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**Echoes of the East End: Historical Trauma and Fascist Friction in
Wesker's Trilogy**

Dr. Subhash

Assistant Professor of English Govt. College, Bhattu Kalan (Fatehabad), Affiliated to Ch. Devi Lal University, Sirsa

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Abstract: *This paper examines the representation of historical trauma, cultural identity, and ideological conflict in Arnold Wesker's The Wesker Trilogy—comprising Chicken Soup with Barley (1958), Roots (1959), and I'm Talking About Jerusalem (1960). Set against the socio-political backdrop of twentieth-century Britain, particularly London's East End, the trilogy captures the experiences of working-class Jewish communities confronting the rise of fascism, political disillusionment, and social transformation. Through the struggles of the Kahn family and their associates, Wesker explores the enduring psychological and emotional impact of historical upheavals, including the threat of fascism and the erosion of socialist ideals.*

The paper explores themes of historical wounds, the rise of British fascism, the disintegration of socialist ideals, and the evolution of British-Jewish identity within the context of post-war drama. Wesker's Trilogy analyzes how Arnold Wesker represents the psychological trauma and political conflicts of the Jewish working class people. His Trilogy presents the intersection of working-class struggles, the feeling of being an outsider, the rise of fascism and the shadow of the Nazi genocide. The paper aims to understand the working-class consciousness, a shift towards domestic and domestic-certified settings, the themes of displacements, socio-political realities of post-war Britain, analyzing working-class struggles, the complexities of cultural identity, the evolution of modern political theatre and the transformative power of education.

The study investigates how personal memories intersect with collective history, revealing trauma not merely as an individual experience but as a shared cultural condition. The East End emerges as a significant historical and symbolic space where tensions between resistance and oppression, hope and despair, idealism and compromise are continuously negotiated. Wesker's dramatic vision foregrounds the resilience of ordinary people while exposing the fractures created by political extremism and social injustice. By analysing characterisation, dialogue, and historical context, the paper demonstrates how the trilogy functions both as a social document and as a powerful critique of ideological intolerance. Ultimately, the study argues that Wesker transforms the lived experiences of a marginalised community into a compelling dramatic exploration of memory, identity, and the persistent echoes of historical trauma.

Keywords: *Disillusionment, socialist dream, anti-Semitic, Jewish, historical trauma, anti-fascist idealism, displacement.*



Introduction

Most of the writers around 1930 underwent shocking experience of the political events of times like the Spanish Civil War, Second World War, the suppression of the Hungarian revolution of 1956 by Russia, and Suez fiasco. The impact of World War Second was the most appalling and awful one. It created a horrifying and confusing situation, filled the rank and file with fear, and scared them out of their wits and nothing left to rely them upon. This new way of feeling forced the young dramatists to talk and walk with a new way and voice. They mocked and scoffed at the gigantic figures of the political, social and religious establishment of the time.

Arnold Wesker attracts critics and audience partly because of his Jewish extraction and political milieu and partly because of the class which he has sketched very seriously and sincerely. There are a number of critics who have turned attention to a close relationship between the social, political, personal and religious realities of the time and Wesker's dramatic constructs. It was his ability to capture sensitively and accurately the mood of his time which brought him recognition as the dramatist of his age.

Wesker's *Trilogy* plays vividly illustrate how the unresolved legacy of historical trauma shapes the psychological and ideological landscapes of subsequent generations. This trauma either motivates them politically or leaves them paralyzed. In these plays, the "fascist struggle" is not just about fighting Nazis. Instead, it represents the conflict between historical trauma and modern complacency. We need to explore how these lessons apply to specific modern situations or how these historical events shape contemporary Jewish identity. Wesker tries to know whether the anti-fascist idealism of the 1930s can survive amidst prosperity, apathy, and the welfare state. Wesker's displacement is reflected in his *Trilogy* plays through his interrupted education and fragmented identity. Wesker's *Trilogy* depicts and analyzes the cultural rootlessness as the successor to political fascism.

