

ALAN AYCKBOURN'S THEATRICALITY AND USE OF
COMEDY IN
WOMAN IN MIND, A SMALL FAMILY BUSINESS AND
HENCEFORWARD:
MARRIAGE, FAMILY, PRIVATE - PUBLIC AND ABSENCE
OF STANDARDS

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF LETTERS
AND THE INSTITUTE OF ECONOMICS AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES
OF BILKENT UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

BY
EBRU BAYOL
JANUARY, 1994

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tarafından başlanmıştır.

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We certify that we have read this thesis and that in our combined opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

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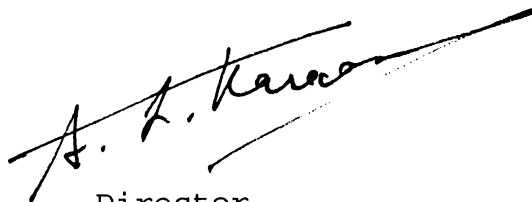
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ÖZET

Alan Ayckbourn'un Woman in Mind, A Small Family Business ve Henceforward Adlı Oyunlarındaki Sahne Sanatı ve Mizahı:
Evlilik, Aile, Kişisel - Toplumsal Yaşam ve Eksik Değer Yargıları

Ebru Bayo1

İngiliz Edebiyatı Yüksek Lisans

Tez Yöneticisi : Dr. David Gilligan

Ocak, 1994

Bu tez Alan Ayckbourn'un son oyunlarından olan Woman in Mind, A Small Business ve Henceforward üzerinde yoğunlaşarak Ayckbourn'un görsel öğelerden nasıl faydalandığını ve mizahi tarzını incelemeyi amaçlar. Ayrıca, bu oyunlarda evlilik kurumunun bozuk yapısı ve bunun çocuklar üzerindeki etkisi, kişisel ve toplumsal hayatın ayrılmaz oluşu ve toplumdaki eksik değer yargıları temaları üzerinde durulacaktır.

Abstract

Alan Ayckbourn's Theatricality and Use of Comedy in
Woman in Mind, A Small Family Business and Henceforward:
Marriage, Family, Public - Private and Absence of Standards

Ebru Bayol

M.A. in English Literature

Advisor: Dr. David Gilligan

January, 1994

The aim of this dissertation is to focus on three of Alan Ayckbourn's recent plays, namely Woman in Mind, A Small Business and Henceforward in order to analyse how Ayckbourn employs visual elements and how he creates comedy while he writes about such themes as the destruction of marriage and its effects on children, the inseparable nature of private and public and the absence of standards.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis advisor Dr. David Gilligan for his encouragement and to Dr. Laurence A. Raw for his support and practical suggestions.

I am especially indebted to my cousin Tuba Ustuner for her encouragement and help in typing and printing this thesis.

I would like to give my special thanks to my cousin Tugrul Ustuner, my friends Neslihan Ozcevik and Ertan Nalbantoglu for their help in typing this dissertation.

I am grateful to my family for their support.

Chapter I

Introduction

Very few academic journals have published valuable articles about Alan Ayckbourn's work, that is articles which provide us with close readings of some of his plays and try to make us judge his importance in the British dramatic context. In a 1983 article published in Modern Drama, Elmer M. Blistein tries to emphasize the importance of Ayckbourn's stage designs. He says that Ayckbourn depends upon "adroit juxtaposition of episodes, the clever manipulation of time, the dexterous use of props" (1). Blistein's comment is valuable ; Ayckbourn is a dramatist who tries to make ultimate use of stagecraft. What I will try to do in my dissertation is to extend these ideas and focus on this concept of "theatricality" (2). Unlike Blistein, however, I will concern myself with three of his most recent plays--Woman in Mind, A Small Family Business and Henceforward. I will also demonstrate that Ayckbourn treats his themes humourously; he creates comedy through incongruous situations. Another concern of my dissertation is to show that Ayckbourn is more than a dramatist who writes comic plays. Malcolm Page's article in Modern Drama, "The Serious Side of Alan Ayckbourn", deals with this issue, but again does not refer to his most recent work because this article was published in 1983 while the plays I will be discussing in my dissertation were written by Ayckbourn after

1985. Page asserts that "Ayckbourn shows and condemns thoughtlessness and insensitivity. . . . Ayckbourn looks steadily at people in pain and shows that being human, having any involvement with others, is difficult and fraught with problems" (3). Ayckbourn is primarily interested in human relationships. He has chosen always to focus on insensitive people and the difficulties they experience in communicating with one another. He generally writes about middle class people living in English suburbs and his recurring theme is that of marriage. More importantly, in his later plays his main concern lies in analyzing the public and the private lives of his characters, their roles which are determined by gender and their relationship to contemporary British society.

Bernard F. Dukore's article in Twentieth Century Literature, " Craft, Character, Comedy: Ayckbourn's Woman in Mind " (4), analyses Ayckbourn's dramatic technique, his exposition of character and his technique of comedy. This is a rather lengthy essay which deals with Woman in Mind in detail. By focusing on the same ideas in A Small Family Business and Henceforward, I will try to develop the ideas and the themes in this article.

Michael Billington's book, Alan Ayckbourn (5), attempts to show that Ayckbourn is not a "boulevard lightweight" dramatist, but rather someone who is "seriously underrated." This book is a useful introduction to Ayckbourn, but for those who look for detailed analysis of his plays, it is somewhat insubstantial.

Although all these critics such as Malcolm Page, Bernard F. Dukore and Elmer M. Blistein have something useful to say about

Ayckbourn, they do not go far enough in analyzing his work -- especially his later plays. This is the main concern of my dissertation. The themes I will be dealing with will be the destruction of marriage and its effects on children, the insensitivity of husbands and their failure as fathers, the fact that private and public are inseparable and the absence of standards.

