



The Lilliputian Mentality in Arnold Wesker's The Journalist: An Exploration of Parochialism and Small-Mindedness in Contemporary Journalism

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the Lilliputian mentality in Arnold Wesker's *The Journalist*. It examines how the play critiques parochialism and small-mindedness in contemporary journalism. The study seeks to uncover the social commentary in Wesker's work regarding journalism's impact on public consciousness. Arnold Wesker's *The Journalist* (1960) critiques the media's role in shaping public opinion. It reveals the shallow, reductive approach of journalists to their subjects. The term Lilliputian mentality, from Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, describes a mindset that is narrow and limited. Wesker's play reflects these concerns, showing how journalism often oversimplifies complex issues. This study uses a qualitative, literary analysis approach. It examines *The Journalist* through the lens of the Lilliputian mentality. Key scenes, character interactions, and themes are analyzed in the context of 1960s Britain. Secondary sources on Wesker's work and journalism theory support the analysis. The analysis shows that Wesker's journalist character embodies the Lilliputian mentality. The play illustrates the parochialism of the profession. It focuses on sensationalism, oversimplification, and superficial coverage of complex issues. The characters' limited worldview makes them complicit in distorting public discourse. The study finds that *The Journalist* critiques journalism's role in society. It also comments on the dangers of reducing complex issues to trivial soundbites. The characters' inability to perceive the larger context of their work reflects their small-mindedness. The Lilliputian mentality in *The Journalist* critiques contemporary journalism. It shows how the profession's narrow focus fosters parochialism and misunderstanding. Wesker's work encourages reflection on the media's ethical responsibilities. It calls for a shift towards a more nuanced, thoughtful approach to reporting.

INTRODUCTION

Arnold Wesker's *The Journalist* (1960) is a thought-provoking play that critiques the role of journalism in shaping public opinion. Set during a time of social and political turbulence in 1960s Britain, the play takes aim at the media, highlighting the narrowness of journalistic practice and the reduction of complex societal issues into simplistic and sensational narratives. Wesker's portrayal of the journalist character exemplifies a Lilliputian mentality, a term derived from Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, which refers to a mindset that is small-minded, provincial, and incapable of seeing beyond immediate, superficial concerns. The play critiques how journalists, in their pursuit of sensationalism, oversimplify and distort the realities of political and social issues, reducing them to soundbites that fail to engage with the complexities of the world. In doing so, *The Journalist* offers a timely and enduring critique of the media's power to shape and manipulate public discourse. The concept of the Lilliputian mentality is central to the analysis of *The Journalist*, as it sheds light on the play's depiction of journalists who, despite their seemingly powerful position in society, operate within narrow, constrained perspectives. This mentality reflects the limitations of their worldview, which is shaped by a combination of personal biases, professional pressures, and the demands of the media industry. The critique of journalism in Wesker's play resonates beyond its 1960s context, continuing to offer insights into the ethical concerns surrounding the media in contemporary society.

While literature on media and journalism in drama and literature is abundant, relatively little attention has been paid to Wesker's *The Journalist* in the context of the Lilliputian mentality. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how Wesker uses this concept to critique the parochial nature of journalism. The research problem at the core of this study is to explore how the Lilliputian mentality functions in *The Journalist* to highlight the limitations of the journalistic profession and its role in shaping a distorted public discourse. Specifically, the study investigates how Wesker portrays the journalist's inability to perceive the larger societal and political context, reducing complex stories into simplified narratives that fail to account for the complexities of human experience. The primary objective of this study is to explore how Wesker's *The Journalist* uses the Lilliputian mentality as a device to critique the parochialism and narrow-mindedness inherent in contemporary journalism. The study aims to examine the ways in which the characters in the play, particularly the journalist, operate within small, constrained perspectives that fail to engage with the larger issues at play in society. Through a close reading of the text, this research seeks to uncover how the play addresses the ethical implications of such narrow thinking in the media, particularly how sensationalism and simplification serve to manipulate and distort public understanding. Ultimately, the study aims to demonstrate how *The Journalist* serves as a call for a more expansive, thoughtful approach to journalism, one that challenges parochialism and engages with the complexities of the world.