Arnold Wesker frequently explored the themes of anti-fascism and the rising of Nazism through the lens of his Jewish eyes and socialist beliefs. His works addressed the dangers of prejudice, totalitarianism, abuse of power, Lilliputian mentality (ethical failures), cultural and social alienation, political disillusion, and loss of idealism, working class apathy and ignorance and historical remembrance of the Holocaust. His works explore the 'anti-Semitic abuse of law' citing the Nazi-era genocide. He was deeply moved by the rise of Nazism and fascism in Europe. The threat of fascism directly formed and framed his cultural identity, political ideology, theatrical output and anti-racist worldview.

Arnold Wesker (1932–2016), a playwright of Jewish descent, was one of the most influential British dramatists of the post-war era. He grew up in a community shaped by poverty, cultural solidarity, socialist ideals, and the lingering memories of persecution.

Understanding Wesker's life and ideological commitments is essential to appreciating the *trilogy's* exploration of historical trauma, political conflict, cultural identity, and the resilience of ordinary people in times of social upheaval.

According to Leeming, Wesker spent his early childhood in the East End of London, notably in Fashion Street and Flower and Dean Street, where his grandmother and aunt lived (Leeming, p. 7). The East End during Wesker's childhood was a site of intense political activity and social struggle. The rise of British fascism in the 1930s, particularly under the leadership of Oswald Mosley, generated widespread anxiety among Jewish communities. Events such as the Battle of Cable Street left a lasting impression



on the collective memory of East End residents and later found expression in Wesker's dramatic works. The experience of anti-fascist resistance, coupled with the hopes invested in socialism and labour politics, profoundly influenced Wesker's ideological outlook.

Wesker worked as a carpenter's mate, bookseller's assistant, a seed porter, a farm laborer, a plumber mate, and pastry cook before turning to playwriting. That is why Reade W. Dornan remarked in her book *Arnold Wesker Revisited* (1993): "As a pastry cook turned playwright, his was a Cinderella story rarely found in post war Britain" (P.IX). After working in various occupations, Wesker became involved with left-wing intellectual circles and emerged as a leading voice in the "kitchen-sink" movement of British drama. These personal and historical experiences form the foundation of *The Wesker Trilogy*—*Chicken Soup with Barley* (1958), *Roots* (1959), and *I'm Talking About Jerusalem* (1960). The trilogy reflects the world Wesker knew intimately: the Jewish working-class communities of the East End, their confrontation with fascism, their faith in socialist ideals, and their eventual disillusionment with political movements that failed to fulfil their promises.

Critics have noted that Arnold Wesker's plays explore a wide array of human experiences, including the erosion of political ideologies, the clash between dreams and reality, the inevitability of death, and the complexities of human relationships and religious fanaticism. Rejecting the label of merely being a political dramatist, Wesker argued: "I have often been referred to as a political writer. I am not certain I know what that means. Most debates about what is good and bad in art... are debates about preference. Theories are evolved to vindicate that preference, like ideologies, are stultifying" (Wesker).

Through his plays, Wesker explored the complex interplay between personal experience, collective identity, and political ideals, making these themes central to his dramatic vision. His personal experiences are dominant as he himself is the part and parcel of that social culture which is the warp and woof of his plays. "My private life is splattered all over my plays, stories and poetry and if any of your readers are interested they will have to read what I've written!" (*Ambivalences* P. 63).

Wesker, drew extensively upon Jewish culture, traditional ways of life, moral values, social responsibility, communal history, and revolutionary political traditions in his works. More than many of his contemporaries, he portrayed the resilience, struggles, and stubborn realities of everyday life while tracing the gradual disillusionment of the socialist dream.

Wesker passionately wrote, fought, and spoke scrupulously in defence of his class and community, roots and religion, society and surroundings. His plays focused on ordinary people, their aspirations, disappointments, and struggles within changing social and political conditions. Deeply influenced by socialist humanism, he believed in the transformative power of culture, education, and collective action, though he remained critical of political dogmatism and ideological rigidity.

Wesker's Fiercely Jewish Identity:

Looking over the last 50 years of Wesker's career as a playwright, one could conclude that the East End and his Jewish upbringing probably did more to shape his plays than any other single factor. The evidence is considerable: his family's history of persecution, his experiences in the bomb shelters, his membership in the Zionist movement, his awe of the power of the intellect, and his continued support over the years by the Jewish arts network.