In order to determine Ayckbourn's place in the British dramatic tradition, it may be useful to compare him with his immediate contemporaries Joe Orton and Willy Russell, since these dramatists also deal with issues like failed marriages, although their points of view are different. In Ayckbourn's plays, there are usually unhappy marriages in which the partners do not understand one another. One of the partners complains, but the other either ignores such complaints or responds insensitively. It is usually the women who have complaints and the men are insensitive. Nevertheless the marriage continues. For example, in Woman In Mind Gerald does not want to talk about Susan's problems; he avoids discussing their marriage. Similarly, in Henceforward, it is the wife Corinna who expresses her dissatisfaction with her marriage. In Russell's two plays, Educating Rita and Shirley Valentine, however, the dramatist provides his female protagonists with satisfactory alternatives: they have the courage to change their lives. Both Rita and Shirley abandon their husbands to live as they wish. For Russell marriage is not a trap which confines the unhappy partner.

In Orton's play Entertaining Mr. Sloane there is not even an official marriage. Sexuality is treated as commonplace; there

is an unplanned pregnancy and unrealised marriage. Orton takes the convention of marriage and makes fun of it in the triple "marriage-like" arrangement between Sloane, Ed--a homosexual--and Ed's sister Kath. Orton tries to point out the valuelessness of marriage through exaggeration.

All three dramatists deal with similar issues, but the ways they treat them are different. Orton aims to shock and antagonise his audience by being outrageous. His characters' language and behaviour are excessive. For instance, Kath says that Mr. Sloane--whose appetite for sex is apparently limitless--is quite "respectable", "trustworthy", "cultured", and "informed" soon after she meets him. Ed tells Kath that Mr. Sloane is "very nice", "clean", "upright", and has "all the proper requisites". Ed is also too quick to judge Mr. Sloane because like his sister he finds Mr. Sloane sexually attractive and thinks that he has "all the requisites" for satisfying his needs. Another example of the characters' exaggerated behaviour is that Kath begins to sweep the floor with a carpet sweeper while her father is suffering from cuts and bruises:

Ed: What are you doing?

Kath: My housework. I mustn't neglect my chores.

Ed: Can't you find a better time than this?

Kath: It is my usual time. Guess what's for dinner
Mr. Sloane. (Entertaining Mr. Sloane, 129) (6)

She only thinks of keeping the house neat and cooking delicious food in order to make Mr. Sloane stay with her because he provides her with what she yearns for--sex. She carries on under the pretence of being his "mamma":

(The snapshots slip from her hand.) There! You've knocked the photos on the floor. (Pause: He attempts to move; she is almost on top of him). Mr. Sloane . . . (Rolls on to him) You should wear more clothes, Mr. Sloane. I believe you're as naked as me. And there is no excuse for it. (Silence). I'll be your mamma. I need to be loved. (Switches off the light.) What a big heavy baby you are.

(Ent. Mr. Sloane, 95)

Russell aims to offer solutions to his audience. The endings of his plays Educating Rita and Shirley Valentine are optimistic. In Educating Rita, Rita passes her exams and has the chance to decide how she will live her life:

Frank: What are you going to do?

Rita: I dunno. I might go to France. I might go to me mother's. I might even have a baby. I dunno. I'll make a decision, I'll choose.

(Educating Rita, 231) (7)

Ayckbourn, by contrast, tries to make his audience recognise that happy endings are the stuff of fiction; they seldom occur in real life. Nor does he deal with issues such as homosexuality and sexual obsession because he writes for respectable middle class audiences and does not want to hurt their feelings.

Ayckbourn differs from Orton and Russell in his use of comic technique. Orton employs parody, especially of stock melodramatic situations. In Entertaining Mr. Sloane, he provides the "eternal triangle" involving two men and a woman, but this is a strange triangle because it is not an emotional relationship which

involves jealousy arising from love. It is built on the gratification of sexual desire. Ed and Kath are obsessed with sex and cannot see beyond it. This relationship is not between two men and a woman or two women and a man, but there is Mr. Sloane in the middle and Kath and Ed, the brother and sister lusting after him. Orton's comedy can be called "the comedy of ill-manners" as his characters are usually amoral. As Orton is a farcical dramatist his plays contain a great deal of fast-paced physical action, confusion and slap-stick comedy. Russell is the opposite. His characters speak rather than act. Shirley Valentine is a monologue where Shirley talks about her life to the audience. In the same way, in Educating Rita (which is a duologue) Rita talks a lot and informs us of her life and feelings. In both plays comedy is achieved through witty jokes and the female protagonists' gift of the gab. An example of a witty joke in Shirley Valentine is when Shirley talks about sex:

It's marvellous isn't it--tellin' people there's two kinds of orgasm. It's like tellin' people there is two Mount Everests--some people stumble on to the real mountain while the rest of us are all runnin' up this hillock an' wonderin' why the view's not very good when we get to the top.

(Shirley Valentine, 6) (8)

In contrast to Orton and Russell, Ayckbourn's plays contain incongruous elements. In Henceforward, for instance, since Nan looks like a human being it is difficult to accept that she is a robot. Unlike Russell's plays, the endings of his plays offer no solutions or happy endings. In Henceforward we are left with the

image of a lonely artist who rejects his family. This combination of stage craft and tragicomic situation is what I will try to analyze in my dissertation.

Chapter 2

Destruction of Marriage

In his plays Ayckbourn suggests that most marriages are doomed to fail because men and women cannot understand and respond to one another's needs, or they have different views about what marriage is.

In Woman in Mind, it can be seen that Susan, the central character, needs to discuss what is going wrong with her marriage and obtain a response from her husband Gerald. Her discontent with her marriage is reflected in her creation of a fantasy family which includes a very handsome and sensitive husband Andy who does not fail to give her the emotional and sexual support she requires. Her fantasy family also includes a handsome brother Tony and a beautiful daughter Lucy, who is eager to share everything with her mother. By contrast, Gerald is not aware of the fact that Susan still has sexual desires and when Susan tells him, he does not want to discuss it. He feels restless:

(Gerald paces round the garden rather restlessly).

Gerald: My fault. I see--

Susan: I knew you'd say that.

Gerald: That's how you make it sound, anyway.

