

POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN JOHN ARDEN, A STUDY OF SELECT PLAYS

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ABSTRACT

*The use of social as well as political issues in modern drama is new as the art form itself. More ever, its making in modern British drama is indicative of a continuing interest on the part of playwrights and dramatists alike. From the dreams of fifties of counter-culture, a new generation of writers emerged with the agreement of one thing and desire to create political and social issues in their plays current issues. The years since 1956 have been a time of violent and rapid change for British drama, a very encouraging number of individual writers who continues to write to interesting plays regarding social and political problems. One of the most strikingly independent of these writers is John Arden and entered to the theatre was looking for a quality. John Arden does not write out of private obsessions or personal problems. His plays are much more about social and political issues. In Arden's plays however, entries are bold, explicit, and efficient and functioning directly out the relationships between groups and relationships between individuals. John Arden dramatizes the attempts of individuals to deal with the problems of social condemnation. He does this by means of common man, changing roles of character who directly addresses to audience. His function was to draw the audience in to the play, while qualities of character are intended to represent that which is common to all. On a whole Arden provides a frame work regarding politics, corruption, colonialism that are very much regular part in the procedure of politics. The origin of ideas which accelerates the writing of plays *Live Like Pigs*, *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* and *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance* desire to shine light the problems relevant to contemporary life.*

Keys words: *counter-culture, social condemnation, Obsession, colonialism, accelerates*

Common to plays under consideration is the desire that their themes be relevant in one way or the other to the modern or contemporary life. However different their dramaturgical or philological approaches may be. The observation may seen inapplicable in that common sense to pre- suppose such a goal on that a dramatist. The

importance of such observation becomes clear, however, if we recall certain tendencies in twentieth century British theatre. As Martin Mishel points out:

“were not concerned to give immediacy and familiarity to the past, but to create a remote and splendid world. Shining by contrast with the present, and evoked by every scene and costume. Every syllable and sentiment of the highly artificial, highly impassioned language spoken on stage”. (*Shaw and the Nineteenth Century Theatre*)

In respect to such plays Shaw ironically noticed that:

only way to write a play which shall convey to the general public an impression of antiquity is to take characters speak, blank verse and obtain from reference to steam, telegraphy, on any other material conditions of their existence. (*The Works of Bernard Shaw*)

Emphasizing the contexts, contemporary relevance the past remains the past it is the business of a playwright to make it present. Arden is noted for satirical and innovative treatment of social themes. His plays constantly invoke the theme of politics of colonialism in Ireland. The major themes in John Arden's plays are violence in politics, a coercive bureaucracy, insensitive treatment, colonial aggression injustice and barbarity of imperialism. Arden realizes his dramatic conflict in terms of social situations and pressures rather than in emotional or spiritual developments. He questions something we might call “humanness in politics” in British context, its role and function as the process and measure in our life is common.

So Arden in his plays discussed in above chapters attempts to deal intelligently to give a relevant themes which serve to define homogenously the contemporary relevance. He is disentanglely associated in a situation that contains the internal politics of the England, Conflict of reformatory faction, corruption, barbarity, colonialism and oppression. Arden's basic themes in his drama are based on the social issues related to man's position in society as well as the existence of serious problems of different kinds of societies which are strongly fatal or lethal. John Arden dramatizes the attempts of individuals to deal with the problems of social condemnation. However John Arden felt that such an approach is reward with the danger for the playwright because of the necessary political divisions with the contemporary audience. How can the playwright dramatize these issues of man's conflict with his society in an action that will not isolate his audience? He does this by means of common man, changing roles of character who directly addresses to audience by means of historical ballad form. His function to draw the audience in to the play while qualities of character are intended to represent which is common to all. On a whole Arden provides a frame work regarding politics in England, corruption,

colonialism that are very much regular part in the procedure of politics. The origin of ideas which accelerates the writing of plays *Live Like Pigs*, *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* and *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance* desire to shine light the problems relevant to contemporary life.

