



## JOHN ARDEN'S PLAY *Live Like Pigs* As A SOCIAL DOCUMENT TO MODERN LITERATURE

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### Abstract

The plays of John Arden represent various uses of socio-political issues in contemporary British drama. All the plays are based on divergent aesthetic values and have attracted critical attention and enjoyed commercial success. Moreover in these plays the dramatist employs variety in forms and techniques which are par with conventions of Naturalistic dramas. The mixture of prose and poetry, music, songs and episodic structures directly addresses the audience and honestly portrays the characters on theatrical stage. The reason for selecting these plays is based on the relevance of social and political issues. These plays represent the social and political situation with respect to the twentieth century social setting. With the production of *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborn in 1956, a huge change took place in British drama. Fashionable drawing rooms were replaced by quality public houses with significant change in terms of subject matter, setting, and language. Theatre was regarded as more than a place for entertainment .At this point John Arden was becoming increasingly well known in England. He desired a dramatic unity, setting and entertainment that consisted ideas of contemporary political and social relevance.

John Arden had been interested in writing plays related to social setting. His plays namely *Live Like Pigs*, *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* and *Armstrong's Last Goodnight*, reflect John Arden's political and social ideas. Other plays related to social issues written by him cannot be included because they are not forceful as the above. Chronologically *Live Like Pigs* was first performed in 1956.

### Introduction & Background Of The Study

The play *Live Like Pigs* was written in 1957 and first produced on English stage society at Royal Court Theatre on 30, September 1958. In the introductory note John Arden writes:

when I write this play I intended it to be not so much social document as a study of differing ways of life brought sharply into conflict and both losing their own particular virtues under the stress of intolerance and misunderstanding...I was accused by the Left of attacking the welfare state: on the other, the play was hailed as a defence of anarchy and amorality... the sawneys are an anachronism. They are direct descendants of the 'sturdy beggars' of the sixteen century, and the apparent chaos of their lives becomes an ordered pattern when seen in terms of a wild empty country side and a nomadic existence. Put out of their fields by enclosing landlords, they found such an existence possible for four hundred years. Today quit simply there are too many buildings in Britain, and there is just no room for nomads. The family in this play fails to understand this, and become educated in what is known as the 'hard way', but which might also be called the 'inefficient way'.

The Jacksons are an undistinguished but not contemptible family, whose comparative cosines is not strong enough to withstand the violent irruption into the affairs that the sawneys bring. Their natural instincts of decency and kindness have never been subjected to a very severe test. (Arden, *Three plays* 101).

The singing of the ballads in same way integrates into the action. The setting is the interior and exterior of the typical council



house. The stage direction of the play is given to represent real house representing the house estate. The Old Croaker- Black Mouth-daffodil group play major role as friends of sawenys family to counter reflect the effect of them on sawneys family as the sawneys in general upon the Jacksons. Each character bears special physical description in the beginning of the play to enhance realism in the drama the stanza song at the beginning of each scene are extended to be sung as an introductory statement. They do not require instrumental accompaniment as they are typically street ballad, dragging and harsh and sung with particular monotony associated with the old fashioned street singers.

The play consists of a series of sketches woven together into a meaningful patterns and the violence of clashes between gypsies and neighbors is summed up. It is the opposing way of life represented by the anarchic Sawenys and law abiding Jacksons. A coercive bureaucracy and pressures to conform are revealed in the play. When the Sawenys a raffish family, living in an old tram car is forced by the officials to live in a public housing estate. The Sawanys turn their new house into pigorty. This kind... is offensive to the civilized neighbor as thus a bloody riot is provoked.

There is no central figure in the action of the play. There are two groups of people; one is Sailor Sawney, Rachel, his woman Rosie, his daughter, Col, Rachel's son, with Rosie's two children Sally and a baby. They are contrasted with their neighbors called Jacksons. This clean little family belonging to middle class is irritated by a group of people called Sawneys, because of their wild virtues. They crack all rules, they steal, degrade the neighbors, do not clean their houses and refuse to send to their children to school, they drink; they live like pigs in their residence. This drama has only one Act divided in seventeen scenes.

The play Live Like Pigs begins with a song in the form of chorus just like a greek drama. The setting in the first scene is evening. The

Official of the city visit Sawney family which has been shifted from rural area to the estate. In the visit Official discovers uncouth, dirty, dissipated condition of the residence, with an open tap and unhealthy living conditions. Official is disgusted with Sawneys Family and try to correct them.

