



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 8. Issue.3. 2021 (July-Sept)

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
EN 1118
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

WESKER'S PLAY THE FOUR SEASONS: A NARRATIVE OF LOVE, BETRAYAL AND
SEPARATION

ANKITA

Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of English,
Lalit Narayan Mithila University, Darbhanga, Bihar, India
Email: ankita.88shri@gmail.com



Article information

Received:12/7/2021
Accepted: 25/08/2021
Published online:6/09/2021
doi: [10.33329/ijelr.8.3.114](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.8.3.114)

ABSTRACT

Sir Arnold Wesker was one of the most celebrated post war dramatists in the British landscape of 1950s. He was a writer who was himself a victim of warfare and wrote against the social and political norms of the Great Britain. He particularly focused on the toiling masses of England who were devastated during the Second World War. His characters became his mouthpiece and they voiced against the inequality and wrath of the government. However, the play discussed in this research paper is totally different from his other plays. He slightly changed his path to write this play entitled *The Four Seasons*. The play is a kind of lyrical narration about the relationship between a man named Adam and a woman named Beatrice. He focused on the private lives particularly the love life of individuals and their private pains. The journey between love and separation is interwoven within the change of four seasons.

Keywords: Devastated, Mouthpiece, Individuals, Relationship, Private pains

Introduction

Arnold Wesker was of course a very politically conscious intellectual and his plays were iconoclastic in nature but as a craftsman he excelled. He was a very accurate observer of certain regiments of human life particularly the lives of Jewish family in the East End of London where he himself grew up among cooks in the kitchen of a restaurant for sometime where he worked as a chef. He also worked as a farm laborer and later on for some time was in the R.A.F services of National Air Force. All these various experiences resulted in the publication of such plays, viz- *The Kitchen* (1957), where a cook goes mad, the trilogy of *Chicken Soup with Barley* (1956), *Roots* (1958), *I'm Talking about Jerusalem* (1960), based on the personal and political history of Jewish family. Consequently, his plays are replete with autobiographical and historical details of courage and desperation, idealism and cynicism and an occasional tone of indifference, heated debates and reconciliation at the same time. Wesker's success lay in his acute observation and portrayal of the spirit of the times. In fact, Wesker worked in a milieu of violence, frustration and atmosphere of displacement and distrust in the policies of ruling government of the then Britain. Wesker shared some common concerns with the new playwrights of the era such as John Osborne, John Arden, Shelagh Delany and Harold Pinter. They created a new kind of drama and theatre with new subjects and new techniques. Obviously, this new drama was based on the attitude of

anger and revolt on the one side and the consideration of certain burning topics such as sexual jealousy, frustration of marriage, the agonies of divorce, travails of friendship and betrayal on the other side.

Discussion

The present research paper concentrates upon the most nonpolitical, humanistic play of Wesker entitled, *The Four Seasons* (1965). Here, in this play, he has deviated from his conventional theme of class conflict and other social stigmas and focused on an abstract narrative of a relationship between a man and a woman. The present play of Wesker is not the most politically engaged play rather it comes under the category of naturalistic plays with strong viewpoints of socialistic ideologies. As a critic commented on the essence of the play-

“It is the only play by Wesker which can be described- in so far as any play can be described- as totally unpolitical.” (Hayman, p.p. 92)

This is only one of Wesker’s plays where minimum numbers of characters are introduced. There are only two characters in the play and story line entangles between them and their love affair and finally their falling apart, the man called Adam and the women called Beatrice. The play paces up with a simple line of development in which the relationship of Adam and Beatrice is symbolized through the changes in four seasonal stages of Winter, Summer, Spring and Autumn. Wesker has deliberately pruned out other illustrations of the plays- like we never come to know that who owns the deserted house in which Adam and Beatrice decide to spend an year, the source of water supply, the food and electricity is also not clarified. Above all we never come to know that how Adam and Beatrice met and how they ended up at the deserted house. All these descriptions are not provided by Wesker and according to the dramatist himself, the reason behind it is-

“The play sets out to explore only the essentials of a relationship with deliberately little recourse to explanation or background.” (Wesker, p.123)

The play depicts three different accounts of love and man-woman relationship- firstly, between Adam and his first wife, secondly, between Beatrice and her husband and lastly, between Adam and Beatrice. However, the past love life and the estranged relationship of Adam and Beatrice with their respective partners is conveyed in the form of remembrances, whereas the different stages of the journey of their present love affair is harmonized with the passing of four seasons. In Winter, Adam and Beatrice enter the house, Adam struggles hard to break the silence of Beatrice but all his efforts goes in vain. Beatrice remains cold and barren just like the season of Winter. In Spring, with the blooming of new leaves their love also blossoms. In Summer with the increase of heat in the atmosphere they start to quarrel on trivial things and finally in Autumn, the season of fall they fall apart and their love fails to keep them together and they part their ways.

