revised full-length version at the Royal Court in 1961.⁽²³⁾

The setting is a busy restaurant kitchen in London, called the Tivoli, over the phase of one day. The kitchen staff consists of thirty characters from different nationalities, mostly cooks, pastry chefs, dishwashers, and waitresses. The

¹⁹- Sanford V. Sternlicht, *A reader's Guide to Modern British Drama* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 12.

²⁰- Reade W. Dornan, "Debts to the Court," in *Arnold Wesker Revisited* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 14.

²¹- George Stade, Karen Karbiener and Christine Likrueger eds., *Encyclopedia of British Writers, 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: Book Builders LLC., 2003), 397.

²²- Michael Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre: Post-War British Playwrights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 28.

²³- Margaret Drabble, ed., *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1049.

kitchen staff is pictured during the course of preparing lunch. The atmosphere is busy as waitresses shout orders and encircling around the kitchen.

Wesker gives instructive notes concerning the layout and action of the setting. He points out that the kitchen stations, or units: poultry, fried fish, grill, roasts and puddings are set up. He also indicates that "at no time is food ever used. To cook and serve food is of course just not practical"⁽²⁴⁾. The actors use mime techniques without real food, though the ovens, chopping boards, plates and knives are actual. So all the work, preparing and serving the food is mimed. Besides, Wesker recounts details about the main characters' backgrounds and the meals prepared.

Wesker also describes the light and sound in the kitchen. Like the human characters, the kitchen is both realistic and symbolic. The noise drowns out the speech of the people, but also exemplifies how work dominates and controls the actions of the working man. Wesker writes in the opening stage directions that "The kitchen's hum builds to a small roar-a battle with dialogue to the end"(99). This provides the context within which thirty workers struggle to regain their sense of identity as human beings.

At the beginning of the play, there are no curtains and the stage is dark. But it comes lighter while Magi, the night porter, lights five ovens creating a hum sound and a roar with a falling a rising rhythm. This sound continues all through the play giving it a sense of beauty.

The members of the kitchen staff enter, greet each other and take their positions in the kitchen. The workers follow a firm routine and each is given a particular job and appointed to a precise part of the menu. The main protagonist is Peter, a twenty-three-year old German pastry-cook. Other cooks are Paul, a Jew, and Raymond, an Italian. Both are pastry cooks who usually work together. There is also, Dimitri, a Cypriot kitchen porter, Max, a fifty-year old butcher, Kevin a new Irish cook and Alfredo, a sixty-five year old veteran chef.

Waitresses go into the dining room which is situated at the back, with trays of glasses and heaps of plates. The workers discuss various issues, but the main topic is the fight occurring the preceding evening between two cooks: Peter and Gaston, a Cypriot. The workers give different versions of the fight with racial undertones. Anne, a waitress serving coffee and desserts, reminds them that Peter is encountering an emotional dilemma because of his wild love affair with a married waitress, Monique. It is known that Monique has been twice pregnant by Peter, but she has had two miscarriages and is now pregnant. Yet,

²⁴- Bernard Kops, *Epitaph for George Dilton*, and, *the Kitchen* by Arnold Wesker, and *The Hamlet of Stepney Green* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1964), 94. Any references to the text will be taken from this edition and will be cited in the text parenthetically by page number.

Monique refuses to leave her husband for Peter's sake. This is the leading story of the play around which the other actions revolve.

Ann: Hey Raymond, tell me, what happened to Peter in the end, you know, last night?

Raymond: Now he's a silly boy, eh? Don't you think so? I don't even know what it was all about anyway, you know, Paul?

Paul: All I know is he had a fight with Gaston.

Why? I don't know. Over a ladle I think, or maybe a

Max: He's a bloody German...he is always quarrelling always. There's no one he hasn't quarreled with, am I right? No one!

Anne: Ah, the boy is in love. (99-100)

Then Peter arrives late; he is a key figure based on Wesker himself. He is a hot tempered Jewish worker, always nervous and in conflict with the other staff. He is portrayed in the stage directions as, "boisterous, aggressive...living on his nerves"(95). He tries to reconcile with Gaston, who is still angry.

Peter: Hey Gaston, I'm sorry-your black eye, I'm sorry about it.

Gaston...You sorry because half a dozen Cypriot boys make you feel sorry-but we not finished yet! (107)

Peter and Monique always quarrel creating a violent and distressing atmosphere. Peter feels jealous and does not want Monique to speak to any customers. But eventually she agrees to ask her husband, Monty, for a divorce.