Official: what's that? Sounds like running water...Where's that kid gone-God help us, in the bath room. Hey hey lovely, hey little girly, hey hey, what do you think you're Playing at with them taps, water all over the bloody floor. [He goes into the bathroom and Sally comes running out down the stairs, and off through the front door. The Official turns the taps off and comes slowly down himself.

Official: I don't know. A lovely house, I'd call it. I've not got a house like this, you know. I have to live in a furnished lodging, and like it.

In the mean time other family member Sailor and Col comes home pushing a home-made barrow consisting of a packing case loaded with pile household junk, chamber pot, and old fashioned gramophone and both also carry bundles. The Official intervenes and asks them to that they should put away the old junk as it is only good for pigs now. Swaneys family extremely mad at Official calling them pigs. They hurl abuses after Official, who leaves the place in embarrassment of being insulted by Sawneys.

Col[violently]: *Go on, you heard him go on jump your bloody feet to t'other side o' that door*

Official: *Now just a moment, you can't do this sort of thing here-*

Col: *Are you going?*

Official: *This is very silly of you, you know, this is very silly indeed...*

[He hurries out of the house as Col advances threateningly]

Rachel:[ *shouting after him*]: *Calling us pigs would you! How 'd you like a real screaming sow to raven your paunch for you, hey!*

Col: *I'll show him pigs.*

Sailor: *has he gone?*



Scenes second and third reflect on the Sawneys family and their relationship with each other, the language used amongst the characters representing Sawneys family projects a coarse, rude and illiterate behavior. These scenes represent those people who are uncivilized, lower income and belong to red neck areas but unfortunately they have been shifted to suburban areas where they feel like fishes out of water.

Scene fifth is about Doreen (Mr. Jackson daughter) going to Sawneys family being attracted by gramophone but Mrs. Jackson warns Doreen about the pitfalls of mixing with people like Sawneys.

Scenes sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth engages in oral word war between Sawneys and their friends. These scenes are very vocal in bringing out the social upbringing of red-neck areas (lower income group) where poverty mounts and illiteracy is a hall-mark of the behavior amongst these people. They fight, be rude with each other without being bothered about the civilized way of living in suburban areas.

Rachel: Let him be, Sailor. He wants his tart- he can have tart, why shouldn't he? He's my lad, he's a mind and rights of his own.

Sailor [*after a pause, lowering the bottle*]: Ah, so. The young man cries for his rights and the old man carries the load.

Well, live and let live. I'm asking nowt more nor that for me- so I'm as well to serve it to you, I dare say. Go on.

Daffy, you bide. Till he breaks your neck. Heh heh.

The following scenes, act as bringing vast gulf between Swaney's and Jackson's, thus building tension around the estate. Sawneys family has no mail box hence the letters fall in front door and Sailor opens the letters and says that they are from corporation, mostly complaints relating to the condition of their residence. Meanwhile the Official comes again and says to Swaney's that their complaints are about you and department will take action against to put you out from the house. The police

sergeant comes abruptly in the house of Sawneys enquiring about police constable wounded last night. From distance tells Jackson's that their clothes were torn by the Swaney's Family. The estate people are angered by this act and they gather outside the Sawneys Family seeing Daffodil burst through the front door shouting towards the members of Sawney family that they will tear Col in bits and pieces. In the mean time Col is beaten by the crowd and comes back with torn clothes and body streaked with blood. Swaney's family is afraid, threatened inside the house talking with each other about leaving the house and shifting elsewhere because they are endangered for their lives by the action of the mob outside the house.