Adam and Beatrice, both are flawed and blemished and apart from their past unsuccessful marriage both have at least one infidelity and betrayal in their account. They decide to try their luck again in love by stepping together into the house for a year but they fail to find comfort and solace in each other. The conflict which Wesker endeavors to depict is the age old tussle between the sexes. The dramatist here tries hard 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.” (Ribalow, p. 85)

Not much of activity is performed in the play, they spend most of the time in the house itself. In Winter, Beatrice is shown sleeping throughout the scene and Adam emanates all his love for the sleeping beauty. They hardly go out in cold and Adam gives her human warmth but not human love as he is afraid of betrayal again. Adam speaks-

“Such a lovely face, A face I could love. Even ‘love’ again. But I won’t, lovely lady. Not love again. Not all that again. I’ll give you human warmth but not human love. Not that again. Not all those old, familiar patterns of betrayal again, those reproaches.” (Wesker, p. 78)

With the arrival of Spring, love knocks at the door of Adam and Beatrice and they grow together in love. With the bright ray of sunshine a change in Beatrice character is visible, she leaves the house for the first time after their arrival and returns back with the bunch of blue bells. She treats Adam like a God and decorates him

from head to foot in the flower and worships him. She becomes more poetic in expressing her love for Adam. As she promises Adam-

“When you need me to be your 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.” (Wesker, p. 95)

As the season changes from budding spring to the golden summer their love also ripens with time. Fun and frolics of love and sports begins as the scene changes from the barren house to the open fields. However, the past memories keep on haunting them as those recollections of failed relationships act as a physiological barrier for both Adam and Beatrice. With this the breach between them broadens and they start to abuse and accuse each other for every trivial issue. The scene ends with the tensed conversation between them in which Adam that all women can be abused-

BEATRICE: You think me capable of abuse?

ADAM: All women.

BEATRICE: But me? Capable of abuse?

ADAM: All women.

BEATRICE: I see. (Wesker, p. 112)

In Autumn, the breach between them widens and they are seen spending time alone rather than being with each other. They both turn retrospective and introspective both at the same time and try to understand that why they failed with their respective partners. They, however, fail to understand the reason behind the failure of past relationships and in this process they even fail to take hold of their present love affair. The play ends on a pessimistic note where they come to a conclusion that they were not in love and to be true they were not even friends. Beatrice, again feels cold and ill as she was in the being of the play, Adam tries to light up to Autumn leaves to give some warmth to Beatrice but the leaves only smoulder. This symbolizes that the passion which had ignited between them during Spring and Summer is now fading away.

The play has received various criticisms, Wesker himself has labeled the play as “a story about love coming and dying” (Wesker, p. 112) and however, Leeming and Trussler add to it as “a play about jealousy” (Leeming and Trussler p. 131). Wesker has also been criticized for his abrupt shift from his usual themes of politically engaged minute dissection of class conflict to the portrayal of abstract love affair. To this Wesker in the epilogue of the play has answered that he has not deviated from his unusual ideologies of politics and class conflict rather the play is the logical extension of the ongoing themes and a humanistic approach towards it. As Wesker has stated in the epilogue-

“the play, far from being a retreat from values contained in my early writing, is a logical extension of them in that a connection exists between, for instance, Sara Kahn’s cry ‘love comes first, you can’t have brotherhood without love’ and Beatrice laments that ‘without love I have neither appetite nor desire, I’m capable of nothing’”. (Wesker, p. 125).

Wesker has set the play for a year instead of a day or a couple of hours, and he makes a fine synchronization of each four seasons. Each and every season representing a different symphony- Winter denotes symphony of acquaintance, Spring a symphony of colour, summer echoes with sound and autumn that of alienation. Despite Wesker’s successful attempt of intermingling seasons with different emotion of love, Ronald Hayman complains about it-

There is no plot and only the simplest pattern of development: the relationship, like the year which the lovers spend together, passes through four seasonal stages. Emotional hibernation is followed by the budding of a love which ripens in the summer and goes to seed in the winter. But there will be no repetition of the cycle for these lovers. At least not with each other.” (Hayman, p. 92)

Wesker being an exponent of 'Kitchen Sink Drama' has a major fascination for foods in his plays. For Wesker, food has always been a source of love and warmth, a way to emote care and love through the characters of his plays. He has portrayed Adam making apple strudel for his lady love and this has the most tempting dramatic effect on the audiences-

"Adam is about to make apple strudel; the process is a very dramatic one. The paste has been resting for twenty minutes. He is about to collect it from the Kitchen. But first he throws a table-cloth over the table. The magician prepares! Now he retrieves the paste from the kitchen, it is lying on a plate covered by a flavoured cloth. The paste sits like a round loaf. He picks it from the plate, gingerly it flops about, though it should come away clean if the plate has been well flavoured, and he is about to lay it on the centre of the table." (Wesker, p. 101)

Wesker's indulgence with food and water through his characters in his plays is understood by Katherine J. Worth in these words-

"Meals are great, warm events on the stage: the preparation for them a ritual, something a nerve-racking one, as in the kitchen, but more joyful in the vein of the apple strudel sequence in *The Four Seasons*. The making of apple strudel sequence is a bravura physical performance." (Worth, p. 35)

Conclusion

To conclude, Wesker, certainly deviated from his usual social and political issues where he is at his best and focused on a new theme of man women relationship. For a while he has given up on the central question of his plays which deals with the problems of salvation of working class Britons. In fact, Wesker here discusses about the private pains of individuals, especially which arises from love and has beautifully intermingled the changes of seasons with the change in the moods of Adam and Beatrice. They started off with love and affection but they ended up with the pain of separation and betrayal.

Works Cited

- Hayman, Ronald. *Contemporary Playwrights: Arnold Wesker*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1970.
- Leeming, Glenda and Trussler, Simon. *The Plays of Arnold Wesker: An Assessment*. London: Victor Gallancz Ltd., 1974.
- Ribalow, Harold U. *Arnold Wesker*. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc. 1965.
- Wesker, Arnold. *Fears of Fragmentation*. London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1970.
- Wesker, Arnold. *Three Plays: The Kitchen, the Four Seasons, Their Very Old and Golden City*. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976.
- Worth, Katherine. *Revolutions in Modern English Drama*. London: G. Bell and Sons, 1973.
-