



# THE WESKER TRILOGY- A CRITICAL STUDY

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

The Wesker Trilogy is a series of plays written by playwright Arnold Wesker in the 1950s. The Trilogy consists of *Chicken Soup with Barley* (1958), *Roots* (1959), and *I'm Talking About Jerusalem* (1960). The Wesker Trilogy explores family and class, identifies themes and significantly contributes to British theatre history. "*Chicken Soup with Barley*" is set in 1936 and tells the story of a Jewish family in the East End of London. The story follows the family, particularly the father, Jacob, as they struggle to come to terms with the effects of the Great Depression and the rise of fascism and their struggles to maintain their identity as Jews in a rapidly changing world. "*Roots*", also by Wesker, is a prequel to "*Chicken Soup with Barley*", set in 1931 and focusing on the same family. In "*I'm Talking About Jerusalem*," Ronnie discovers that even when they are supported by tireless work, lofty ambitions do not necessarily convert into satisfying, excellent outcomes. He consequently has to face severe disappointment. The impact that young Wesker's work had on the British theatrical scene in the middle of the 20th century is helpfully brought to memory by this book. Its repercussions are still being felt today. The three plays together make up what is known as the Wesker Trilogy.

### 1.2 Background

The Wesker Trilogy begins with the drama "*Chicken Soup with Barley*." The Kahn family comprises a group of Jewish Marxists who are striving to cope with the societal and political upheavals occurring at the time in London in the years preceding World War II. Arnold Wesker examines their lives in his play "*Chicken Soup with Barley*,"

which is based on the book of the same name. The drama equally explores political, familial, and identitarian themes (McCloy, 2020). The first play points out how having differing political beliefs can complicate relationships and how this impacts their interpersonal interactions. In the Wesker Trilogy, "Roots" is the second play. Beatie Kearney, pregnant and longs for a better quality of life for herself and her family, serves as the drama's protagonist.

There are many themes in terms of the perspectives that have been selected or displayed. The Kearney family attempts to strike a balance between their traditional origins and the contemporary ways of living in the play "Roots", which explores the tension between tradition and modernity. The drama explores how history has affected people and their families while situated in a particular historical era. In the third play, "I'm Talking About Jerusalem", the protagonist, Jimmy, is an outspoken socialist who dreams of a better future for Britain. He believes the only way to achieve his goal is through a socialist revolution (Black, 2021). Throughout the play, Jimmy constantly challenges the status quo and pushes for a fairer society. He advocates for workers' rights and argues that the working class should be given better wages and working conditions. He also believes that the government should be held accountable for its actions and should be transparent with its citizens. By the end of the play, Jimmy is still fighting for a socialist future, but his dreams are starting to look more achievable.

### 1.3 Research Rationale

In terms of the research rationale for this study, it can be stated that this critical study will work with the themes, and overview of the Wesker Trilogy. The rationale for the study is to give a broader aspect of the Trilogy, including all three plays. The themes of the three plays have been placed in this research. The rationale is all about giving proper aspects of the Trilogy. The significance of the research is connected with knowledge-giving critical study. This will analyze the themes as well as all the drawbacks and the criticisms which can be drawn further. All the thematic analysis is there in this study; this will allow the readers to go further with the critical study of the topic.

### 1.4 Aim and Objectives

The Wesker Trilogy consists of Chicken Soup With Barley (1958), Roots (1959), and I'm Talking About Jerusalem (1960). The Trilogy is often seen as a seminal work in British theatre, and Wesker's exploration of themes such as family, politics, identity, and community has been highly praised by critics. A critical study of the Wesker Trilogy could explore the various themes and issues that Wesker discusses in the plays and their relevance to the cultural context at the time of their production. Additionally, a critical study could explore the political and social implications of the plays and how they might have been interpreted differently by different audiences. The following are the primary aims and objectives of the critical study

1. Analyze the character development of Albert Wesker throughout the Trilogy.
2. Examine the themes of power, control, and identity explored in the Trilogy and how these themes inform the characters' actions and the overall plot

3. Analyze the use of symbolism in the Trilogy and how Wesker's transformation from villain to hero relates to the more prominent motifs of the narrative
4. Compare and contrast the three novels in the series and find the similarities and differences between them in terms of style, tone, and characterization
5. Analyze the use of setting in the Trilogy and how different locations play a role in the overall plot and themes of the story
6. Examine the role of morality in the Trilogy and how the characters' decisions reflect their sense of right and wrong
7. Investigate the role of the protagonists in the Trilogy and how it affects the characters and the plot

## 1.6 Research Significance

Regarding the research significance of this study, it can be said that this analytical investigation will interact with the themes and general outline of the Wesker Trilogy. The study aims to provide a more comprehensive view of the Trilogy, which includes all three plays. In this study, the three plays' themes have been identified. Giving the Trilogy's formal elements is the primary goal of the argument (Stähler, 2021). The research's importance is related to the knowledge that offers critical analysis. The concepts, as well as all the flaws and objections that can be extended, will be examined. This research includes an exhaustive thematic analysis, enabling readers to continue their critical examination of the subject.