Peter: [following her like the pathetic, jealous lover]. And remember you're hostess today, I can see you in the glass. No flirting, do you hear?

[Grips her arm.] No flirting.

Monique: I shall talk to who I like. [Moves off]

Peter: [hoping no one can hear him]. Cow!

Disgusting cow! (111)

The staff members work continuously for long hours without stopping, they do not have time to know each other. They do not even reply to each other's greetings. They create a disharmonious atmosphere, when referring to each other's nationalities. Peter: "Hey Irishman, I thought you didn't like this place. Why don't you go home and sleep?"(124) Violet: "You Boche you. You bloody German bastard!"(140) Nicholas, a young Cypriot, declares "I don't hate no one

like I hate Boche" (117). Max resents the speaking of different languages in the kitchen: "You're in England now. Speak bloody English" (108).

The atmosphere is full of chaos and tension when the staff shouts at each other and give orders as the speed of work increases in preparation for the lunchtime meal. The workers move in a distracted and chaotic manner, devoid of any emotions, as the tempers of the workers explode.

The workers feel themselves under pressure and cut off from the rest of society. They work but they are dissatisfied with their lives. They have nothing to do but work and only work. Work for them is more significant than their lives. They are unemotional, cold and reserved in their attitudes. Besides they are made to be lifeless and 'caricatured'. Even when the new cook, Kevin, arrives the kitchen staff is not excited or moved by his arrival: Paul [shouting]: "Is the new cook here? Alfredo, [shrugging his shoulders]: He didn't ask for me" (104). Their behavior is characterized by disagreement and a lack of communication with each other. Kevin cries: "No one cares, that's what gets me, no one cares" (131). When the staff hears of Winnie's miscarriage, they don't stop their work. Even when Hans, a young German, who works at the frying station, has an accident in the steam room and his face is burned, the staff seems indifferent and apathetic, even if they try to show some sympathy.

A waitress [calling after them]: Put some of the
yellow stuff on him.

Frank: He'll live. [To the crowd] All right, it's all
over, come on. (113-114)

Even Mr. Marengo, the seventy-five year old owner of the restaurant shows his detachment. He only comments: "He's burnt his face. It's not serious, [to Chef] but it might have been" (114).

All this behavior shows the hostility and degradation of the kitchen staff and their boss. They act selfishly, hating to help each other. A very awful incident occurs with Kevin in the kitchen. He asks about some dishes from Chef and Chef impolitely responds saying: "I don't know anything about it, it was my day off yesterday. See the second Chef" (110). Once more throughout the 'heavy rush' during lunch time Kevin wants a cutting board but Peter grabs the cutting board from Kevin. Kevin's explosion is a sign of opposition and hostility:

Kevin: Let me borrow your cutting board then,
please.[He moves to take it from Peter's bench.]

Peter [he stops his work and jumping on Kevin
grabs board] In the kitchen it is each man for
himself now]:Oh no, no, no, no, my friend... This
is mine, I have need of it.

Kevin: But I'll give it back in a few seconds.

Peter[pointing]: The plate room [slams his hand down on the board for emphasis. To a waitress-] What do you want?

Kevin [surprised at this change in Peter]: Well, speak a little human like, will you, please?

Peter: No time, no time (121-122).

The economic and social systems surrounding the workers have shaped their personalities. They are subjected to too much pressure, their work is exhausting and dull which makes them lose their humanity and ethical morals and became alienated from themselves, from their work and the society they live in. Kimball King in "The Modernity of The Kitchen" suggests that what is happening is an example of how technology is man's potential enemy, subjugating him and leaving him in a state of 'dehumanizing existence'.⁽²⁵⁾ It is detected how Wesker dramatically reflects Marxist concept of alienation in The Kitchen through its theatrical images and characterization.

During the Interlude, when the work stops, the characters eat lunch in relative peace and talk about themselves. Peter urges the other workers to sit with him and dream. They discuss their dreams and what they would do if they did not have to work. The Interlude represents a brief utopian moment between the brutal paces of the two busy periods in the kitchen. Wesker, here underscores some of the humanity inside each of the workers; as if the impact of their work is responsible for their dehumanization. When there is no work, they are different people. Unexpectedly, Wesker infuses a sense of hope reflected in the dreams and ambitions. Wesker employs dreams as a means to transcend the harsh reality of workers and escape to a world of fantasy, where they can imagine, express their feelings and communicate with each other.