(He paces about.)

I rather thought you'd lost interest in all that, you know.

(She does not answer.)

I thought that when a woman got to--our age--she more or less . . . switched off.

Susan: . . . I'm afraid you married a freak . . .

(Muriel comes from the house at this moment.)

Gerald: (Now full of bonhomie) Ah, bless you, Muriel.

(Susan has closed her eyes)

Muriel's made us a nice cup of coffee, dear.

(Woman in Mind, 27) (9)

We see that although he tells Susan he loves her, he is unable to do so. For Gerald marriage is simply a convenience, not something involving love because he is a vicar, who is expected to be married. He concerns himself with domestic life, reminding Susan that their son Rick is coming for lunch or wanting Susan to cut the hedges. He hopes to keep Susan busy and thus avoids talking about more contentious issues such as their marriage. He himself is preoccupied with writing a book and spends most of his time in his room. For Gerald this is also a convenient way of ignoring his marital problems. What Gerald understands from marriage is that men and women have appropriate roles; they should follow a routine. This idea is just the opposite of what Susan would like--a marriage based on romance. Gerald's indifferent attitude is demonstrated in the way he tends to underestimate Susan's state of mind: "She's in a little tiny bit of a mood, Muriel. Don't worry" (WIM, 27). The incompatibility between Gerald and Susan is also evident from this dialogue:

Susan: That'll [Joining of girls to Rick's school]
terrify the life out of Ricky.

Gerald: Nonsense.

Susan: The only reason he joined, so far as I can make out, was to avoid meeting women.

Gerald : Don't be so ridiculous--

Susan: They frighten the life out of him.

Gerald: (Stung by this slur on his son) If they do, I think we can easily see the cause. (WIM, 32)

Gerald is affected by Susan's remark because it also , in a way, refers to himself. He is similar to Jerome in Henceforward whose inability to love results in the loss of his wife and daughter. All Jerome requires is a female whom he can manipulate and this is realised in his creation of a robot as a companion. He cannot relate to human beings. Ayckbourn suggests that Corinna is too tough for him as she does not have "Nan's submissive nature", but rather has "a good deal more personal aura, not to mention neuroses" (Henceforward, 58) (10).

Jerome's and Corinna's views of marriage and love are different from one another. Corinna suggests that she and Jerome have been "warm and spontaneous and amusing and joyful and-- loving" (Hence., 58) at times, but machines can never be. She wants to make a fresh start, but Jerome rejects this, preferring to play games--either with his electronic equipment or with his ex-wife. Both are of equal value to him:

Corinna: I must say this place is looking remarkably tidy.

Jerome: Well, we wouldn't want you picking up any nasty germs whilst you were visiting us, would we?

Corinna: Us?

Jerome: What? (A great show of having forgotten.)

Oh, dear. Oh, heavens. Ah. How could I have forgotten? You haven't met Zoe, have you?

Corinna: Zoe?

Jerome: Zoe--is my--fiancee.

Corinna: (Rather shaken) Well, this--certainly does alter things. Doesn't it?

(Hence., 59-60)

Jerome causes Corinna to suffer because he is an insensitive man. We see that human love is something unimportant or perhaps too frightening for him. This is revealed at the end of the play:

The screen is filled with the faces of Corinna, Geain, and Mervyn all silently shouting at the video camera outside to be readmitted. . . Jerome, oblivious, plays on like a man possessed. Finally, with a great flourish, he finishes. A silence. He stands, triumphant. (Hence., 98)

From these two plays, Woman in Mind and Henceforward, it would appear that Ayckbourn puts the blame on men for the breakdown of their marriages. Both Gerald and Jerome are weak because they refuse to confront either their wives or their own emotions. They appear to be more interested in work, which helps them to establish their own secure little worlds, cocooned from reality. The consequence of this for the family is that their wives have virtually all the domestic responsibilities, particularly raising children.

Chapter 3

Effects of An Unhappy Marriage on Children

Ayckbourn also shows us the negative effects of unsatisfactory husband-wife relationships on the children. He suggests that the unity of the family is threatened when lack of communication between the partners influences their offspring's behaviour. In Henceforward, the lack of paternal affection and authority have turned Geain, Jerome's "little girl" into an "hermaphrodite" with "male work clothes", "heavy boots" and a jacket "studded with the words: SONS OF BITCHES" (Hence., 75). She does not talk much and when she does, she either "mutters" or "scowls". Geain's appearance constitutes a great contrast to her appearance on the video screen recorded four years previously: "A young girl of about nine appears on the screen. Conventionally pretty, fair-haired and slightly self-conscious" (Hence., 28). At that time she was quite articulate:

Young Geain: Hallo, Daddy. This is Geain. I'm just calling to say thank you very much for all my presents. . . Mummy gave me a long dress which is really live. . . . we're going out to dinner to Del-- to Del something--I can't remember. . . . (She makes a big cross in the air with her finger.)

That's a kiss. (Hence., 28)

Jerome's tendency to blame Corinna for what has happened to Geain demonstrates that he is not strong enough to accept the

physical and emotional changes in his daughter. He lives in his own secluded world; his daughter exists solely in the past as Daddy's "little girl":

Jerome: (With a cry) What have you done with my little girl? I want my little girl. I've never seen that thing before. (Yelling at Corinna) What's it? I don't want that. Take it away! (Hence., 79)

Jerome does not want to see that he has failed to fulfil his responsibilities as a father and that he himself is to blame for what he perceives as Geain's "decline" because he has taken no interest in her.

Jack, in A Small Family Business, is another example of an inadequate father. He is a forceful and energetic man who puts great effort into his work. He gives an impassioned speech about honesty when he is appointed manager of the family business. This contrasts with his inarticulateness when talking to his sixteen year old daughter Samantha who is "at a stage when life is often a painful, intensely private experience" (A Small Family Business, 2) (11):

(Samantha is now reading while listening to her personal stereo.)

Jack: (Noticing her) Hallo, Sammy.

Samantha: Hallo, Dad.