Turning now to the plays which i have taken for the present study will focus on the major themes that are relevant and illustrates the concerns of John Arden in present context. The most important theme that exists in these plays of John Arden under consideration is political violence. Political violence is a term used to portray violence committed by government or persons to achieve political goal. Many individuals or groups understand that their political system will never reply their demands so they impute violence that is not only necessary but also justified in order to make their political objectives. Political violence is defined as “hostile or aggressive acts motivated by desire to affect change in the government. Holding dangerous riots in the streets to try over throw the government. An example of political violence is terrorism” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>)

Political violence is used by groups of people, citizens, or government in many contexts. The theme of political violence is depicted in the plays of John Arden. In play *Live Like Pigs* we see that when a group of people besieged the Sawneys house whose accumulation of anger has boiled over, bricks are thrown through the windows and furious voices of crowd outside is being heard, threatens them, Sawneys inside bolted all the doors and windows, all feared and trampled during the night at their house. Here Arden shows the implications of political violence against the Sawneys family by their neighbours.

Man's voice [outside]: We're going to get you out o' that house-

Women's voice [outside]: we're going to show you, by God, we're going to show you! What are you trying-

Col: I think they're coming....

Rachel [*Taking deep breaths like a tired man*]: ah ah ah...[The noise outside grows *as though the people were approaching the house....*] (Taylor, *Three Plays* 183-84)

In the play *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* we have seen that when Lindsay's rational statesmanship and humanity became apparent. He knows that previous rivalry Johnny will not keep the promises and ignores McGlass's warning, his policy of “blind flattery and dishonor” (Arden, *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* 58) will prove destructive. Lindsay disagrees and marks that by inciting trouble among borders. More than political violence is shown here when we consider Gilman's assessment:

“...his consciousness and rationality his wit and sense of the way the world runs are not s; simulacra of seriousness, they are actually the instruments of a game he plays. The game played by anyone who is too civilized, too given over, that is to say, to one side... practical, abstract, logical...of the perennial conflict that runs through man’s organized life in common.”(Norman Long, *The Use of Historical Material* 140)

Again Lindsay continue to pursue a ill event despite the McGlass’s warning and King’s disapproval, an event which reaches in a fantastic scheme to make a separate border state with Armstrong as a kind of king. Again he reveals the game like approach to diplomacy or we can that Lindsay make a political violence to gain the power against Armstrong. “I did ever tak pleasure in ane devious activity.” (Arden, *Armstrong’s Last Goodnight* 97) Lindsay and his men encourages Johnny to view himself as a king in order to deceive him shows the political violence by the Lindsay and his men to attain the Johnny’s confidence over his kingdom.

Now in the play *Sergeant Musgrave’s Dance* the theme of political violence is prevalent. We see the action of characters and situation in the Colliery town, a situation which Musgrave sees as parallel to the unhappy conflict, where he and his soldiers have fled. Though the Colliers suspect that the soldiers may break their strike, but Musgrave have confidence that their support will be won. “At the present, they’ll believe we’ve come to kill them. Soon they’ll find we haven’t, so they’ll stop hating.” (Arden, *Sergeant Musgrave’s Dance* 33)

The situation is clear cut that the Soldiers and the Colliers are rebels with a common cause and common oppressor. In Musgrave’s mind The Mayor, Parson and Constable are equivalent to use the imperial force upon the villagers and miners. They apparently unite for the common enemy (The town’s Establishment) Arden makes clear that political violence is present within the government system. Actually the Colliers distrust on the mine owners displays about the use of military force to settle difference between the workers who are justifying for their rights are oppressed by the owners.

“...Law and order have been re-established by force. The dance certainly implies apathy in some of the colliers but there is a stage direction which makes it quite clear that their leader, who is last to join in, does so unwillingly. This is the sort of detail which on a small stage covered with people, can easily be missed.” (Norman Long, *The use of Historical Material* 197)

The physical violence and bloodshed rather than a peaceful display is evidence that shocks the people of the town and realizing the seriousness in the message of Musgrave. As the text points out: “The strike could be a

kind of non-violent action beyond the range of Musgrave's imagination, but the strikers' do not put all their trust in this, and attempt to steal the soldiers Gatling gun."(Norman Long, *The use of Historical Material* 197)

So we can say that the theme of Political violence is present in all three plays which are in study.

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