After that, the staff returns for the evening service which is more tranquil than the lunchtime period. Peter and Paul compare the kitchen with the contemporary world and are aware of the consequences of estrangement. Paul says: "there is a wall, a big wall between me and millions of people like him" (127).

Even love is governed by money and power in a capitalist society. Peter and Monique love each other, but their relationship is insecure. At all times Monique dismisses Peter's suggestion of having a divorce. As the play proceeds, it is obvious that she has no intent of leaving her husband because he provides her with material possessions. She remarks gladly that her husband is going to buy

²⁵- Kimball King, 'The Modernity of The Kitchen', in Arnold Wesker: A Casebook, ed. Reade W. Dornan (London: Routledge, 1998), 123.

a house for her: "Monty has promised we shall soon have our own house. Peter [screaming]: Monique!" (138)

Wesker draws attention to the fact that estrangement, detachment and alienation do not characterize the workers only, but the manager also. Tensions are heightened by the arrival of Mr. Marengo, who is described as an elderly 'world-obsessed proprietor'(96). He is a materialistic dispassionate owner who exploits his workers and is indifferent to their problems. Wesker depicts him as the heartless and inhuman stereotype who represents the capitalist system. He constantly reacts impassively and in a mechanical manner. Peter dislikes Mr. Marengo and criticizes his way of life:

He is a man, he is a restaurant.... 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. Here he stands, sometimes he walks round touching the hot-plate, closing the hot-plate doors, then looking inside this thing and that thing.... Every day from morning to night. What kind of a life is that, in a kitchen! Is that a life I ask you? (109)

Peter attempts to impart a sense of enjoyment, he tries to eventually be himself and encourage others to do the same. However, the unfriendly mood of the kitchen, with its whining of the burning ovens awakens in him the loss of pride and freedom. In a moment of disappointment after feeling rejected by Monique, Peter hysterically smashes the gas tubes and crockery and destroys them completely with a chopper, trying to emphasize his dignity. In what to be considered the climax of the play, Peter rebels against the system and turns into a 'mad man', destroying everything in the kitchen. This episode is described by Ray Orley in his review of *The Kitchen*:

The microcosm [of the play] strains and bursts because Wesker tries to pack it too much tightly with incidents, tries to commandeer it a bulldozer for his own personal revolution against meaningless work, impersonality and the whole catalogue of contemporary society's ills.⁽²⁶⁾

This episode of Peter's emotional catharsis and personal failure is of great significance. It is a forceful theatrical moment in giving a deliberately 'humdrum action' a satisfying dramatic outline and a sensed climax. Additionally, in terms of representation, it is considered a physical signal counter to the environment

²⁶- Ray Orley, "The Kitchen" Educational Theatre Journal, Vol. 24, No. 2 (May, 1972), 189.

that has been redirected in Peter's uttered irritability and in aggression directed against his fellow-workers. ⁽²⁷⁾

Peter's aggressive behavior and hot tempered mood are caused by the burden of his failed love-affair and the pressures of work placed upon him. Peter is a victim of the political and social capitalist system in which there is no place for false hopes or dreams for a better life. He becomes conscious of the mechanical and inhuman life of the workers. Peter protests but does not succeed in giving his protests an intellectual endorsement because he is romantic and vulnerably impulsive.

Peter's charisma is a mixture of sincerity, rebellion and ambiguity, he is sketched in compliance with the British youth, experiencing disappointment, provocation and disillusionment reflecting the mood of the people. At one moment, he is violent and pessimistic, in another, he is calm and positive. In *The Kitchen*, violence, anger and negative emotions are manifested, which identify this play as a piece of Kitchen-sink drama. In consequence, Peter crystallizes the image of the 'Angry Young Man' who is dissatisfied with his life and is incapable of accommodating and harmonizing with the environment surrounding him.

Wesker gives the play an ironic finality when Mr. Marengo enters with confusion; he does not understand the dissatisfaction of his kitchen staff. Marengo responds:

I don't know what more to give a man. He works,
he eats, I give him money. This is life, isn't it? I
haven't made a mistake, have I? I live in the right
world, don't I? What is there more? What is there
more? What is there more? (142-143)

The play ends with the question "What is there more?" Perhaps it is a question about the meaning of life. Mr. Marengo believes that there is nothing more to life than work, food and wealth. Through this 'emphatic' ending, Wesker may be hinting that life contains more: doubt, hatred, panic, ambitions and dreams. Life is maybe more about human relationships, kindness and passion than it is about making money. ⁽²⁸⁾

The Kitchen is an account of the miserable life of the British working-class in the mid-twentieth century. Wesker uses effective metaphors and characterization. He draws on a realistic-setting with the intention of revealing

²⁷ - Glenda Leeming, "Daily Bread" in *The Plays of Arnold Wesker: an Assessment* (London: Gollancz, 1971), 31.