This study hypothesizes that Wesker's *The Journalist* uses the concept of the Lilliputian mentality to offer a scathing critique of contemporary journalism. Through the character of the journalist, Wesker exposes how the media's narrow, parochial perspective limits its ability to understand and represent the complexities of social and political issues. By portraying the journalist as trapped within a limited worldview, the play highlights the ethical failures of the profession, which reduces complex realities to trivial soundbites for the sake of sensationalism. The study asserts that Wesker's portrayal of journalism in *The Journalist* reflects the broader social and ethical concerns surrounding the media's role in shaping public opinion. The significance of this study lies in its exploration of the intersection between literature, media, and social ethics. *The Journalist* is an important text for understanding the role of the press in shaping public discourse, and this study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on the media's ethical responsibilities. By examining the play through the lens of the Lilliputian mentality, the study offers a unique perspective on the limitations of journalism and its impact on society. In addition, the study draws connections between Wesker's critique of journalism in the 1960s and the ongoing concerns surrounding media sensationalism, bias, and oversimplification in the contemporary world. In an era of fake news, media manipulation, and shallow reporting, Wesker's work remains a relevant and powerful critique of the ways in which the media can distort public understanding.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study's significance extends beyond literary scholarship, as it offers insights into the broader cultural and political implications of journalism. The critique of the Lilliputian mentality calls attention to the dangers of a limited, provincial worldview in the media, urging a more expansive and ethical approach to reporting. This study will be of interest to scholars in media studies, journalism ethics, and cultural studies, as well as those interested in the ethical responsibilities of the press and the role of literature in critiquing societal institutions. This study will focus primarily on Arnold Wesker's *The Journalist*, analyzing the play through the lens of the Lilliputian mentality and its critique of journalism. While the study will reference secondary sources on the play and its themes, the primary focus will remain on the text itself and its portrayal of the media. The research will consider the historical and social context of the 1960s, particularly the media landscape of that time, but will not undertake a detailed exploration of the history of journalism or other works by Wesker. Additionally, while the study will discuss the ethical implications of journalism as depicted in *The Journalist*, it will not attempt to provide an exhaustive analysis of media practices in general or compare the play to other literary depictions of journalism.

METHODOLOGY

This study will employ a qualitative research methodology, primarily relying on literary analysis and close reading of *The Journalist*. The analysis will focus on key scenes, character interactions, and themes that highlight the Lilliputian mentality and its critique of journalism. Secondary sources, including critical essays on Wesker's work and theoretical literature on journalism ethics, will inform the analysis and provide context for understanding the play's broader social and political implications. By examining *The Journalist* through the lens of the Lilliputian mentality, this study will offer new insights into Wesker's critique of the media and its role in shaping public discourse.

The paper will be structured as follows: Section 1: Introduction - Providing background information, research problem, objectives, and an overview of the study. Section 2: Literature Review - A review of existing scholarship on *The Journalist*, the Lilliputian mentality, and journalism in literature. Section 3: Chapter 3: Analysis - A detailed analysis of *The Journalist* through the lens of the Lilliputian mentality, focuses on the portrayal of journalism and its ethical implications. Section 4: Conclusion - Summarizing the findings and offering conclusions, with suggestions for further research. This structure ensures a systematic approach to exploring the themes of *The Journalist* and provides a comprehensive analysis of the play's critique of journalism and its ethical implications.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Wesker's another play *The Journalists* (1977) is not about journalism, "it is about the poisonous human need to cut better men down to our size, from which need we all suffer in varying degrees" (Wesker, 1975: 5). This poisonous human need is embodied in journalistic profession. *The Journalist* is a 'work relationship play', as the effects on the characters show. Wesker notes in *Fears of Fragmentation* that in: the web of social relationships (in work), individuals exhibit mentality, which is petty, lumpen, one that diminishes or minimalizes. ... this particular kind of mentality.... which operates in all of us when we feel ourselves to be failures. And how often one does encounter the mean-spirited person who feels he is compelled to reduce people to his own miserable level. Journalists could be a mirror of that aspect of human behaviour (Wesker, 1985:116).