Jack: Didn't see you there. All right, then?

Samantha: Yes, I'm all right.

Jack: Right.

(They appear to have run out of conversation.) Good

(Jack goes back into the hall.) (ASFB, 10)

Samantha herself finds it equally difficult to communicate. She apologizes from her father, but does this rather mechanically with no emotions involved, after her mother forces her to do so. We can observe this when Samantha expresses her "gratitude" to her father for saving her from prosecution:

Samantha: (Rather as if she's been rehearsed in this)
Thank you for what you did in getting me out of trouble and I promise I won't do it again and I am very sorry for bringing shame on the family.

Jack: (A little taken aback) Yes. Good. I'm sorry if I've--er . . . I'm sorry. I don't know if I have done anything but if I have, then

Samantha: You haven't.

Jack: Good. Fine. Right. Well. Go and sit down, shall we? (ASF, 42)

Jack's hesitant words and his repeated apologies are an indication of lack of authority over his daughter. It is also significant that Samantha is not punished by Jack and Poppy for shoplifting. They never mention the event after she has been saved from prosecution.

When Jack is compared to Gerald and Jerome, it is evident that he has a good relationship with his wife, but he is similar to the others in that he lives in his own self-enclosed world. One of the ironies running throughout the play is that for all his belief in moral principles, Jack is unable to realise that Samantha has been using drugs:

Jack: Here's to us. Here's to the family. And finally, here's to the business. We've had our share of troubles

and we've seen them off. And together, I can promise you this, we will continue to see them all off whoever they are and wherever they come from. Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you--the family business!

All: The family business!

(As they drink, the lights fade on the party guests -- leaving for a few seconds or so, the image of Samantha, huddled and alone. Then, as we lose her too: Blackout, Curtain.) (ASFB, 111-112)

By contrast, Poppy, Jack's wife seems responsible for her child. She is like a mediator between Jack and Samantha. For example, she tells Samantha that her father really appreciated her coming down for the family gathering and that her father adores her. Poppy also arranges for the reconciliation between them by making Samantha get dressed neatly and by telling her what to say to Jack. But Poppy is getting nowhere with these tactics because we see that Samantha does not feel like expressing her gratitude at all. We do not see Jack showing his emotions to his daughter either, and this makes it difficult for Samantha to believe that her father loves her. What Poppy is doing is only trying to organize things the way they should be in an ideal family, but she is doomed to fail. What Ayckbourn suggests is that Jack's indifference to Samantha renders Poppy's efforts to bring her up well ineffective.

Like Poppy, Susan has also been more active than her husband as a parent; she felt it necessary to inform Rick of sexual matters as Gerald has been reluctant to do it. But Susan tries to talk about sex to Rick's girl friends, which in turn has

made Rick embarrassed and feel more isolated from his family. He has avoided introducing his friends to his parents. Here it may seem that Susan is equally a failure to establish a good relationship with her son, but this is only a result of Gerald's inability to talk about sex with Rick. This is his duty as a father, but he fails to do so. So, while trying to compensate for Gerald's deficiencies, Susan has made things worse for herself. We can see that the cause of the problem is basically Gerald's neglect of his son. Ayckbourn shows Susan's frustration with her son through her creation of a daughter in her fantasy family whom she finds perfect: "Lucy is a tall, good-looking, athletic girl, easy-going and charming" (WIM, 13). She is very kind towards Susan and admires her:

Lucy: We're just all so proud of you, Mummy, you have no idea. I know you won't read these things, but did you know that last Sunday in The Observer, they called you probably our most important living historical novelist . . . (WIM, 35)

Chapter 4

Ayckbourn's Theatrical Success

It is clear that Ayckbourn's progress in the theatre from actor to assistant stage manager to technical stage manager to director has certainly encouraged him to make his points more effective through stage-technique. He tries to make ultimate use of dramatic set-pieces, which will be the concern of this chapter.

The visual is a major aspect of almost any play's theatrical qualities. In Woman in Mind, Ayckbourn reinforces his theme with the help of visual means and the major display of his theatricality is the presentation of Susan's hallucination on the stage. The visualization of her fantasy family helps us to compare them with her real family and see the sharp contrast between the two. This, in turn, enables the audience to judge more clearly the reasons for Susan's mental breakdown. The way the members of the two families dress, talk, behave and live are totally different from each other. We see all of these in detail on the stage. For example, while Andy and Tony are "tall, good-looking, athletic, easy-going and charming" (WIM, 13) the Reverend Gerald Gannet is "a solemn man in his middle forties" (WIM, 22). His sister Muriel is "a woman who has known her share of suffering and is anxious others should know about it too.

. . the two present an unattractive picture, entirely lacking the lightness and ease of her earlier family" (WIM,22). Andy

treats Susan kindly and he is romantic:

We'd all be lost without you. There's only one of you, you see. . . . And we all need you very much. Me most especially (he kisses her tenderly). . . (Andy moves away and looking back on her, smiles and leaves, blowing her the gentlest of kisses on one of his fingers). (WIM, 16)

Andy does not want to send Susan to hospital, but wants to look after her at home: "(Catching and helping her to sit again) Steady! You are going to do nothing except sit here. As soon as Tony comes back, we're going to carry you up to bed" (WIM,15). In contrast to Andy's behaviour, Gerald is only sarcastic. He wakes Susan up when he sees her sleeping in the garden:

Gerald: There is a school of thought that believes sleep is for the night. You seem to be out to disprove them.

Susan: I'd sleep at night if I could. I'm finding it very difficult recently.

Gerald: Hardly surprising. If you sleep all day.

(WIM, 22)

In Woman in Mind, Ayckbourn's clever scenic construction tells us a lot about the nature of the relationships between the characters. For example, most of the time Gerald is absent when Bill and Susan are together. There is a great deal of dialogue between them whereas there is a lack of communication between Gerald and Susan. It is also significant that there is not a scene in the play where Rick and Gerald are seen together because

Gerald avoids having a conversation with Rick. He even hides in the cupboard when Rick arrives at home. It again tells us something about Gerald's character: he lacks self-confidence and courage and he is not very good at interpersonal relationships.