'Jewishness' and 'politics' are identical and interconnected concepts in Wesker's plays because he was a Jew by birth, but brought up in a political surrounding that was certainly hitting the Jews below the belt in one way or another. Wesker's umbilical cord to Jewishness made him stand in favour of Jews. He remained detached from politics, yet the realities of the era affected him deeply; it was difficult for a Jew to escape the political terror that loomed over the first half of the 20th century. Politically, Wesker thought for the welfare of the Jews as they were not safe in the pre and post war era under the bark of the Nazis and the fascists (Blackshirts). Many of Wesker's plays have underlying political concerns. Wesker mirrored his experiences in his plays. These experiences influenced Wesker's view of the world. "Wesker was a socialist and his experiences in the 1950s honed and shaped his politics, as they honed and shaped his writing." (Pattie p.93). In an essay on Wesker, John Bull observes that he was never a simple cheerleader for left wing politics. In fact, his writing was born from a desire to make sense of the circumstances in which he had grown up and the responses of the people he knew to those circumstances. *Chicken Soup with Barley* grows out of political argument between Wesker and his mother. "What grabbed me was the disintegration of a family and a circle of friends paralleling the disintegration of an ideology. Political disillusion didn't strike me a good idea for a play. It was there, in my life, to be witnessed and shaped" (Wesker).

The term 'Jewishness' attracted Wesker very much. In an interview he says: "I only began to think specially about Jewishness when I was about fourteen when I joined Habonim (a Jewish Youth group) and my Jewish consciousness was deepened and sharpened during that period which was about four or five years and then it lapse entirely and it's only recently in the last possible three years that I felt Jewish in a belonging way or a protective way. I think that what happens is that you are suddenly aware that you have inherited a shared consciousness of your community's suffering. I didn't experience much anti-Semitism as a child. What I did discover I took fairly flippantly. I mean I had socialist answers for why it existed. And we were a long way from what happened in Europe to the other Jews. But there does remain an inherited sense of a history of persecution. And it is that which I give one a sense of identity" (Wesker in interview with Hayman). Politics and religion are things apart but the time and place of Wesker's birth pushed him reluctantly into the hotchpotch of this hostile world: "There was no religious life in his home, but he developed a strong consciousness of his Jewish origins and the feeling that the Jews formed a unit in a hostile world. His parents inculcated in him a gentleness of temperament and an opposition to violence." (Evans)

In the 1930s, the East End was home to about 109,800 Jews, with half of them living in Stepney. About one-quarter of the Jews in Stepney had been born abroad and were immigrants to this country. There was a large Chinese community in Limehouse, as well as a smaller group of Lascars and Black people. This led to an increase in anti-Semitism. With Hitler's regime firmly established in Germany, the threat of fascism seemed real, especially in light of the Spanish Civil War. The Kahns of *Chicken Soup*, like their friends, are largely communist, immigrant, and Jewish—three compelling reasons for being particularly sensitive to a political movement that was highly nationalist in nature. The first act of *Chicken Soup* provides the historical and political background for the entire Trilogy.

Arnold Wesker's Jewish upbringing profoundly shaped his identity, political convictions, and literary career. Born in the East End to Jewish immigrants from Russia and Hungary, Wesker grew up in a vibrant, politically active working-class communist subculture. This environment combined intense socialist activism with a secular but deeply felt Jewish heritage, fuelling the raw materials for his



"kitchen sink". Wesker's early personal life served as the explicit source material for his most celebrated works. He famously modelled his characters directly after his family members, capturing their distinct cultural ethics, attitudes, and speech patterns.

In his masterpiece *The Wesker Trilogy* the central Kahn family is a direct mirror of his own household. The character of Sarah Kahn—a fiercely independent, stubborn, and passionate communist matriarch—was based on Wesker's mother, Leah. The passive, weaker father figure, Harry Kahn, closely mirrored his real father, Joseph. Though Wesker's parents were strict, committed atheists, they maintained a powerful, unyielding connection to their Jewish roots. Wesker inherited this complex worldview, noting that his parents were strict atheists but still fiercely protective of their family faiths. He attended a Jewish infants' school in Whitechapel and later joined the Zionist youth group Habonim, which provided him with structured education outside the traditional classroom. For Wesker, Jewishness was not a matter of theology or religious practice, but rather an obsession with ideas, debate, and intellectual pursuit.