Wesker questions, is it not possible to have relationships both social and familial without any mean motives, and when will we realize that all human beings are in need of tolerance and understanding? It is this lack of contact and antagonism with each other which Wesker dramatises in *The Journalist*. Wesker asks in his critical work *Journey into Journalism*, "Is contact with men and women who are giants in the field (Journalism) a sad and inevitable enticement to Lilliputian attitudes?" (1972: 251). For Wesker this mentality is a characteristic of journalists because they are prone to show it.

Wesker says the purpose of the play is to display disgust for those characters that are prone to show "Lilliputian mentality". It is a mentality based on bias, hatred, animosity and indifference. Wesker exposes this mentality as he speaks of it: I inherited from my parents a contempt for a certain kind of a mentality which is petty... I have encountered it in my air force experience, in

work, in my school days- and especially with journalists. And it seemed to me that journalism was an area in which I could explore this Liliputian mentality (qtd in Patterson, 2003: 32).

This mentality according to Wesker is not only found in upper class but also in lower class particularly in the profession of journalism. He holds the belief that this mentality can be reformed because there is a potential for growth and change in humans. This belief, as Michael Patterson says, provides "the balance that Wesker offers: the despising of the ugliness of humanity coupled with the faith that they can be transformed" (Patterson, 2003: 33).

The play shows how the hurly-burly of journalistic profession embodies oppressive work environment. Leeming comments that "as a scene is taking place in one area, the characters in all the other offices are to continue unobtrusively busy, so that individuals are always seen in relation to the rest of the Newspaper team" (1981: 72). As far as its work environment points to his earlier plays *The Kitchen* or *Chips*, *The Journalist* is not concerned with the effects of work theme in quite the same way as the earlier plays. It shows Wesker's neo-naturalistic stance by highlighting the grave effects of capitalism that diminishes good men to nothingness. "The newsroom is a microcosm of a capitalist society, where efficiency trumps empathy, and workers are reduced to interchangeable parts in the relentless machine of production." (Stevenson, 1997: 115) The action takes place in the offices of the fictional Sunday Paper. This entire set-up is noticeably intended to produce an atmosphere in the midst of which human beings feel the violent pangs of suffering not only physically but also mentally. The revolving stage, with- Editor's office, Business News, Women's Page, Political Features, News Room, Arts Pages, Sports Pages, Foreign Dept is constantly changing location from one place to another, showing the loss of control it is likely to cause in the staff trapped in it. Wesker shows the work as a force, leaving the strong marks on those sticking to it. From this point of view, as Leeming says, "it becomes clear that the characters are, as one would expect, affected by their daily work, some more than others" (1981: 72). The harrowing effects of this job are evident in the way it has completely dehumanised and led to death-like situation for those holding it. Wesker in Stoll disagrees "that capitalist society is benevolent and should be retained." (1976: 424) Tamara's reporting of wars and massacres for foreign news assignments is pushing her to the verge of a nervous breakdown and a photographer is obsessed with gruesome scenes he is required for a photograph.

The Journalists deals with the agonies, anxieties, silliness and prejudice of the characters during their work. Gordon Fairchild, the Foreign editor, for example, tells Tamara Drazin, a foreign correspondent, of the ruinous consequences of the profession, "We're all growing old. Especially in this profession. At 32 one's old" (53). They are compelled to be in a position of servitude and move out to collect news even if it is worthless trash. Tamara is sick and tired of her job because it demands something she is not ready to provide. She is sick of cutting out clippings and pasting them in her books which she feels is an encumbrance left on her shoulders by her work. This assembled collection does not assist her in any way in life, but only helps to boost her ego

for possessing something on every possible foreign issue. Having let herself deep in the newspaper office, Tamara learns to a great extent man's ruthless and repulsive stupidities. Ultimately she says contemptuously, "We're not reporting foreign news, we're reporting madness" (53). Tamara seems to speak in a feeling of sorrow over her own suffering. She gives vent to her pent up feelings by taking the entire responsibility for their plight. The dilemma of the workers is that they are caught in this disdainful environment and they have not done anything to repel it. Tamara feels guilty for her inability to cope with the environment and says: These offices, sour jealousies. Battles for space. Defeated journalists on the one hand, and the smug weariness of experienced politicians. The intimidations of bigoted minorities. The tortuous self-defence of money-makers. The pomposity of knowledge-glutted academics. Genocide in Pakistan (34).