²⁸ - Laurence Kitchen, "Drama with a Message: Arnold Wesker," in *Modern British Dramatists*, ed. John Russell Brown (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1968), 77.

the living circumstances of working and lower-middle class origins and highlighting their predicaments. In the *Educational Theatre Journal*, Wesker elucidates that: "All the world's a restaurant's kitchen and all the men and women in it merely cooks, bakers, waitresses, salad girls, dishwashers, owners, and managers" (29).

Through the dialogue and the incidents of the play, Wesker tries to interpret human relations in the post-war Britain which is perceived as corrupted, frenetic, inhumane and indifferent. So the play is about the relationship of people to their work. The play illustrates the lack of communication and disharmony among the working class and their inability to express themselves. Moreover, most of the characters in the play get engaged in different arguments and conflicts; thus, creating an aggressive and negative atmosphere, which is one of the main features of Kitchen-sink drama. They fight against each other instead of cooperating, calling racist names like "bloody German bastard"(140), "disgusting cow"(111), "the lunatic"(141). The monotonous busy daily routine of the kitchen staff has made the characters impersonal, detached and shallow.

It is evident from the examination of the play, that class distinctions are manifested in the play. Historically, Britain is a class-based society. Social classes characterized the British society beginning from the feudal system of the medieval period, extending through the early modern period embodied in the model of the courtly aristocrats and then evolving in the last two centuries to form the traditional archetype of the working, middle and upper classes. Each character in society plays a role in relation to the prevailing hierarchy.⁽³⁰⁾

The hierarchy of The kitchen is with the owner on the top, than the cooks followed by the waitresses and lastly the porters are at the bottom of the hierarchy. Divisions are clear between the members of the staff, between the chefs and the waitresses and between the staff and their boss.⁽³¹⁾

All the characters in the play work with low benefits in meaningless jobs. The working-class has limited opportunities in life, with no real education. This is obvious when a tramp appears at the kitchen door and is treated with contempt by Max: "Go to hell... I work for my living" (134). Peter gives the tramp some cutlets, which provokes the Chef: "Don't think we're too busy I can't sack you. Three years is nothing you know... Don't go thinking I won't sack you." (134). This displays the lack of sympathy for the class below the working-class, and highlights the thin line between people who rely on a wage and the

²⁹- Quoted in Orley, "The Kitchen, 189.

³⁰- Gloria J. Milton, Norman Goodman and Marilyn Goodman, Introduction to Sociology (NTC Learning Works, 1996), 61.

³¹- Ronald Hayman, Contemporary Playwrights: Arnold Wesker 3rd ed. (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.,1979), 16.

impoverished. Since class tension is one of the distinctive features of kitchen sink drama, thus *The Kitchen* is identified as a representative of this genre.⁽³²⁾

From the analysis of the play, it is perceived that the social pressures placed upon the workers, besides the hostile busy atmosphere surrounding the kitchen, prove to be the driving forces that control human actions. The tensions arising from working in close quarters in the kitchen suggest ways that the working environment itself conspires to prevent the working class from acting in solidarity. Wesker embraces the ideas of Marxism in that the solution is not in overthrowing capitalism but replacing it with a society based on harmony, fellowship and cooperation more willingly than competition which is essential in capitalism.⁽³³⁾

Stephen Lacey in *British Realist Theatre: The New Wave in its Context 1956-1965* states that The kitchen, in addition to being 'a metonym' for other kitchens but also is a 'metaphor for society'.⁽³⁴⁾ Thus, the problems, conflicts, and difficulties placed within the kitchen signify those confronting the whole working class in an industrial and capitalist society. The Kitchen is an example of the worker's perspective of the collision of Man with economy and the protest against mass manufacture and profit drives. Critic Kenneth Tyan adds that:

The play achieves something that few playwrights have attempted, it dramatizes work, the daily collision of man with economic necessity, the repetitive toil that consumes the large portion of human life which is not devoted to living.⁽³⁵⁾

Concerning the language of the play, it is crude and realistic. Wesker's aim is to use everyday language in order to shock the audience with its frankness. Additionally, different languages are spoken on stage. Hans and Peter speak German, and Hans and Raymond speak French together. There are many instances in which the speech is over layered, and the audience at certain points have to choose which thread of conversation to follow. The very fact that the play has so little plot is emblematic of its realism, since, unlike in the theatre, human stories do not neatly resolve themselves over the course of a day. This characterizes the play as a piece of Kitchen-sink drama. The realism of the play,

³²- Cornish and Ketels, *Landmarks of Modern British Drama*, xi.