Susan's dissatisfaction with her family and her unhappiness are displayed through the moments when her fantasy family appears. They come when Susan quarrels with her real family or complains about them. In one scene Andy appears just after Susan and Gerald have quarrelled:

Susan: (Still ploughing on) You will have--You will have uncoiled the final strands of electrified barbed wire that served to keep us--(Giving up) Oh, what's the use? (She is alone now. She stares at the sky and listens. The garden grows darker as though moving towards sunset. After a moment, Andy appears and watches her.) (WIM, 60-61)

The prison image inherent in Susan's words and the romantic atmosphere following her words are two successive scenes which show the contrast between Susan's two worlds.

Ayckbourn uses changes in the weather in order to achieve a transition from reality to fantasy. For example, after Gerald leaves Susan in the garden lying under the rain because he is unable to take her in, Tony appears with an unopened umbrella. When Tony holds it over Susan's head we see that it is a sunshade and at once the weather changes to a sunny country afternoon. This change in the weather and the environment improves the dramatic action. It is symbolic of Susan's desire to escape her bitter reality to take refuge in a fantasy family.

Another element of theatricality in Woman in Mind is the pattern followed by Ayckbourn in presenting the fantasy family. First, they appear when the real family members are absent, but later on in the play they come in the presence of her real family and start to intrude on Susan's relationships with them. They even make Susan swear at her real family. Towards the end of the play the two families become confused in her mind and the whole action assumes a dream-like quality. The dialogue and the action were reasonable in the previous scenes, but they are absurd and incongruous now:

Tony: You bet. I've just been having a snoop round the bride's enclosure. Our Lucy looks as good as any of them, I must say.

Susan: (Rather puzzled) Sorry?

Andy: Glad to hear it.

Tony: I think she'll do it, you know. She is in peak condition, she is free of injuries and, of course, the going'll suit her.

Susan: What are you both talking about?

(From the distance over the band, the sound of the PA. It is hard to make out distinctly, but it seems to be announcing a list of runners for the next race.)

Andy: (Hearing this) Hallo. Things are getting started.

(Bill enters. He is dressed in a rather loud, cliché bookie's suit. He still clutches his case as always. Only this one is emblazoned with the words HONEST BILL)

Bill: Afternoon, chaps.

Susan: (Uncomprehendingly) Bill?

Bill: Hallo, Susie.

Susan: I thought this was a wedding. (WIM, 84)

Ayckbourn conveys to us the deterioration of Susan's mental state through this incoherent dialogue. The intervention of horse race scene into the expected wedding scene indicates the beginning of the destruction of Susan's fantasy world. It is not any more glamorous, but starts to crumble. Susan's romantic vision of a wedding ceremony has turned into a horse race in which her elegant Lucy will be running to incite excitement in the spectators. Ayckbourn also uses the visual to comment on the verbal: We see that "everything from here on is in a slightly heightened colour and design, suggesting Susan's own extreme mental state" (WIM, 82). Things have altered in both families. The new roles adopted by the real family members are better than the previous ones. Gerald appears dressed as an Archbishop and he is socialising with people (Andy, Tony and Bill). Muriel is pregnant, suggesting that her dead husband, with whom she has been trying to communicate for some time, has returned. She is in a maid's black bombazine with cap and apron _ she has become a maid and is doing all cooking and serving for a purpose now at least. Rick comes dressed as a sort of rickshaw driver. We already know that he has got married and plans to go to Thailand where he is going to work as an oddjob man. Now we see that he has found a job. In contrast to these positive changes in the real family, things have deteriorated in the fantasy family. Lucy's wedding does not take place, the champagne served to Susan has

frogs in it and Andy and Tony ignore Susan by talking among themselves. All these suggest that everything is in chaos and Susan seems lost in it. Susan's linguistic confusion at the very end of the play adds to the effect of the scene. When Susan manages to attract the attention of both her families by shouting very loudly, they ask her to make a speech. She starts talking, but she utters meaningless words.

Susan: Dearest friends. Family. My happiest moment has been to stand here with you all and share this, my most precious of days. I grow hugh, summer few bald teddy know these two wonderful children, Lucy and Rick. I can not tell you how heaply cowed siam.

(As she continues to speak the lights begin to fade round her until finally she is isolated.)

(WIM, 91)

The dialogue, coupled with the fading of the lights around her suggests that Susan is becoming disconnected from the real world. This image is heightened by the reflection of an ambulance's blue flashing light.

A good example of Ayckbourn's use of "adroit juxtaposition of episodes, clever manipulation of time and dexterous use of props" (Blistein 1983, 34) can be seen in Woman in Mind. While in her real world Susan is asked to come inside immediately (as Muriel says that the meal is starting to burn), she can take her time in the fantasy world because there is no hurry: the family members are carrying the things slowly to the garden and they are eager to serve Susan:

Tony: Andy says that if no one is coming in to lunch,

then lunch must come to you. Come on, young Lucy, shift yourself and give us a hand. (WIM, 46)

Susan is in a hesitant mood, but the action of setting the table is going on incessantly, confusing Susan's mind:

Susan: (Making to take a step) God, I think I'm drunk
 (Tony enters with a small garden table already laid for four, which he sets down on the grass.) (Lucy re-enters with two chairs which she sets at the table)
 (Tony takes Susan's hand)

Tony: (with a whoop) I'll get the rest.

(Tony goes off)

(Tony enters with two more chairs)

(Lucy re-enters with three more champagne glasses and the bottle. During the next, she sets these, together with Susan's glass on the table.)

(WIM, 46-47)

While these are happening Bill comes and informs us about what is happening inside: " We are all wondering if you were coming in. We've all set down, you see. . " (WIM, 47). Unlike the fantasy family members, who are trying to make Susan sit first at the table and serve her as if she were at a restaurant, the real family has already sat at the table and they send Bill to call Susan rather than come themselves. These all show that the fantasy family cares a lot for Susan. During the preparation of the table, the manners of the fantasy family are also important:

Tony: One moment, madam. The waitress is fetching you a chair. There we are, you see. Allow me. (He takes Susan's hand)

Lucy: Luncheon is served.