## 1.7 Research Structure

In terms of the research structure of this critical study, it can be stated that this research will take all the available data of the Trilogy and will take one by one to analyze them to do the research towards the critical study of the topic. The structure of this study will follow a simple form, and it will utilize the secondary data available regarding the topic. This research will avoid any complex structure in critically studying the Wesker Trilogy. The research structure is much more emphasized on the aspects of the critical reviews of the Wesker Trilogy.

## 1.8 Summary

The Wesker Trilogy is a collection of three plays by British author Arnold Wesker that, as was previously noted, investigates the prospect of a socialist utopia being realized through the characters' collective activity. The Trilogy tells the story of a group of young idealists who were inspired by the socialism of the time and lived in a rural part of England in the late 1950s. The Trilogy is still often performed and studied today and is recognized as one of Wesker's most important compositions. The Trilogy has gotten positive reviews from critics who value its exploration of the human condition and ability to make complex subjects understandable. The Trilogy is regarded as one of Wesker's most significant compositions and is still often played and studied today. The Trilogy has received favourable reviews from critics who appreciate its examination of the human condition and capacity to simplify complicated topics. The plays are renowned for their spare language and minimalist sets, which have been regarded as distinguishing elements

of Wesker's aesthetic. The Wesker Trilogy has drawn much praise, yet it has also come under fire. The plays have been criticized for being unduly didactic, with characters giving monologues that represent the playwright's opinions rather than acting convincingly and naturally. Others have critiqued the plays for being extremely basic in their treatment of issues and lacking subtlety. The Wesker Trilogy focuses mainly on the challenges of bringing about a socialist utopia and its potential. The socialist beliefs of the plays' characters face several problems and opposition from both within and outside society.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

The three plays, "I'm Talking About Jerusalem" (1960), "Roots" (1959), and "Chicken Soup with Barley" (1958), were first written as standalone pieces between 1958 and 1960. Still, due to their thematic and narrative coherence, they were joined together in a printed trilogy. The three loosely autobiographical plays follow Ronnie, a young Jewish boy raised in London's East End, as he matures. Ronnie is a fictionalized version of Arnold Wesker.

In "Chicken Soup with Barley", which is realistically gritty, a rumoured socialist victory over Oswald Mosley's fascists is juxtaposed with the story. In Beattie Bryant, one of "Roots" most difficult and magnificent theatrical portrayals of a multifaceted woman created by a male dramatist, we find one of the most complex and nuanced female characters ever. In "I'm Talking About Jerusalem", Ronnie learns that lofty goals do not always translate into satisfying, deserving outcomes, even when accompanied by steadfast effort. As a result, he must deal with crushing disappointment. This book serves as a helpful reminder of young Wesker's influence on the British theatre scene in the middle of the 20th century. Even now, its effects are still being felt.

### 2.2 The Wesker Trilogy- an overview

The Trilogy addresses the themes of power relations, communication failures, and linguistic manipulation. The Wesker Trilogy's opening play is "Chicken Soup with Barley". In "Chicken Soup with Barley", author Arnold Wesker delves into the life of the Kahn family, a group of Jewish communists striving to cope with the socioeconomic and political upheavals in London at the time just before World War II. The drama examines political, familial, and identitarian themes. The Kearney family attempts to strike a balance between their traditional origins and the contemporary ways of living in the play "Roots", which explores the tension between tradition and modernity.

Further, The Kearney family and their interactions with one another are at the heart of the play. The drama examined the dynamics of family life and the effects of tradition on the various family members. The ideas of tradition vs modernity, introduced in the drama "I'm Talking About Jerusalem", are just one of the issues that Arnold Wesker addresses (Etienne and Saunders, 2020). Willy Mossop, a character in Arnold Wesker's play, battles to find a middle ground between his indigenous "Roots" and the new ways of living as the tension between tradition and the modern world is explored. The drama also explores the issue of identity. In "I'm Talking About Jerusalem", the author explores how culture, tradition, and individual experiences affect people's attempts to define who they are. Willy Mossop has difficulty accepting who he is and his place in the world. The Wesker Trilogy has drawn much praise, yet it has also come under fire. According to some reviewers, the plays are highly didactic, with characters giving monologues that represent the playwright's opinions rather than acting convincingly and naturally. Others have critiqued the plays for being extremely basic in their treatment of issues and lacking subtlety.

