



CRITICISM OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM ON A MICROCOSMIC LEVEL: GLOBAL POLITICS IN AN INDUSTRIAL TOWN IN JOHN ARDEN'S *THE WORKHOUSE DONKEY*

BİR SİYASİ SİSTEM ELEŞTİRİSİ: JOHN ARDEN'İN THE WORKHOUSE DONKEY İSİMLİ OYUNUNDAKİ KÜRESEL VE YEREL POLİTİKALAR

Banu ÖĞÜNÇ

Yrd. Doç. Dr., Aksaray Üniversitesi, Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi, Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü, banuogunc@aksaray.edu.tr

Abstract

John Arden's The Workhouse Donkey depicts the local politics of a northern English town in order to criticise the corruptions within the local government in a mocking way. Derived from a real-life story, the play specifically focuses on the political life that can be experienced in an industrial town in the United Kingdom. According to Arden, the setting and the characters are important for the theme of the play. Nevertheless, what is portrayed in the play transcends the regional problems of a northern town. On the other hand, what is treated in the play on a microcosmic level is, in fact, a reflection of politics on a macrocosmic, global level since it is the system that is being criticised in the play regardless of its local representation. Hence, the play has a political tone that criticises the political system rather than targeting a political party or a political view. Thus, this study aims to offer a detailed analysis of John Arden's play The Workhouse Donkey in order to justify the significance of the play as a criticism of contemporary political system caricaturised as in the scope of local politics in a northern town in line with the much-debated definitions of politics proposed by Bernard Crick.

Öz

John Arden'in The Workhouse Donkey isimli oyunu, kuzey İngiltere'deki bir kasabada kurgulanan yerel politikaları ve yerel yönetimdeki yozlaşmaları alaycı bir şekilde eleştirme amacıyla betimler. Gerçek bir olaydan yola çıkarak kurgulanan oyun özellikle politik hayatın Birleşik Krallık'ta endüstriyel bir kasabada nasıl yaşandığına odaklanır. Arden'e göre oyunun geçtiği yer ve karakterler, oyunun teması açısından önemlidir. Buna rağmen oyunda sergilenenler, kuzeydeki bir kasabanın bölgesel sorunlarını aşar. Oyunda mikrokozmetik seviyede işlenen sorunlar, aslında evrensel düzeyde politik hayatın bir yansımasıdır, sistemin yerel düzeydeki temsilinden öte, oyun, sistemin kendisini eleştirir. Belirli bir politik partiyi ya da politik görüşü hedef almaktansa, politik sistemi eleştiren oyunun, bu nedenle de politik bir tavrı vardır. Bundan dolayı bu çalışmanın amacı, The Workhouse Donkey isimli oyunu detaylı bir şekilde incelemek ve kuzeydeki bir kasabanın yerel politikası kapsamında günümüz politik sistemini karikatürize eden bu oyunu, Bernard Crick tarafından öne sürülen politika ve çokça tartışılan tanımlar bağlamında değerlendirmektir.

Makale Bilgisi

Gönderildiği tarih: 23 Şubat 2017
Kabul edildiği tarih: 12 Haziran 2017
Yayınlanma tarihi: 21 Haziran 2017

Article Info

Date submitted: 23 February 2017
Date accepted: 12 June 2017
Date published: 21 June 2017

Anahtar sözcükler

John Arden; Politik Tiyatro; Bernard Crick; Jonson Komedi

Keywords

John Arden; Political Drama; Bernard Crick; Jonsonian Comedy

DOI: 10.1501/Dtcfder_0000001532

Defined as a melo-drama by John Arden himself (112), *The Workhouse Donkey* is about the local politics of a northern English town and stages the corruptions within the local government in a mocking way. Derived from a real-life story, Arden stresses out that *The Workhouse Donkey* “is a regional play” (Gaston 160). Moreover, he adds that “[i]t belongs to a certain type of society, and outside that society it doesn't make a great deal of sense” (Gaston 160). Unlike Arden's opinion, the setting of the play as an industrial town and the individual characters in the play just represent wider issues. Hence, what is treated in the play in microcosmic level is, in fact, a reflection of politics in a macrocosmic, global, level. In the play, it is the system that is being criticized regardless of its local representation. Rather than targeting a political party or a political view, Arden points out that it is always a figure of authority that is blamed for the system and overthrown. In this regard, the play illustrates the arguments put