Tony: We love you and we don't want to see you hurt.

Lucy: Here, Mummy, you sit here. You must have the view of the lake. (WIM, 47)

These all show the fantasy family's concern and love for Susan.

The props are also important in that they are an indication of the perfection of Susan's fantasy world: A small garden table used for the purpose of eating a pleasurable meal among the roses in the garden, the view of a lake in the front drinking champagne (it is expensive and drunk in special occasions).

Ayckbourn also uses the "juxtaposition of episodes" in Woman in Mind, in this case the interplay between the two worlds:

Bill: (Tentatively) Susan, I. . .

Lucy: (Passing Susan, hissing) Tell him to go away.

Tony: Tell him to get lost.

Susan: Can you explain to them I couldn't face being indoors, just at present?

Tony: Drop dead.

Lucy: Drop dead.

Susan: Oh, Bill, do drop dead. (WIM, 47-48)

The two families' having lunch in different places is also significant because it helps to render the other contrasts between them. Inside is like a prison for Susan. We never see her going inside. She spends all of her time in the garden outside and it is the location she creates for her fantasy family when they are having lunch. Inside is the location chosen for her real family.

Ayckbourn's theatricality can also be seen in Henceforward.

The very first stage picture suggests a close relationship between the central character Jerome and the machines to the neglect of everything else. We see that the living room of his flat is filled with some very sophisticated electronic equipment: computers, tape and disc recorders and several keyboards. The fact that his technical equipment is kept lovingly protected while the rest of the room is in chaos, gives us a clue to Jerome's intense love for machines, and his lack of concern for other matters. This is also a foreshadowing of his neglect of human beings and his failure in human relationships later on. For example, when he hears Mervyn's voice on his answering machine, he "groans" and goes to the kitchen without any attention. He again "groans" when he sees his friend Lupus on the screen. He even "pushes a button on the console and Lupus goes into fast-forward mode" (Hence. ,5) While people keep appearing on the screen of his answering machine, Jerome is busy trying to operate his humanoid Nan. His reprogramming of this machine is acted on the stage in detail to indicate Jerome's attachment to the machines. All these actions, combined with the appearance of Jerome's flat with no windows or with heavy steel shutters allowing no light into the room, show us that Jerome is out of touch with the real world, very much preoccupied with his electronic equipment. He is physically and psychologically isolated. Thus we can easily judge the irony of the situation. Jerome, whose supposed role as an artist is to communicate with the people, prefers to communicate with machines. He opts for indifference to his immediate environment and prefers to indulge in his own affairs. With the coming of Zoe into the play Jerome's

inability to establish healthy human relationships is further demonstrated. Zoe, who is supposed to be Jerome's escort, leaves him in anger because he records her moans of sexual ecstasy without obtaining her permission. This vision of failed human relationships inside Jerome's flat is paralleled with the vision of The Daughters of Darkness outside, who create violence in the streets. This parallel between the actions inside and outside is once more seen at the end of the play. While Jerome cannot decide whether to go with Corinna and Geain or stay with his machines, the missiles launched by the Daughters of Darkness keep hitting the shutters. Jerome's hesitant mood parallels the chaos outside

Jerome's lack of concern for his family is also displayed when he does not go out immediately to help his family, who are being attacked by the Daughters; he prefers to stay indoors because he has finally been able to compose his "love" piece. This causes him to remain completely indifferent to the situation outside: "He plays on like a man possessed. . . . He stands, triumphant" (Hence., 98).

The contrast between Corinna and Nan is also significant in judging Jerome's character. In the stage directions Corinna is described as having "little of Nan's submissive nature and a good deal more personal aura, not to mention neuroses" (Hence., 58). On the other hand, we know that Nan is only a machine who acts the way Jerome wants. She is programmed by him to play the role of a perfect companion who cannot object to Jerome. That is what Jerome looks for in a female. He just wants to use her for his purposes. This is also indicated through his failed relationship with Zoe who cannot stand his insensitive nature. Jerome feels

more secure with a machine than he does with human beings.

In A Small Family Business, Ayckbourn displays his theatricality in his use of setting, continuous flow of action and tempo, which serve the purpose of showing the immorality of the family members who are trying to swindle their own firm. All the family members except Jack and his wife Poppy are selfish and have obsessions. They are involved in dishonest business. After Jack learns about this, we see him making great effort to resolve the crisis. At the beginning of the play, all the family are together, but there is not much communication between them. When there is conversation, it is only about marital problems; nothing about the business is mentioned although this is meant to be a gathering to celebrate Jack's becoming the manager of the small family business. The members avoid talking because they do not want to reveal their secrets. They just congratulate Jack by uttering cliches:

Desmond: (Confidentially, to Jack) Just what was needed. Very inspiring.

Anita: You're a lovely talker, Jack. Beautiful. I could listen to you for hours.

Cliff: Good speech, just now. I almost believed it myself. (ASFB, 8-9)

The fact that there are secrets kept among the family members is an indication of a crumbling family structure. The family members are not together most of the time. Two are in the sitting room while two are in the dining room. This shows us that they do not have close communication. After Jack's speech, Ken and Yvone leave immediately. Likewise, Anita and Uberto also

leave saying that they have a dinner engagement. Others move into separate locations, i.e. some to the far sitting room, some to the kitchen and others to upstairs to the bedrooms. This shows that they are not eager to sit together. This is again an indication of a lack of closeness among the family members.

Ayckbourn attempts to convey each character's immorality through a continuous change of location. In the rest of the play, each character is seen in their own household separately engaged in their own tasks. For example, Anita tries on her expensive clothes and jewellery or come out of the bedroom with one of the Rivetti brothers, naked except for a sheet wrapped round her. Desmond is seen in the kitchen trying to cook and listen to a Teach Yourself Spanish cassette, since he plans to go to the Balerics and open a restaurant. We always see Harriet in one of the sitting rooms resting on the sofa with her dog Peggy near her. She is very much concerned with the dog's comfort and even keeps interrupting a serious family meeting in order to warn them not to make much noise. She seems as if she were not in the business and did not know anything about it, but she listens to what they talk about secretly.