### 2.3 First Play: "Chicken Soup with Barley."

"Chicken Soup with Barley" is the first play of the Wesker Trilogy (WESKER and TOMA, 2019). The Wesker Trilogy is one of modern literature's most popular and common works (Heidarzadegan and Kurt Yildiz, 2020). Arnold Wesker penned his Trilogy of standalone plays, but later they became a trilogy (Mishra).

In his play "Chicken Soup with Barley", Arnold Wesker explores the life of the Kahn family, a group of Jewish communists attempting to adjust to the political and social upheavals taking place at the time in London in the years before World War II. Political, familial, and identitarian issues are all explored in the drama (Etienne and Saunders, 2020). The matriarch of the family, Rebecca, and her tribulations as a Jew during a war period are the story's focus. The other members of the Kahn family are also examined, as well as how their interactions with one another and their political views affect their daily lives. In conclusion, the play "Chicken Soup with Barley" explores the complexities of family dynamics, politics, and identity in a thought-provoking and impactful way (Staples, 2020).

Further, "Chicken Soup with Barley" states about a Jewish family. Each family member is portrayed here by the differences in each other's political beliefs (Garson, 2021). Arnold Wesker pens their complex relationship. The first play states how different political beliefs can bring complexities in relationships and how their personal interactions were affected. The political convictions of the protagonists have a significant impact on their lives because the play is set in the years before World War II. The effect of politics on people and how it affects their identities are both topics of the play. The drama explores the quest for identity and how it is affected by relationships with family, politics, and one's own life. The characters have difficulty understanding who they are and their place in the world. The drama explores how these events have affected the people and their families amid political unrest and conflict. In addition, the play examines another recurrent issue in Pinter's works: the power of language to enslave and control people. The play also looks at the characters' interpretations of past events and how they impact their present and future.

### 2.4 Second Play: "Roots."

"Roots" is the second play in the Wesker Trilogy (WESKER and TOMA, 2019). This play was written in 1958; British writer Arnold Wesker wrote the play "Roots." The play is set in a tiny, rural English community and chronicles the lives of the Kearney family members (Hong). The drama's protagonist is Beatie Kearney, who is expecting a child and yearns for a better life for herself and her family. Tradition, family, and the search for identity are all themes that are explored throughout the play. The Kearneys' attempt to strike a balance between their traditional "Roots" and the modern world is another aspect of the tension between the old and new ways of life explored in this book.

At its debut, the play earned positive reviews, making Wesker a well-respected figure in the theatre community (Lee, 2020). The play is still studied and performed today since it is regarded as one of the most significant from the 20th century.

When it comes to the themes and the perspectives which have been chosen or shown, there are several themes. The play "Roots" examines the conflict between tradition and the modern world as the Kearney family struggles to find a balance between their traditional "Roots" and the new ways of life (Etienne and Saunders, 2020). Further, the play centres around the Kearney family and their relationships with each other. The play has explored the dynamics of family life as well as the impact of tradition on the individual members of the family. Along with these themes, the play delves into the search for identity and how it is influenced by family, tradition, and personal experiences. The characters struggle to come to terms with who they are and where they belong in the world. The play also explores the theme of social class and how it affects the characters' lives and opportunities. The play also explores the themes of gender roles and how they affect the characters' lives, mainly through the character of Beatie Kearney and her desire for a better life. The play is set in a specific historical context and examines history's impact on the characters and their families.

## 2.5 Third Play: "I'm Talking About Jerusalem"

"I'm Talking About Jerusalem" by Arnold Wesker was written in 1968. It is set in the fictional village of Wiltshire, England, and follows the life of the charismatic and controversial figure Willy Mossop (Etienne and Saunders, 2020). The play explores themes of freedom, identity, and the search for a sense of belonging. It also examines the conflict between tradition and the modern world as Willy Mossop struggles to hold onto his wild and free spirit in the face of a rapidly changing society. The play was well-received by critics and audiences and was considered a significant work of Wesker.