forward by the political philosopher Sir Bernard Crick in his *A Defence of Politics*, a study that has altered understanding of politics in the field. Hence, this study aims at analysing John Arden's play *The Workhouse Donkey* in depth, in order to justify the significance of the play as a criticism of the contemporary political system caricaturised as in the scope of local politics in a northern town in line with the much-debated definitions of politics proposed by Crick.

As given in the stage directions, "[t]he action of the play takes place in a Yorkshire industrial town: somewhere between Sheffield and Leeds" (116). The plot of the play encounters the Labour and the Conservative party members as appropriate to the political content of the play. It opens up with the welcoming of the new chief of police Colonel Feng by the Labour Mayor Alderman Boocock and the ex-Mayor Alderman Charlie Butterthwaite, who is the workhouse donkey in the title. While the Chief is having dinner at the conservative Sir Harold Sweetman's house, the Labour members of the play are arrested for drinking after hours. Upon this, Butterthwaite believes that the Chief is on the side of the conservatives and acting upon their interests. Later, he attempts to create a scandal through Copacabana Club which is secretly owned by Sweetman. Meanwhile, the play introduces the gambling problems of Butterthwaite who ends up stealing money from the Town Hall to pay his debt to Blomax. He makes it look like a burglary and shows the police as incompetence. Thus, the play leaves the Chief Feng as defeated against the corrupted politics of the town as he is forced to resign from his position. Thus, within this plotline, the play exemplifies corruption in a local government.

As pointed out briefly, Arden mainly reflects his experiences in a northern town in this play. He expresses this in his interview with Wager and Trussler: "*The Workhouse Donkey, which is a play about a scandal in municipal politics, was based on my own recollections of municipal politics in my native town. I collected from my memory a whole lot of such scandals and amalgamated them*" (46). In his preface to the play, he also points out his two inspirations for the play. As his first inspiration, he states that "*[t]he personality of the late Mr Joseph D'Arcy of Dublin inspired much of the play*" (114). About his own observations Arden remarks that "*[t]he personality of my native town of Barnsley also inspired a great deal of it: but I have carefully avoided the imitation of the personalities of individual inhabitants*" (114). Thus, he indicates that he has created types rather than individual characters just illustrating the system in politics. On the inspiration for the story, in his interview with Wager and Trussler, Arden points out the daily events of his town: "*Certain key*

incidents-the burglary at the town hall, the incident at the Victoria, the politics of the art gallery, and so on...belong in a not-so-veiled form to the politics of Barnsley. The chief constable controversy is based upon a row they had in Nottingham a few years ago” (49). In this regard, Arden justifies that both the characters and the incidents are a part of real life although seems to be caricaturised in the play. Moreover, it can be definitely argued that these political personalities and incidents happen to encounter in different places at different times contributing to the argument of this study.

Nevertheless, Arden challenges the universal theme of the play once again in the published text of play. While writing it, Arden comes up with an alternative epilogue and prologue to be changed according to the geography of the play’s staging as north or south which is given at the end of the published play. Arden chooses to do so based on his idea that the perception of the play changes in north and south of the country. Arden touches upon this issue in his interview with Gaston:

The play was produced at Chichester, which is in the south of England and as far removed in spirit from a northern industrial town as it could possibly be. The audience just stared at it with open-eyed astonishment. I think three-quarters of the audience didn't have the least idea what the play was supposed to be about. When it's being done in northern theatres, the audiences' reactions have always been much better. [...] It wasn't very impressively received, for instance, when I saw it in West Berlin in the late 1960s, where they too clearly hadn't the least idea about the environment or the atmosphere of the story (160-161).