The journalists make us believe that their intended purpose to respond and react to everything authentically is hallowed and soon they are exposed. Their coverage is shown to be hypocritical and indifferent, writing down quickly without much attention to the detail and few lines about everything as a matter of duty. Tamara is even sick of the first class travel and the first class hotel and of writing unsympathetically about people with whom she makes quick friendships. She feels that her creative powers have been dried up by the never-ending mechanical work and as a result she can hardly bring together anything worthwhile artistically. Her learned profession without further ado causes unbearable pain physically and emotionally. Her coverage of wars and massacres pushes her to the brink of a nervous breakdown, the retrieval of which she finds very hard. Her powerlessness is revealed by her inability to act in enforcing any rule at the office. At the end, she comes to a conclusion that she is in journalism because she is below the standard for any other profession.

Wesker depicts the specific form of vices the journalists get from their habitual procedure. First of all, they lack courage, boldness, conviction, and are presumptuous and hypocritically pious. Despite having an aversion for the profession and variation of opinion among themselves, they all show consent on one point that the "government is wrong and we're right" and carry on a clash and incompatible feeling with politicians for a limitless time (35). 'Credit grabbing' as Jane Merryweather, a Women's Page journalist, finds is another inclination that their work infects and corrupts them with. Everyone claims credit for a good thing and overrules others in this wild rat race. Therefore, one is predisposed to admit the comment, supposedly made by Mr. Morgan King, the new fiery socialist superstar, that journalists are without qualifications and ill-equipped to read between the lines anything. They are "not—always adequately—briefed" and are only "information drunk" and interpret according to bias or the way their mind perceives the surface reality (38). Even Norman Hardcastle, a journalist working in 'Political and Features', expresses disapproval of the profession for what he dubs as illegal dealing with human imperfections and human tragedy. And he is accustomed to making a capital of only human omissions and commissions. They are engaged in a futile exercise sans any positive role to play. It is the circumstantial demand which brings forth

into existence shabby little journalists who in turn distort readers' vision of the world.

The work environment of the newspaper office incites jealousy, ambition, personal ill-will, hatred, deceit and conspiracy. They pull one another's legs and conspire to bring their rivals down. The dominant character Mary Mortimer is a star columnist. Her discontentment with being a columnist results in an aspiration to replace Paul, a future editor. She cunningly compels Harvey to pension him off and calls Paul, "tired, sentimental and a third rate mind" (49). In a discourteous manner she reminds Harvey that he cannot call her relentless as it is a quality he too, from time to time relies on. Even her proposal for an appropriate course of action to Jane, a journalist in charge of Women's Pages, on how to lessen the size and pride of an old journalist and put before categorically one's superiority, is also a part of their usual game. Mary has a professionally vicious way of dominating people who are not in line with her own liberal and idealistic beliefs. Her irrational "obsession is with cutting people down to size" (Bigsby, 1981: 72). Mary's lilliputinizing mentality which Wesker criticises is conveyed through her feud with Morton King. She criticises him for his ideals which she believes are pretentious and immodest but ironically these ideals are similar to her own. This is pointed out by her own children who after reading an extract from her column attacking Morgan King's belief say "you see, mother he also talks about order out of chaos that's just what we mean. It's as though you're fighting yourself" (70). Morgan King is Mary's antagonist whom she hates, but ironically King is still shown to be someone with "whom she is uneasy and feels a constant need to attack" (Leeming, 1971: 102).

In *The Journalist* all the characters are engrossed in mean materialism, and which has an effect on their relationships. "Wesker's plays often delve into the emotional toll of work, portraying characters trapped in professions that exploit their humanity under the guise of productivity and professional duty." (Leeming, 1981: 70) In this profession people have no time to cease and deeply ponder on their degradation. This in turn causes emotional strain on the human relationships. In pursuit of his favourite theme, Wesker has chosen a more civilized and sophisticated area of human activity in *The Journalists* to explore the effect of an environment on workers. Wesker focuses on the irrational industrial environment with its deadening working conditions. The monotonous labour leads the characters to frustration and loss of identity. They are ultimately reduced to automatons which Wesker exposes.