"I'm Talking About Jerusalem" by Arnold Wesker explores several themes, including the tradition vs modernity established in the play (Etienne and Saunders, 2020). Arnold Wesker's play examines the conflict between tradition and the modern world as *Willy Mossop struggles to find a balance between his traditional "Roots" and the new ways of life*. Further, the play works with the theme of identity. "I'm Talking About Jerusalem" delves into the search for identity and how tradition, personal experiences and the society influences it. *Willy Mossop struggles to come to terms with who he is and where he belongs in the world*. Social class also has been placed in the third play of the Trilogy. The play also explores the theme of social class and how it affects the characters' lives and opportunities. *Willy Mossop is a charismatic and controversial figure who lives on the fringes of society, and the play examines how society views him*. Readers can find the elements of freedom in the play. "I'm Talking About Jerusalem" also explores the theme of freedom and how it is perceived by society and how it affects Willy Mossop's life (WESKER and TOMA, 2019). Arnold Wesker has portrayed the attributes of history in his play. The play is set in a specific historical context and examines the impact of history on the characters and society, how it shapes their beliefs, and how they see the world. The third play of the Trilogy represents how language can be used to manipulate and control others, a recurring theme in Wesker's plays.

## 2.4 Critical study of the Trilogy

The Wesker Trilogy is a series of plays written by British playwright Arnold Wesker, consisting of "Chicken Soup with Barley", "Roots", and "I'm Talking About Jerusalem" (WESKER and TOMA, 2019). The Trilogy is considered one of Wesker's most essential works and is widely studied and performed today. Critics have generally praised the Trilogy for its exploration of the human condition and its ability to convey complex ideas through simple means. The plays are known for their minimalistic sets and sparse dialogue, which has been seen as a defining characteristic of Wesker's style. "Chicken Soup with Barley" is particularly praised for exploring family dynamics, politics, and the search for identity (Coatman, 2019). The play delves into the complexities of the relationships between the members of the Kahn family and how their political beliefs affect their personal lives. "Roots" is also highly praised for exploring tradition, family, and the search for identity (Farce). The play examines the conflict between the old and the new ways of life as the Kearney family struggles to find a balance between their traditional "Roots" and the modern world. "I'm Talking About Jerusalem" is considered one of the Trilogy's most powerful and thought-provoking plays. It explores themes of freedom, identity, and the search for a sense of belonging. It also examines the conflict between tradition and the modern world as Willy Mossop struggles to hold onto his wild and free spirit in the face of a rapidly changing society. Overall, the Wesker Trilogy is a powerful and thought-provoking work that delves into the complexities of the human experience, and it continues to be widely studied and performed today.

While the Wesker Trilogy has received much praise, it has also faced criticism. Some critics have argued that the plays are overly didactic, with characters delivering speeches that express the playwright's views rather than behaving believably and naturally. Others have criticized the plays for their lack of complexity and overly simplistic exploration of themes. Some reviewers have also found the characters to be one-dimensional and not fully developed, lacking depth and complexity. Additionally, the language used in the plays has been criticized by some as being repetitive, lengthy and lacking in subtlety, which can make the plays feel heavy-handed and lacking in nuance. It should be noted that these criticisms are not universal and have been debated among theatre critics and scholars. The Wesker Trilogy is still considered a significant work of Wesker and has been widely studied and performed.

## 2.5 Socialism and the Possibility of Utopia realized through the Wesker Trilogy

The Wesker Trilogy, created by British playwright Arnold Wesker, is a collection of three plays that explore the prospect of a socialist utopia being realized through the collective activity of the characters, as was covered in the earlier portions. The Trilogy tells the tale of a group of young idealists who were inspired by the socialism of the late 1950s while living in a rural part of England. They set out to improve their society for themselves and their fellow residents. Through their hardships, the protagonists learn the value of teamwork and cooperation in creating an equal society. The Wesker Trilogy predominantly examines the possibilities for a socialist utopia and the difficulties in making it a reality (Etienne and Saunders, 2020). There are many issues and challenges of the protagonists' socialist principles in the plays, coming both from within and beyond society. The plays offer a look into the possibilities of

such a society and the significance of collective collaboration and effort to attain it, even though they do not offer a conclusive explanation of how a socialist utopia may be realized.

The plays also explore the potential for human solidarity and mutual aid amongst the characters. In their struggle to build a better society, the characters face social and economic obstacles. Yet, they can also find strength and support in their collective actions. Through the plays, Wesker presents a vision of a society where individuals can unite to support one another and work towards a greater good.