Scenes fourteen and fifteen propels the action to denouement as a member of Swaney's family gather in hall listening to the threatening voices outside who are yelling. "We are going to get you out from this and will check you in the canal, you bloody gypsies. (Arden, *Three Plays* 183-84)

Last scene opens with peace in the neighborhood. As the police enter in Swaney's family, Col fearing of being caught tries to run away with his lover Daffodil. But the policeman comes to know about it and goes after Col. In the mean time Sergeant discovers sailor injured by his leg and says, "Why you people can't live decent, I can't think" (187). He calls for an ambulance for the Sailor. The scene closes with a message *they/us* and reminds the audience that no matter how good fences are built, the chasm between social class will remain a reality. "Croaker: Ah, it's you and me, we're the old bones, aren't we? They tears us all up, you see." (189)

[*She sings:*]

Old, old and thrown on the road,

Washed away with the rain:

Dig a hole and put them in

And never come out again. (189)

*Live Like Pigs* evidently based on social subject reflects on how deep the differences in society exists on each level. We



witness a troubled attack of uncontrollable outside force represented by Sawneys into hitherto settled community. The Sawney and Jackson both neighbors wish to be left alone but their way of life collide with each other through originally unexamined differences. They both become committed to fight. The circumstances that yielded up in the action are very common place-both neighbors trying to be friendly when Col tries to pursue Jackson's daughter Doreen, to come to his home with him. But Mrs. Jackson does not approve this mixing. The play strikes us a social document in which action is chosen to present the contemporary social history. In scene two how Mrs. Jackson one side and Rachel, Sally and Sailor quarrels on a small issue.

Mrs. Jackson [*very friendly*] : Excuse me: it's Mrs. Sawney, isn't it? The rent collector give me your name, he said you were coming to live here, so I thought, well, I'd just pop round the door and have a word-like, it's your first day here, and why not be neighborly, I thought and give'em a call? Eh, isn't it a lovely day?

Rachel : Who are you?.....

Rachel : Oh go to hell, you and your fizzing husband.

Mrs. Jackson [*stopped gasping in midstream*] : I beg your pardon!....

[*Sally runs out of the Sawney House and stares at Mrs. Jackson.*]

Sally: Mam, mam, she's as fat as a pig, ent she? (Taylor, *Three Plays* 112)

However all the seventeen scenes with abundant variety of incidents, dramatic tendency is kept tight with rapid change in mood and subject. We get a vivid feeling of life being lived out in front of us on the stage. After *Waters of Babylon* (1957) it is a big surprise that Arden manages to present various characters so clearly to life, differentialize so well between them and giving them vividness and represent action on stage. The most dominating character is Sailor; he is seventy, too old to be dominated and remains unchallenged. Rachel who is forty tries to hold and overrules Sailor and Col who are

growing into manhood. Another character who is an outsider of twenty eight years old to the central party is Blackmouth. Arden says in his preface to *Live Like Pigs* The old Croaker, Blackmouth, Daffodil group have much the same effect upon Sailor's house hold as the Sawney in general do upon Jackson's (The respectable neighbor.) The goodness of *Live Like Pigs* depends on individual and group relationships. The stage present only bestow to the tension at the end when the house is in a state of seize.

Arden sees them as a source of sturdy beggars of the sixteenth century, with values derived from nomadic existence. They belong to open space with crowded atmosphere spread farther and farther in to the country, subdued by the freedom of their old life as they stretch in this civilization is new to them. Hence they are bound to dress out in new housing estate by authorities and the action reflects the feeling of the violence by neighbors when they refuse to do so. Sympathy is with Swaneys family as they represent the down-trodden. Arden made us understand that the neighborhood will be good and more peaceful. Arden's achievement in inventing a language for the Sawney is very considerable one. He shapes dialect for them which suits illiterate but explicit everything. "From the beginning, Arden succeeded in picking the right small incidents to symbolize the fractions that start of by being trivial but grows much too big for Sawneys to survive" (Hayman, *Contemporary Playwright* 16). In the scene first pretty quarrel between Rosie and The Council official is shown, she tells him that he has no right to chase Sally out of the house just because the child was running water in the bathroom. The official point is that she had lifted the plug into the basin and water was going all over the floor. In the mean time when sailor arrives, celebrates the fact of having a house and ordering the official out of it. "Here we are and here we have got to live. But we are keeping *them* out from us, every bloody one of them. [*He stands astride and terrible.*]



They call me Sailor Sawney and no man slaps  
his natter at *me*." (Taylor, *Three Plays* 109).  
This play technically uses the mixture of highly  
formal verse and extravagantly informal prose  
with lines that rhyme.

To every woman is a man  
Or two or three or four:  
And she has not got a man  
Must fight a terrible war. (Arden, *Three  
plays* 110)

This is the Arden's boldest play and  
remains one of the funniest and powerful  
statements in twentieth century British theatre  
about social conflict.

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