³³- William Augus Sinclair, *Socialism and the Individual: Notes on Joining the Labor Party* (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1995), 50.

³⁴- Lacey, *British Realist Theatre*, 107.

³⁵- Kenneth Tynan, *Review of The Kitchen*, *The Observer*, July 2, 1961.

the focus on the problems of the working class and the critique of middle-class verify that *The Kitchen* belongs to kitchen sink drama.

The Kitchen: a Play of Social Realism

Pointing to working-class social realism in *The Kitchen* is difficult without first defining what is meant by social realism. The new British theatre has been devoted to exposing the reality of British people and particularly the working-class. Among the theatrical forms employed by this theatre is social realism, which is used interchangeably with Kitchen-sink realism and Working-class realism.⁽³⁶⁾

Social realism is “the realistic treatment of man in society.”⁽³⁷⁾ Social realism or socio-realism is an artistic movement related to the depiction of the contemporary social, economic and political status in a realistic mode, focusing on the social and racial discrimination and the everyday struggles of the working class. It usually adopts a left-wing viewpoint advocating protest and social reform. The movement, which has been motivated by Marxist and socialist ideas, initiated in the art of painting in which the portraits painted carry a message of social and political protest.⁽³⁸⁾

In her article ‘Realism and Convention’ Marion Jordan points out to the main characteristics of social realism:

The genre of social realism demands that life should be presented in the form of a narrative of personal events... the characters should be either working-class or of the classes immediately visible to the working classes...that the locale should be urban and provincial (preferably in the industrial north) that the settings should be common place and recognizable....that the time should be ‘the present’; that the style should be such as to suggest an unmediated, unprejudiced and complete view of reality.⁽³⁹⁾

In the context of dramas of the mid-late twentieth century, social realism is most clearly seen in a commitment to social issues. In Wesker’s case, it is the situation of the working class. Wesker possess a social consciousness of the role of theatre and its impact on the audience. He is a socialist playwright whose

36- Lacey, British Realist Theatre, 63.

37- Geraldine Gaskin, et al. *Social Realism: a Source Guide for Teaching of Canadian Literature in English* (Toronto: The Writer’s Development Trust, 1977), 13.

38- Todd, James G. ["Social Realism"](#). Art Terms. Grove Art Online 2009 (Accessed 6 February, 2018.)

39- Cited in Lez Cook, *British Television Drama: a History* 2nd ed. (London: Palgrave, 2015), 37.

treatment of the working class is made universal. He helped to identify the context for working-class realism and relate it to political and social problems.

The Kitchen is the most political and socialist play of Wesker's early dramas although the play may seem 'ideologically stilted' and dramatically unexciting. It is observed how the play demonstrates political connotations and delivers a socialist message. Harold Ribalow, an American writer, critic and anthologist, believes that Wesker is politically committed in his plays and has recognized how "Wesker has wrestled with politics and ideas" and that Wesker "does this in all of his plays."⁽⁴⁰⁾

Wesker's philosophical heritage and artistic credo is only a reflection of his leftwing ideology which is rooted in the sociopolitical theories of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and the aesthetic theories of the British utopian socialist, William Morris (1834-1896).

Wesker's *The Kitchen* carries a moral and social function and it is an instrument for expressing his social ideas as he gives a poignant pictorial reflecting the dreadful conditions of the working class.

Social realism in the play is attained by a combination of strong characterization, setting and plot. The single setting of *The Kitchen*, in the rigidly hierarchical environment of a restaurant kitchen, represents a microcosm of society at large. This setting of *The Kitchen*, all taking place on one set, is a characteristic of social realist drama. The different characters, men and women, English and foreign, at different places in the work hierarchy, are typical of the men and women of the post war British society.