A vision of socialism as a strategy for building an ideal society is also presented in the Wesker Trilogy. In the plays, a community is portrayed where everyone works with each other to accomplish a common goal and where the requirements of the whole are prioritized over the needs of each individual (Heidarzadegan and Kurt, 2020). But the plays also recognize that establishing such a society does not come without obstacles and challenges. The Wesker Trilogy presents socialism as a complicated, nuanced system that has the potential to improve the world but also one that requires careful consideration and implementation. The Trilogy offers a robust and contemporary examination of the possibilities for a socialist utopia and the difficulties involved in making it a reality. The plays are a potent reminder that group effort is required to attain an equal society through their colourful characters and gripping tale. The Wesker Trilogy serves as a vital reminder of the strength of group effort and the value of solidarity in the struggle for social justice.

## 2.6 What are the major themes in The Wesker Trilogy?

The Wesker Trilogy, written by Arnold Wesker, is a series of plays that explore themes of working-class struggle, family dynamics, and the search for meaning and purpose in life. The plays also examine the relationship between the individual and society and the role of art and creativity in providing a sense of identity and connection to the world. Additionally, the plays explore themes of love, loss, and the human condition. The plays depict the difficulties faced by working-class individuals and families and the impact of social and economic conditions on their lives. The plays explore the relationships between parents and children and how family dynamics can shape an individual's identity and sense of self. The characters in the plays often search for a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives, and the plays examine how individuals attempt to find fulfilment and satisfaction. The plays look the tension between the individual and society and how societal expectations and pressures can shape an individual's choices and actions. The plays also explore themes of love and loss and the human condition

## 3.0 Summarisation

The Wesker Trilogy is a set of three plays written by British writer Arnold Wesker that explores the possibility of a socialist utopia being realized by the character's collective action, as was discussed in the last parts. The Trilogy chronicles the story of a group of young idealists who, while residing in a rural area of England in the late 1950s, were motivated by the socialism of the era. The Trilogy is regarded as one of Wesker's most significant compositions and is still often played and studied today. The Trilogy has received favourable reviews from critics who appreciate

its examination of the human condition and capacity to simplify complicated topics. The plays are renowned for their spare language and minimalist sets, which have been regarded as distinguishing elements of Wesker's aesthetic. Although The Wesker Trilogy has received a lot of praise, it has also faced criticism. In contrast to acting convincingly and naturally, the characters in the plays instead deliver monologues that convey the playwright's thoughts, according to some reviews (Riemenschneider, 2020). Others have criticized the plays for overly simplistic handling of the subjects and lacking of nuance.

Arnold Wesker portrays the life of the Kahn family in his play "Chicken Soup with Barley," a group of Jewish communists striving to cope with the political and social changes that are occurring at the time in London in the years before World War II. The drama examines political, familial, and identitarian themes. The drama investigates how one's interactions with family, politics, and one's life impact one's search for identity. The characters struggle to comprehend who they are and where they fit. In a time of political turmoil and conflict, the drama examines how these events have affected people and their families. The Kearney family tries to achieve a balance between their traditional "Roots" and the contemporary ways of living in the play "Roots," which explores the tension between tradition and modernity. The drama is set in a particular historical period and looks at how history has affected individuals and their families. The drama examined the dynamics of family life and the effects of tradition on the various family members. The drama explores these topics and the quest for identity and how family and tradition shape it and personal experiences. The concepts of tradition vs modernity, introduced throughout the play, are just one of many issues that Arnold Wesker addresses in "I'm Talking About Jerusalem." The issue of socioeconomic class is also explored in the play, as it impacts the characters' options and way of life. The drama explores how society perceives Willy Mossop, a charismatic and contentious figure living on society's periphery. One of Wesker's frequent themes in his plays, and one that is represented in the third piece in the Trilogy, is the idea of how words may be used to control and manipulate others.

### 3.1 Conclusion

The Wesker Trilogy provides a compelling and up-to-date analysis of the potential for a socialist utopia and the challenges associated with making it a reality. The play's vivid characters and compelling stories serve as a forceful reminder that cooperation is necessary to create a society where everyone is treated equally. The Wesker Trilogy does this as a crucial reminder of the value of solidarity and the power of community effort in the fight for social justice. The plays examine the interplay between parents and kids as well as how their family shapes a person's identity and sense of self. The plays explore the numerous ways in which people try to attain fulfilment and happiness because the characters frequently look for a sense of purpose and meaning in their life. The plays explore the conflict between the individual and society and how societal pressures and expectations can influence a person's decisions and behaviour. The plays also tackle topics like loss and love and the human condition.

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