Wesker's deep-rooted connection to Jewish thought and culture is a conscious, foundational element of his identity, profoundly shaping his exploration of universal socialist ideals and working-class experiences: "I feel a Jew, I am a Jew—there is no logic to it. Yet my roots though vague are real. And because I am a Jew, I feel and write in a particular way" (Arnold Wesker's personal essay titled *To See the Playwright* originally published in *The Jewish Quarterly* in 1959). Because of his Jewish identity, he has never felt fully at home in England. The political setting of his plays was largely influenced by the poor treatment of Jews at the hands of European dictators.

Wesker embraces his Jewish heritage with an unprecedented sense of profound pride and mature understanding: "And I feel very English, especially when I'm out of the country. When I'm in England, which is most of the time, I feel alien—partly because I grew up in the atmosphere of an immigrant family, and partly because I'm Jewish." (*Ambivalences* p.36). Wesker seems more anxious to stress their alienation from the Jewish community than his connection with it. All the same Wesker cannot get away from it. Critics emphasize his Jewish rhythms of emotion and language. Wesker has answered the question, "Why do I feel like a Jew?" by saying: "I feel a Jew because of the way my family spoke, because of the rhythms and patterns of their living"—even because of "the rituals I knew of, though I do not perform." (*Fears of Fragmentation*)

"Wesker deals most directly with Jewish subjects, and with socialism and family life as necessary parts of the Jewish scene. His *Chicken Soup with Barley* shows a Jewish milieu warmed by the hope of socialism" (Popkin). His *Trilogy* plays center working-class Jewish families in the East End grappling with socialism, disillusionment, and post-war Britain. His personal clash between aspiration and circumstance became his subject matter.

Wesker frequently noted that even though he did not actively practice traditional Jewish religious rituals, his cultural identity was deeply rooted in his grandparents' backgrounds—one was a shochet (ritual slaughterer) and the other a great rabbinical scholar. Wesker explained that his ancestry subconsciously seeped into the use of imagery and the vibrant, conversational "rhythms and patterns" of his characters' daily lives. Throughout his career, Wesker continuously examined his Jewish identity—often drawing on his East End working-class upbringing to probe the intricate intersections of his cultural roots, personal psyche, and socialist ideals. At a symposium on Jewish writing, writers and Jewishness, Wesker told his audience, "You know, I suspect I am more Jewish than I think I am."



He expanded his observation by remarking, "I was not taught in a yeshiva, but one of my grandfathers was a shochet, and the other was a great rabbinical scholar, and I suppose their Jewish feeling must have been handed down to me subconsciously. At any rate, this shows in some of the imagery I use." (Wesker in British Newspaper, *The Observer* on November 18, 1984.)

In one of his stories from *Six Sundays in January* (1971) titled *Menace* Wesker talks about a young Jewish woman who finds herself restless and crippled with the awareness of her "double otherness"—that of being a Jew in England and being married to a Gentile. In his play *Shylock* Wesker subverts Shakespeare's anti-Semitic tropes to present the Jew a loyal friend, dignified, highly cultured Renaissance humanist and scholar. He transforms Shylock from a vengeful villain into a victim of systematic prejudices. In his plays, Wesker pours his own Jewishness into his characters. We can see Wesker directing his energy to the condemnation of the industrial society and the ruling class in *The Kitchen and Chips*. *Chicken Soup with Barley* charts the Kahn family's journey from their enthusiastic resistance against the Fascist Oswald Mosley's March in 1936, through the hopeful expectations of the 1945 labour electoral triumph to their ultimate disillusionment following the 1956 Hungarian uprising. The play deals with the class conflicts and family issues of the working class folks. Sarah is busy discussing and planning about various marches and protests of the Jews against fascists. The play moves across complex activities: political meetings, strikes and marches, trade union debates, a world war and a life in a kitchen etc.. Both the families have Jewish extraction and same background. Wesker has expressed in his works the various problems, tensions and troubles faced by the Jews.