As can be perceived, Arden constantly emphasises the locality of the play claiming that *The Workhouse Donkey*, its story and its message, only gains full meaning when it is performed in northern areas. Nonetheless, beneath the local qualities of the story, the play, as aimed to be argued, underlines the corrupted systems in politics that function, as can be observed, in different times and places. Politics exemplified in the play can be further analysed explaining Crick’s political philosophy as well. According to Crick,

Politics is not religion, ethics, law, science, history or economics; it neither solves everything, nor is it present everywhere; and it is not any one political doctrine, such as conservatism, liberalism, socialism, communism or nationalism, though it can contain

elements of most of these things. Politics is politics, to be valued as itself, not because it is 'like' or 'really is' something else more respectable or peculiar. Politics is politics (11-12).

Although it might seem like as if Crick is simplifying politics as a political philosopher, he, meanwhile, points out the basic element of this play. Arden illustrates politics not according to a particular political doctrine within the local government. He represents caricaturised characters within local government in a comical, in fact more in a satirical way, in order to exemplify Crick's statement that "Politics is politics" regardless of time, place, and the political views.

In the preface, Arden admits that the play "*was originally commissioned for the Royal Court Theatre*" (112), but staged at the Chichester Festival Theatre after being adapted for the open stage at Chichester. Such adaptation included minimizing the décor for a proscenium-arch. After staging the play in a festival and in a specific kind of a theatre structure, Arden mentions his idea of turning this play into a performance that lasts up to thirteen hours. According to Arden's wish,

[he] would have been happy had it been possible for *The Workhouse Donkey* to have lasted, say, six or seven or thirteen hours (excluding intervals), and for the audience to come and go throughout the performance, assisted perhaps by a printed synopsis of the play from which they could deduce those scenes or episodes which would interest them particularly, and those which they could afford to miss (113).

Thus, he proposes the play, and consequently the theatre, as an entertainment which includes other attractions such as restaurants and bars reminding an amusement park. He relates his wish to "vital theatre" (Preface 113). Turning the play into a live experience, where you can come and go, can also be considered as a supporting evidence for this study's stand. Considering that the play criticises politics as can be encountered in different level in different parts of the world, the come and go side of the play reminds how people experiences real life politics. Just like people are forced to face with different sides of politics and political systems within their daily lives, they can enjoy the play within the course of this entertainment package. Nevertheless, he eventually writes a three act melo-drama to be staged in the traditional sense.

The Workhouse Donkey centres on Butterthwaite and his fall from power; however, “the action is made up of a complex network of intrigues and counter-intrigues, involving various degrees and forms of contradiction within and collaboration between the main groups” (Malick 217) including the members of the Labour Party, their Conservative counterparts, and the police. Although it seems to be a simple story of the local politics focusing on one main character, the play, in fact, is much more complex. For McKernie “[w]ith a rambling structure and involuted plot, the play presents the System in all its myriad facets, personal idiosyncrasies and private motivations” (158) as if, to some extent, describing global elements within the play. The play confronts the characters not for the welfare of the individuals. On the contrary, “individuals [are] in conflict with the political system” (McKernie 142) since rather than a particular ideology, power and money are pointed out as the reasons of the conflicts in the play. Thus, the play presents all the major characters as corrupted in different ways. Not only Butterthwaite, but also other characters are defeated at the end since the system itself is always stronger than the individuals. Crick suggests that “[p]olitics is not just a necessary evil; it is a realistic good” (136). The realistic side of politics draws attention to the necessary acts of the characters. It is only if the characters cooperate with the system that the characters can survive in politics of the town. In this regard, Butterthwaite and Feng deserve close analysis in order to reveal their failure in the play against the system.

Charlie Butterthwaite is the protagonist and the major figure of the play. As defined in the play, he is the “Chairman of the Regional Branch of the Labour Party, Secretary of the Local Mineworkers’ Union, controlling spirit of one-hundred-and-one hard-working committees: and perhaps above all, the man who has held the office of Mayor of this borough not fewer than nine times altogether” (I.i.121). Dermiş, on the other hand, finds the character “as part-clown, part-charlatan, and part-idealist” (62) appropriate to a character of Dionysus festive. Although he talks about grand discourses on politics, he is merely after his own interest and political power. He is politically corrupted since he wants to be the sole authority. This can be observed in his shadow existence and in acting as the real decision maker behind the Mayor Boocock. He spends the party’s money drinking after hours. He owes money because of his gambling. Hence, not only he is corrupted in politics, but he also continues to act in corrupted way in his private life. Moreover, he is bold enough to steal money from the Town Hall and to accuse the police for not solving the crime. He is ready to do anything to overthrow the power of his Conservative counterpart