Wesker presents a 'slice of life' and employs a "realistically detailed setting, realistic-sounding dialogue and rounded characters" as Michael Patterson in his book, *Strategies of Political Theatre: Post-War British Playwrights*, confirms.⁽⁴¹⁾ Glenda Leeming maintains that:

The kitchen is at once realistic and representative: for a director's ability to contain an action that so nearly approaches documentary realism in its details of kitchen routine with a form that verges upon the expressionistic- especially in its manner of relating the places overwhelmingly mechanistic trappings to the human responses these shape and provoke-has tended to determine the success of the play in production.⁽⁴²⁾

⁴⁰- Harold Ribalow, *Arnold Wesker* (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1965), 41.

⁴¹- Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre*, 27.

⁴²- Glenda Leeming, *Wesker, the Playwright* (London: Methuen, 1983), 27.

Additionally, Wesker examines the social interactions and personal conflicts between the kitchen staff, and from these conflicts the social behaviors and codes of different levels of society are revealed.

Wesker views life as imperfect and flawed; he believes that society has its shortcomings. The working-class in Wesker's play is not a homogenous mass, and it is perceived how certain segments of the population are in an even less advantageous situation. The kitchen only works perfectly together when personality and differences are completely erased, as demonstrated in the synchronized crisscrossing at the end of Part One: the capitalist machine works best when the workers are not fully-formed people but cogs in a machine.

The success of the system relies on people being happy with little and being unwilling to question it, like Alfredo. Peter, who is the most full-formed personality in the play, brings his feelings into the workplace: his troubled relationship with Monique, his sympathy for the tramp, and his feelings of discontent with being merely a cog in the machine. His breakdown at the end of the play represents the excess of human feelings that can bring the kitchen to a halt, representing Wesker's belief that a humanist approach to drama and to life is the best way to achieve greater parity in English society.

The dialogue is fragmented and full of non-sequiturs and asides. Wesker has seen social realism as akin to humanism, meaning an understanding of the real concerns and prejudices of people of a certain background, and therefore it is in the conversations that the play demonstrates its realism.

Wesker is established as a socialist playwright who deprecates injustice, exploitation and oppression. He calls for a social and political awakening and for the participation of workers in the management decisions along with a persistence on a more interrelated and sympathetic society.⁽⁴³⁾

To conclude, Wesker employs social realism by exposing realistically the prevailing social, political and economic problems and the evils of society in post-war Britain. He inspects the impact of power and the clash between the labor and capital systems in addition to the tension and stress in the human and social relationships especially, the social and economic relationships of society and calls for brotherhood.

Conclusion

In the mid and late 1950s, a New Wave of British theatre emerged as a reaction to the social, political, and economical changes resulting from World-War II. This era witnessed the manifestation of various new theatrical

⁴³- Dornan, "Debts to the Court," 25.

tendencies dominating the stage, among which Kitchen-Sink drama, was the most prominent. This theater which is also labeled as Working-class realism is a descendant of John Osborne's "Angry Young men". It is a theater of anger and protest against the political, social and economic failures of the Welfare State.

The Kitchen is a play by Arnold Wesker, which discloses the harsh reality and miserable tribulations facing the working-class in a materialistic capitalist society in post-war Britain. Consequently, and through the analysis of the play, it can be concluded that The Kitchen adopts the conventions of Kitchen-sink realism through the choice of topics, class, language and mode of narrative. The play uncovers the social, political and economic conditions of the poor and lower-working class in a realistic setting (kitchen) and it employs the raw language of everyday life.

In the light of this study, Wesker embraces the approach of social realism which can be traced in the characters, settings, dialogue and themes of the play. Wesker is committed to interpret truthfully the experiences of the working-class experiences. Wesker's play is an emphatic and perceptive record that carries a moral and social function. *The Kitchen* is a social document intended to carry a didactic message, intensify sympathy and raise an awareness of the harsh social reality of the unprivileged working-class.

Furthermore, Wesker has found his voice as a humanist, championing individual rights and human values and defending the causes of the deprived therefore, he condemns the meaningless and mechanical life of the working class. Thus, he pleads for social justice and tries to bring about a true social change in a society full of class-struggle and oppression by revolting against the dehumanizing working conditions and eliminating distinctions between classes.

The researcher hopes that his work will help other researchers to understand the underlying forces of the post-war English society. Furthermore, this paper will be significant as it will provide specific comparative literary perceptions of Wesker in the context of Kitchen-sink drama and Social realism.

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