Fusing Jewishness with Political Idealism

"Wesker comes from a family with a long and deep tradition of communal and political activism with an emphasis on self-discipline, fellowship, and social responsibility— all socialist as well as Jewish values." (*Arnold Wesker Revisited* P.15) *The Wesker Trilogy* is the only sustained effort to understand and interpret the climate of social and political changes in Britain and Jewish tension from the anti-Fascist Movement of thirties to the Labour government of the fifties. "The clash of personalities is really a clash of ideals and the drama gains in depth of human content as we see the political framework of the play conflicting with the network of human relationship" (Choudhary P.53-54).

The Trilogy, in Ronald Hayman's view, contains the first serious political plays to be written in England. *Roots* ends with a disguised political whisper, while *Chicken Soup with Barley* opens with a loud political roar. It covers a number of political events of the time. The Battle of Cable Street in October 1936 plays its part in the opening Act of *Chicken Soup with Barley* is a model of the world's political divisions. It was the time of Fascism and Fascists. In 1932, Sir Oswald Mosley, a politician and the son of a Baronet, had been a conservative Member of Parliament and labour minister. He left the Labour Party because of its failure to solve the issue of unemployment and formed his British Union of Fascists under the influence of Mussolini and Hitler. They were a group of people who were anti-Semitic, and who made all sorts of false claims that they were plotting to take over the world. His followers dressed in black uniforms, like fascists in Italy led by Mussolini and like those later led by Hitler in Germany. These two dictators believed that Government is all powerful and power is centralized in a dictator. This was a national movement and highly military in its nature.

Mosley felt the uselessness of communism that would destroy liberty and property. Fascists believed that communism emanated from Russia where it had reigned for twenty years and that it was financed



by rich Jewish business interests. It was felt that Jews controlled too much. Hitler's revenge against Jewry resulted in the murders of millions of innocents. Mosley's anti-Semitism took the form of whipping up racist feeling, particularly in the East End of London. Jews from Eastern Europe had arrived as exiles into this area at the turn of the century. They spoke Yiddish, they formed a community of their own, and they appeared to make money. The Jews were resented by the native East Enders and Mosley could harness this resentment. Some of the Jewish families had brought communist beliefs with them. Families who are communist and Jewish like the Kahns were threatened by Mosley's political demonstration on their doorsteps. In the Battle of Cable Street, anti-fascist demonstrators fought back, forcing the police to ask Mosley to disband his men—but not before some minor outbreaks, looting, and property damage had already occurred. "While breaking up the mobs, the police seemed to be more sympathetic to the fascists than the Jews since in the end, many more Jews than fascists were arrested" (Dornan p.27). The Battle of Cable Street plays an important role to the Kahns in Wesker's *Trilogy*.

The rise of British fascism in the form of Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts and the historic Battle of Cable Street formed the political heartbeat of his iconic semi-autobiographical *Trilogy*. Wesker's work challenges these abrupt ideologies to highlight the fragility of democracy and the working class solidarity. His plays chronicle the trajectory of this political environment: from the radical anti-fascist street battles against Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts in the 1930s, through the anxieties of World War II, to the deep disillusionment with Soviet communism in the 1950s. His works constantly wrestle with the Jewish-socialist struggle to construct a utopian way of life within a flawed, changing modern society.

The key event in Wesker's *Trilogy* is the historic Battle of Cable Street, which culminated in 1936 when the Jewish community and its many supporters blocked British fascists from marching through the East End London. The battle of Cable Street, as it came to be known, after the street that saw the most direct confrontations, had immense symbolic as well as actual significance in the domestic resistance to fascism. In *Chicken Soup with Barley*, the victorious moment is seen as a high point of left-wing idealism, in which political action unifies personal integrity and identification with the class. Moreover, the play links the battle against the British fascism with the wider anti-fascist struggle.