Sweetman. This is indicated in the play through Butterthwaite's aim to reveal Sweetman's connection with Copacabana Club. Moreover, due to his ambition for power, he is likened to Napoleon. To sum up, McKernie defines him who "*wants to be greater than the System, a Napoleonic Emperor who can do whatever he chooses*" (158). Nonetheless, abusing his power leads to his downfall.

Towards the end of the play, Butterthwaite tries to save himself by pointing out the police as the responsible part for what happened since the town and its people are used to corruptions. When Butterthwaite's decision is judged from a moral perspective, Crick's argument supports his actions: "*Political morality is simply that level of moral life (if there are other levels) which pursues a logic of consequences in the world as it is. To act morally in politics is to consider the results of one's actions*" (149). Thus, Butterthwaite's mere consideration is his own well-being and survival within the political system. Yet, Butterthwaite still cannot protect himself. His retribution comes from his own mistake of challenging the system. As a nine-term governor of the town, he is one of the names who have contributed to the formation of their political system which bears corruption in its core. Nevertheless, he wanted to overcome the system he has contributed. According to McKernie, if the system, which plays the major part in the play and intended to be criticised,

[...] is to be anything more than an anonymous, insensitive mass, it must be seen for its true self – a complex of individuals who together seek to sustain the status quo because they have each defines a position for themselves within the System and do not want any part of it to be destroyed because that might affect their own position (159).

In this regard, Butterthwaite changes the balance of the system by trying to conquer it which prepares his downfall. As Clayton touches upon "*[...] his reckless and arrogant exercise of power leads him*" (159) to his destruction. This view is also underlined by Malick: "*Butterthwaite falls because of his recklessness and refusal to conform to the established norms as well as because of the treachery and betrayal by some of his friends and colleagues*" (61). In the character of Butterthwaite, and in his end, it is possible to observe that political content of the play is not local, but it carries a global significance for drawing attention to the malfunctioning of the system over the individuals.

The other significant name is the newly appointed chief Colonel Feng who triggers the action in the play. He is depicted as a stereotypical character who is honest, incorruptible, a man of integrity. Yet, he stands in extremes thanks to his strict attitude in his position. He constantly puts his integrity forward and hesitates to take action. This attitude leads him to resign and leave the town as experienced by Butterthwaite who stands on another extreme. In act I scene ii Feng tells his mission as the new chief as following: “*And I must test/The whole community according to/The rigid statutes and the statutes only*” (129). It is a quite passionate speech in which Feng makes his statement underlying the supremacy of law. It is also justification of why he failed in local politics of the town as the chief. According to McKernie, through Feng, “*Arden satirizes the proponents of law and order*” (155). He has extreme trust on justice and law. He is a type of the character who stands outside the system that the corrupted politics of the town has established. His idealism can be deduced from his neutral position toward the political parties: “*I represent the force of law. I can have no opinion of political matters*” (I.ii.126). Nevertheless, his attitude becomes the destroying force in his career. In this regard, McKernie claims that “*[b]oth Feng and his law disrupt the political stability of the community; but he is unable to keep free of politics; and finally politics destroys law and Feng*” (157). Thus, even law cannot be powerful enough to resist the system. The society is so involved and internalized within the corrupted way of politics that it is not just the politicians Feng is faced to fight. Crick suggests that “*[p]olitics should be praised for doing what it can do, but also praised for not attempting what it cannot do*” (146). In this regard, Feng tries to force politics to attempt what it cannot do forcing law and politics in terms of corruption. This indicates the shortcomings in the character of Feng. As Dermiş also points out “*Feng is not prepared to tolerate the corrupt social circumstances which have been taken for granted by both political parties*” (61). Feng puts forward his principles leaving him without any other choice but to leave the town. As opposed to Butterthwaite, he eventually realizes that he is not powerful enough to fight with the system.