A playwright of substance, Arnold Wesker has produced a variety of plays where he tackles compelling subjects and ideas. What is utterly consistent in his new form of realism is his belief that theatre can change life for the better. This is the foundation of Wesker's socialist theatre. Coming on to the English stage as part of the anger and the rebellion, where does Wesker fit? A consensus emerges that he is a diligent, committed playwright. He is a critic too and a reformer of the world and in particular of the English society. Out of this emerges Wesker's rigorous effort to make his plays vehicles of thought and introspection. It is no wonder therefore that his prominent characters (Sarah, Ronnie, Harry, Ada, Dave) speak at times for him and convey to us his commitment and his socialist

faith. In this way, Wesker's plays become a new kind of Shavian discussion drama.

Moral passion is a quality difficult to control, and preaching is a difficult thing for Wesker to avoid. Yet his moral passion along with his acute consciousness of his working-class origin is Wesker's greatest strength as a playwright. He aimed to "promote cultural enrichment as well as the material prosperity of the working people." (Wilcher, 1996: 417) These qualities have enabled him to create characters who speak with burning conviction about important issues and to portray on the stage little-known facets of modern life. He is a man with a mission who shows the drama as an educational force. Wesker's attempt is to raise the cultural standards of a nation by forcing people into a realisation that apathy is synonymous with death. Surely, one must admire a man who is devoting his life to such an effort.

CONCLUSION

This study explored Arnold Wesker's *The Journalist* through the lens of the Lilliputian mentality. The research examined how the play critiques parochialism and small-mindedness in journalism. The study focused on how Wesker uses the concept of the Lilliputian mentality to show the limitations of journalists and their tendency to oversimplify complex societal issues. The study found that *The Journalist* portrays the Lilliputian mentality through journalists who reduce complex issues to sensationalized, trivial narratives. The characters operate within narrow perspectives and fail to engage with the broader context of their work. This small-mindedness reflects the ethical dangers of journalism that prioritizes sensationalism over thoughtful analysis. Wesker's portrayal suggests that such an approach distorts public understanding of political and social issues. The study also revealed that Wesker critiques not only individual journalists but also the broader media industry's role in perpetuating these limitations. The play underscores how journalists, by focusing on sensationalism, contribute to a shallow public discourse that fails to address deeper societal complexities. The study's findings have important implications for contemporary journalism. Wesker's critique of the Lilliputian mentality serves as a reminder of the ethical dangers of oversimplification in media. In today's media landscape, where sensationalism is common, Wesker's work remains relevant. The study highlights the need for journalists to move beyond quick, headline-grabbing stories and engage more thoughtfully with complex issues. The findings suggest that media practitioners must consider their ethical responsibilities more seriously. There is a call for more nuanced, comprehensive reporting that challenges the shallow narratives often found in modern journalism. The study has several limitations. It focused primarily on *The Journalist*, so its conclusions are based on a single work. Although *The Journalist* provides valuable insights into journalism as a profession. Further exploration of Wesker's other plays would enhance understanding of his views on the media. Additionally, while the study examined the historical context of the 1960s, it did not delve into the development of journalism in that period or compare *The Journalist* with other works of literature. Expanding research to include other critiques of media would broaden the scope of the analysis. Future research could

explore how other works of literature and drama critique journalism and media ethics. A comparative analysis of *The Journalist* with other works could reveal deeper insights into the portrayal of journalism in literature. Research could also examine how the themes of the Lilliputian mentality and oversimplification are present in contemporary media practices, especially in digital journalism and social media. Another area for future research could be to examine the broader impact of the Lilliputian mentality in media beyond Wesker's work. Studying the effects of media simplification on public understanding could contribute to ongoing discussions about journalism ethics in modern society. In conclusion, *The Journalist* provides a sharp critique of journalism and the ethical consequences of the Lilliputian mentality. The play illustrates how journalists' small-minded perspectives lead to a distorted public discourse that oversimplifies complex issues. Wesker challenges the media industry to move beyond sensationalism and adopt a more thoughtful, ethical approach to reporting. The study highlights the relevance of his critique in today's media landscape, where similar ethical challenges persist. Ultimately, the research calls for a shift in journalism towards deeper, more nuanced reporting that embraces complexity and social responsibility.

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