Chicken Soup is about how the Kahns family takes steps to come out on the streets to protest against the anti-Jewish march held by fascists. In *Chicken Soup with Barley*, "families were brought together, neighbourhoods became more cohesive, and eventually the nation turned against Mosley when England entered the war against Germany" (Dornan p.27). Sarah is a passionate communist who wants to join other Jews to support them. A march against Jews is being conducted by fascists, and the streets of London are filled with the public. Oswald Mosley gathers the fascists together in England under the name 'The British Union of Fascists.' The socialists, communists, colonists, and Labour Party members want to organize a march against the anti-Jewish march of the fascists. The reference to Spain also notes that such marches are taking place in other parts of Europe too. Most of the Jews are from the working class and have gathered to oppose the fascists' march. Sarah is annoyed because her husband is not active enough to take part in demonstrations and protests. Dave and other youngsters are familiar with the plans of the fascists. One can feel the brutality and inhumanity of the fascists when they throw a seven-year-old girl out of the window. We encounter references to Oswald Mosley at several places. *Chicken Soup* is clearly structured by the historic milestones of the local and international struggle



against fascism in 1936—in London against Oswald Mosley's British Blackshirts and in Spain against Franco—and the traumatic effect on Western communists of the suppression of the popular uprising in Hungary by Russian tanks in 1956.

Wesker's mother, a member of the communist party, was the avowed model for Sarah in *Chicken Soup with Barley*. Wesker grew up in a politically engaged household. *Chicken Soup with Barley* focuses directly on the real-life struggles of East End Jewish families and their Communist comrades who fought against fascism in the 1930s. The play juxtaposes fierce anti-fascism with the disillusionment that emerged from socialist ideals in the post-war era.

In the opening scene of *Chicken Soup with Barley*, the looming confrontation with Oswald Mosley's fascists sparks the emotional tension and sets strict ideological boundaries locally and globally for dedicated communists like Dave Simmonds. "Hello, Sarah. Spain is the battlefield. Spain is a real issue at last" (WT p.11). The people from all working classes—men and women—are in the streets to oppose Mosley's march. However, there are traces of tension over their faces. Monty Blatt, another young activist, can scarcely contain his exhilaration: "Bloody wonderful, isn't? Makes you feel proud, eh Sarah? Every section of this working class area that we've approached has responded. The dockers at Limehouse have come out to the man" (Trilogy p.13). Later in the day, they all return in triumph from the barricades, bubbling over with confidence for the future:

PRINCE: There's no turning back now-nothing can stop the workers now.

MONTY: I bet we have a revolution soon. Hitler won't stop at Spain, you know.... Then we'll move in. (p.22)

Sarah is reminded of the paralyzing sensation of politics and war: "Horrible times! Horrible times — dirty, unclean, cheating!" (P.64 Trilogy). In the world of Wesker's Trilogy, we see people living whole lifetimes without knowing their next-door neighbours. The greatest battle in the plays of Wesker is against indifference and nihilism. In the words of Ronnie: "you have got to care, you've got to care or you'll die." (P.77, Trilogy)

The protagonists (Sarah and Harry) in *Chicken Soup* are from Jewish community and the dramatist explores how they struggle to maintain their convictions in the face of Fascism, World War II, Stalinism, or the 1956 Hungarian revolution. Sarah fights in the left wing battle. But her husband shows weakness here, there and everywhere. Sarah thrust a red flag with a hammer and sickle in the hands of her husband to wave during the demonstration but he goes to his mother's home to drink tea instead of waving the flag. The three act play opens in 1936 with the Kahn family preparing to take to the streets to counter a planned anti-Jewish march organised by Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists. The family members are excited as they join socialists, communists, and Labour party members, who have been running battles with the police. They are all up for the battle apart from faint hearted Harry who would rather read a book and have a cup of tea than face confrontation. We can see the working class people assembling for actions, marches and demonstrations everywhere in *Chicken Soup with Barley*. The play deals with the clash between classes and the problems of the low paid workers. "Try", he says, "cos we're still suffering from the shock of two world wars and we don't know it." (Trilogy P. 120). The world of Kahn family itself is in chaos and confusion. There is internal conflict and incertitude among the family members. Ada says: "How can we care for a world outside ourselves when the world inside is in disorder?" (P. 41)



Expressing the motivational cause behind *Chicken Soup with Barley*, Wesker says that he had quarreled with his mother over politics, raging at her continuing adherence to communism: "I had screamed at her: how could she still remain a communist? The speech in the play is more or less that she replied in the life" (*As Much As I Dare* P. 213). After completing this play Wesker read it to his mother; and when he finished, his mother smiled and said "...who is going to be interested in any of it, silly boy? It's about us, it's between us. It won't mean anything to anyone else..." (*Trilogy* P. XII). *Chicken Soup* shows a working class Jewish family, the Kahn's of London, and the way political and social events affects their idealism.