Ayckbourn presents us with a cross-section of a modern two-story house on an executive-type estate (this shows that the family is well-off). The rooms of the house serve for the locations of different households. When Ayckbourn wants to take us to Anita and Cliff's house, he only makes a change in the lights and there is an indication of a change in the location although the setting remains the same. This is for practical reasons as well as for the purpose of a continuous flow of action

and visualising the nature of the family all at once for a better effect. When certain characters are on stage, we know that others are engaged in other activities. Ayckbourn lets us see what all the characters are doing at one specific time. Use of only one house on stage for the whole family is to form a compact unity--a quality a family should have, but when we look at how the family members live and behave, we see that the situation is ironic. The family is seen together, but actually lives separate, secretive lives.

Every immoral act by the family members is shown on stage in order to make the audience focus on the fact that Jack has just been appointed the manager of a business which has been run by dishonest family members. Jack's own involvement in immoral deeds is sustained through his action from one location to another to organise things, but his efforts are vain because other members of his family are reluctant to rescue the situation. This irony can be observed when we see the family having a meeting to discuss how they can solve their problem:

Jack: Our Mr. Hough wants more, Desmond. You underestimated. How much can you raise?

Desmond: How much does he want?

Cliff: Fifty.

Desmond: Fifty! Oh, no, Jack . . . That's impossible . . . there's no way I could . . . Fifty? No .

Seven if I sell the confectionery oven. But it is a German make, they're like gold to get hold of . . .

Jack: Then you should get a good price for it. Right. That's seven from you.

Roy: You could sell that car . . .

Cliff: I'm not selling that.

Jack: If needs be we will auction your internal organs
round the back of the General Hospital, Clifford.

(ASFB, 90)

Jack's determination to raise money contrasts with other members' hesitation to sell their goods.

Chapter 5

Alan Ayckbourn: A Comic Dramatist

Although Ayckbourn deals with tragic issues such as the destruction of marriage and absence of standards, the way he treats his themes are humorous as he deliberately creates incongruous situations. Muriel in Woman In Mind is a terrible cook who makes the others eat and drink the horrible things she has prepared. Moreover, she keeps on blaming Susan to cover up her incompetence:

Gerald: It's all right, Muriel. Susan is a little--
 (He suppresses a burp)--she's just a little bit--
 (Another burp)--would you excuse me, I've got the most
 terrible. . . Excuse me. (Gerald hurries off)

Muriel: (Concerned) Now, look what you've done?
 Shouting at him like that. You've given him
 indigestion. (WIM, 59)

We understand the causes of Gerald's condition (he has eaten burnt omelets flavoured with Earl Grey Tea), but nonetheless laugh: It is funny and incongruous to see a vicar--a symbol of respectability--suffering.

It is also significant that Muriel appears with cups of coffee or tea at moments when Gerald and Susan are quarrelling. She functions as a comic relief, but she also makes Susan's situation more tragic: Susan has to cope with an incompetent sister-in-law besides an insensitive husband. It once more makes

us realize the prison-like nature of Susan's life and her ultimate refuge in a fantasy world:

Gerald: Now, Susan, I'm not going to start on this. We have argued our lives away over that boy and we're not going to do it anymore. I refuse to become involved--

Susan: You smug-- . . . Self-satisfied . . . Conceited. . . bastard!

Gerald: (Wagging a finger admonishingly) Ah--ah--ah--ah! Now. Now.

Susan: (Softer) Bastard!

(Muriel comes on carrying a tray with four coffee cups)

Muriel: Here comes a lovely cup of coffee.

Gerald: (Startled) What?

Susan: No, thank you, Muriel. (WIM, 58)

The fact that Muriel thinks she is a good cook as she indicates by referring to her coffee as "lovely" is ironic; we know that everybody avoids eating or drinking anything she prepares. It is also tragic, however, as it shows that Muriel looks for something to give value to her life because she is a lonely woman, as her husband is dead.

Another character in Woman In Mind who provokes laughter is doctor Bill Windsor. The information about Bill at the beginning of the play demonstrates that he does not have the capacity to be a successful doctor:

Bill Windsor, a pleasant, rather nervous GP is kneeling on the grass a little away from her,

attempting to open his medical case without much success. . . . Bill is . . . eager to reassure, quick to apologise for his own shortcomings. Not though, alas, an instinctive healer of the sick. (WIM, 9)

Bill's language reveals his uncertainty about professional matters; he pauses a lot and uses the word "probably" frequently, which shows a fundamental lack of confidence:

Bill: I've--er--sent for an ambulance . . .

Susan: Ambulance? Oh, no, I don't need that.

Bill: I'd rather you did, if you don't mind. The point is--blows to the head--never can tell--could be delayed reaction. Better safe than sorry. Probably just an overnight stop, that's all. Be back here tomorrow. Right as rain. Probably.

(WIM, 11)

As a doctor, Bill should be able to provide people with exact explanations about their illness, but he is not even able to open his bag. Since we expect a doctor to inspire trust in people, Bill's situation is incongruous, offering opportunities to the actor to develop the comic potential of the role.

In Henceforward, Ayckbourn again uses comedy to reinforce the theme of subordination of human love to mechanisation. He mostly achieves it through Nan. For example, her sudden appearance in the bedroom doorway while Zoe is changing into Corinna's clothes, and her subsequent struggle with Zoe is comic. It is not unexpected from Nan as she is a nanny programmed to look after the children and as she registers Zoe as a child, but Zoe does not know this. The audience is more knowledgeable than

Zoe and this is what creates the comedy:

(Nan appears in the bedroom doorway. Zoe does not see her. Nan watches her for a moment, then produces her face flannel.)