Wesker made his Jews politically conscious rebels.

It was very difficult for Jewish immigrants to imagine life in the East End of London in the 1930s. The community faced intense political tensions and the looming threat of fascism, followed shortly after by the devastating German bombing campaigns during the Blitz. Wesker has no faith in the political art of Hitler and Mussolini. He thinks it utterly bad and infectious to people. He said to the *Guardian* on 15 march 2003: "Nazis and communist ideology made political art and it was mostly bad because it was not one person's truth about their experience as they perceived it, it was wish-fulfillment-experience invented in the shadow of gloomy theories about the way life should be lived" (*The Guardian*, Saturday, March 15, 2003).

Wesker's *Trilogy* acts as a chronicle of the British Jewish experience from the 1930s to the 1950s, tracing the shift from passionate anti-fascist, communist idealism to postwar disillusionment. The narrative mirrors historical events—including the Spanish Civil War, the Nazi-Soviet Pact, and the 1956 collapse of faith in Stalinist Russia—through the personal, ideological journeys of the Kahn family. The fascists were assembling across London, gathering at locations like Royal Mint Street, Commercial Road, Limehouse, Victoria Park, and Cable Street in an effort to harass and intimidate the Jewish community. While reading Arnold Wesker's play, *Chicken Soup with Barley*, the reader encounters prominent political figures of the era, including Hitler, Churchill, Mosley, General Franco and Mussolini. The Jewish characters appear terrified as the fascists gather in their neighborhoods: "They are assembling! They're assembling! Out to the barricades—the Fascists are assembling" (*Trilogy* P. 14). The Spanish Civil War, the International Brigade, the British Communist Movement, the Fascist march in London and various other small events that took place in the first half of the 20th century bring to us, as never before in a play, the political reality of the thirties. The things seem very exciting in comparison with the stable family environment in the East End basement flat of the Kahns. Wesker examines the concrete social and political themes as class conflicts, failure of Welfare state, disintegration of family structure, generation gap and social and ethical changes in the society which form the very warp and woof of his plays. He is exceptional in tossing dignity aside and protesting again and again.

Nazi Germany, actively engaged in a brutal act of genocide as a matter of state policy, planned and executed in every detail by administrative orders from the top and followed through the end by its administrative organs down the line to the man, who unhesitatingly threw the Cyklon B gas through the small opening in the roof of the gas chambers, knowing well what he was doing.

Conclusion

Arnold Wesker's trilogy stands as a powerful dramatic exploration of the East End Jewish experience, revealing how personal lives are shaped by larger historical and political forces. Through the



interconnected narratives of *Chicken Soup with Barley*, *Roots*, and *I'm Talking about Jerusalem*, Wesker reconstructs a world marked by economic hardship, ideological commitment, communal solidarity, and social transformation. The trilogy captures not only the aspirations of working-class Jews but also the profound disillusionment that followed the decline of socialist ideals and the fragmentation of collective political movements.

The historical memory of anti-Semitism and the emergence of fascist forces form a persistent backdrop to the plays, reminding audiences that political extremism thrives in conditions of economic insecurity and social division. By situating his characters within the turbulent landscape of the East End, Wesker demonstrates how historical trauma continues to resonate across generations, shaping identities, relationships, and political consciousness. The anti-fascist struggles depicted in the trilogy are therefore not merely historical episodes but enduring reminders of the need for vigilance against intolerance and authoritarianism.

At the same time, the trilogy transcends its specific Jewish and East End setting to address universal concerns about belonging, dignity, social justice, and the search for meaningful collective action. Wesker's nuanced portrayal of ordinary people negotiating the tensions between hope and disappointment, idealism and reality, gives the plays a lasting relevance. Ultimately, *The Wesker Trilogy* serves both as a record of a particular historical moment and as a compelling reflection on the resilience of human values in the face of political upheaval, historical trauma, and ideological conflict.

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