Nan: (Playfully) Boo! Nan's coming to getcher!
(Zoe turns, sees her, but is too late to dodge. She screams. Nan sets about Zoe's face with her flannel. Zoe screams and struggles but her cries are mostly muffled.)

Zoe: (Spluttering) Hot hoo hooing hoo hee? Het ho!
Hoff! Het Hoff!

Nan: That's better. That's better. There's a nice clean face. (As she says this, Nan goes off at speed to the kitchen.) (Hence., 19)

Besides initiating comedy, the situation strengthens the audience's belief that Jerome is enslaved by machines. It contributes to the play's didactic purpose.

Chapter 6
Conclusion

Ayckbourn is a successful dramatist as he has been adept at unifying content with structure. The conclusion that can be reached after analysing the presentation of marriage and family in Woman in Mind, A Small Family Business and Henceforward is that not only are Ayckbourn's male characters failures as husbands and fathers. It is clear that the dramatist draws our attention to their professional lives. Ayckbourn's aim in presenting Gerald as a vicar and Jerome as an artist is to create an ironic situation. Gerald is supposed to provide mental comfort for people but he is unable to respond to his wife's crisis in his immediate environment. All he does is to offer Susan some cliché-ridden platitudes:

Gerald: All I'm saying is--you still don't seem to have enough to do. . . . 'The trivial round, the common task, will furnish all we need to ask. . . ' All one can say is that they're words that have provided comfort to several generations. (WIM, 24)

What Gerald fails to see is that although these words have provided comfort to several generations, they certainly do not help Susan. He should think of more practical solutions for her problems, Gerald chooses to spend all his time on writing his book. How can we expect him to advise other people? In the same way, Jerome, whose supposed role as an artist is to communicate

with people, neglects his own family. Although Ayckbourn does not sketch in Gerald's and Jerome's public lives, it is enough to see their private lives in order to judge them as unsuccessful in their public lives.

Correspondingly, A Small Family Business suggests that Jack's inability to relate to his daughter finally causes him to disregard his moral principles and say yes to the use of their domestic furniture network for the distribution of drugs. His failure in his private life is carried over to his public life and renders him immoral.

In these plays we come to understand that nothing is as it should be, that there is an absence of standards in Ayckbourn's middle class world. What Ayckbourn ultimately wants to convey to us is a pessimistic vision of crumbling families which are made up of ineffectual and destructive individuals. Through the presentation of the private lives of his characters Ayckbourn aims to show us the sick state of contemporary society.

He has always given importance to stage-craft, that is the use of stage, action, scenes, props and time for dramatic effect. He has never overemphasised the verbal at the expense of the visual. Ayckbourn makes this point clear in an interview with Ian Watson:

It seems to me that your play is failing whenever you see someone with his eyes closed, listening with a serene smile on his face. It can not happen all the time, but I would love to feel people were saying, "I'd better watch this because I may miss something" . . . physical structure is very important, and I

always try, once the idea is there, to start searching around for an interesting visual way to tell the story Something dramatically visual has to happen; some event has to occur to make the audience sit up. (Watson 1988, 126) (12)

In Woman In Mind, A Small Family Business and Henceforward, it can be seen that there is something visual to reinforce the themes of the plays and thus to attract the attention of the audience. In Woman In Mind, the presentation of Susan's fantasy family on stage, the use of a two-story house whose rooms serve for different locations for different households in A Small Family Business and the use of a robot to play the role of a female companion are examples of visual elements employed by Ayckbourn in the plays we have analyzed.

Notes

1 Elmer M. Blistein, " Alan Ayckbourn: Few Jokes, Much Comedy," Modern Drama 26.1 (1983): 34.

2 Ayckbourn's ability to create theatrical effects is a result of his long apprenticeship in the theatre. He started his career as an Acting Assistant Stage Manager in the actor/manager Donald Wolfit's company in the 1950s when he was seventeen years old. This company--which never had much money --toured Britain with a selection of classic plays, playing a different play each night. Thus, people like Ayckbourn were essential members of the backstage staff. In 1957 he became a permanent member of Stephen Joseph's Theatre-in-the-Round company at Scarborough, and wrote his first play in the summer of 1959. After a fifteen-year career as an actor, he started directing when he was permitted to do so by Joseph--an autocrat who ran his theatre like a business. When Joseph died in the late 1960s, Ayckbourn took over as a director of the company, and has remained at Scarborough ever since. Ayckbourn is both a playwright and a director who has written four dozen plays for the stage and has directed nearly 150 plays. He runs his own company and directs his own plays. Since he himself has been an actor, he knows how to write suitable roles for the actors of his company. His close connection with the theatre has also enabled him to become very skilled in the arts of playwriting and stagecraft. These are what make him one of England's major playwrights.

3 Malcolm Page, " The Serious Side of Alan Ayckbourn," Modern Drama 26.1 (1983): 44.

4 Bernard F. Dukore, " Craft, Character, Comedy: Ayckbourn's

Woman in Mind " Twentieth Century Literature 32.1 (1986): 23-39.

5 Michael Billington, Alan Ayckbourn (London: MacMillan, 1990) 1.

6 Joe Orton, The Complete Plays (London: Methuen, 1980) 129.

(All references to the texts of Entertaining Mr. Sloane are in this edition.)

7 Willy Russell, Educating Rita, Stags and Hens, Blood Brothers: Two Plays and a Musical (London: Methuen, 1986) 231.

8 ---. , Shirley Valentine and One for the Road (London: Methuen, 1988) 6.

9 Alan Ayckbourn, Woman in Mind (London: Faber and Faber, 1985) 27. (All references to the texts of Woman in Mind are in this edition.)

10 ---. , Henceforward (London: Faber and Faber, 1989) 58.

(All references to the texts of Henceforward are in this edition.)

11 ---. , A Small Family Business (London: Faber and Faber, 1989) 2. (All references to the texts of A Small Family Business are in this edition.)

12 Ian Watson, Conversations with Ayckbourn (London: Faber and Faber, 1988) 126.

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