When the system is in the foreground, neither Sweetman nor the police force can be ignored, since they also are a part of the system. The Conservative Sir Harold Sweetman does not suffer as Butterthwaite or Feng. Although he is also corrupted, he is merely waiting his line to get the political power to be able to exercise his power. He acts as balancing the power with Butterthwaite. Also, he enjoys his own share of taking advantage of the corrupted system. The most significant example to this is his ownership of the Copacabana Club as a semi-

illegal way of earning money. Sweetman makes his political statement in a soliloquy in act II scene i. He primarily touches upon the changes in the economy in post-war Britain foreshadowing the upcoming free economy days of the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. He draws attention to the end of class struggle and to the opportunity that anyone can be called a baron as long as he or she manages to get the power of money. He praises himself for improving his position in the society economically and socially. He continues questioning why he cannot get hold of the political power in spite of his economic and social power. Nevertheless, the last three lines deliver the message of not just his speech, but also of the play: *“And in their good time/I turn to the electorate and they turn/In my good time, to me! And turn for ever! Yes...”* (176). He exactly expresses the nature of politics. This is one again defined by Crick: *“‘Politics’, then, simply summarises an activity whose history is a mixture of accident and deliberate achievement, and whose social basis is to be found only in quite complicated societies. It is not as such motivated by principle, except in a dislike of coercion which can, in turn, be simply thought to be a matter of prudence”* (27). Eventually, there will be a time Sweetman would enjoy political power as well. This is not because he personally deserves such a position, but it will be his turn to blame the others for politics.

Although two political parties, Labour and Conservative, are pointed out through individuals as corrupted and making a corrupted system efficient, a governmental organization, the police, is also involved in such a corrupted system. This is mainly unrevealed with the arrival of the politically neutral chief Feng. It is the connivance of the police that makes it possible for a man of position like Butterthwaite to drink after hours, for the club to run. According to Crick, *“[p]olitics [...] can be simply defined as the activity by which differing interests within a given unit of rule are conciliated by giving them a share in power in proportion to their importance to the welfare and the survival of the whole community”* (16-17). Although the town in the play indicates a corrupted community as a whole, all the mentioned characters can be observed protecting their own interests while sharing a certain power in politics of the town. More than the role the mayor plays in the local government, both Sweetman and the police have their own importance in the political system.

Although he does not belong to a particular political party, Blomax is also a crucial name for the political balance that the system compromises. Blomax is a corrupted town doctor exemplifying corruption in different level, a choral figure

explaining the actions in the play to some extent, an interpreter for the audience and/or the readers, a manipulator, and a good friend of Butterthwaite who betrays him at the end. In general, he is the embodiment of the corruption in the town as he also admits: *"I am a corrupted individual: for emperor needs to have his dark occult councillor: if you like, his fixer, his manipulator – me. I do it because I enjoy it"* (I.i.123). According to Clayton *"Blomax, then, serves a triple role – Greek chorus, Machiavelli and personal friend to Butterthwaite"* (161). Thus, he is quite an essential character. He is also quite successful since he manages to find his way within the system. In other words, he makes himself a part of the political system and exists as a political entity.

The play has a crowded cast heavily depending on male characters; however, there are also significant female characters who contribute to the plot such as Gloria the daughter of Blomax Wellesley, the manageress of the Copacabana Club, Mrs. Boocock, and Mrs Sweetman. In his interview with Gaston, Arden narrates an anecdote with an actress: *"It was pointed out to me by accident, by an actress taking part in the German production of The Workhouse Donkey, that I had written some very poor parts for women in that play. This actress said, 'You haven't really written good roles for us women.'"* (163). When these three female characters are analysed, it can be observed that the German actress is not absolutely right in her remarks. Gloria has an important function within the plot line for invalidating Butterthwaite's aim to reveal the club's interests with Sweetman. She is a name who acts within the system as well. Dermiş also touches upon her function in the play: *"The affair between the superintendent and the directness Gloria is an evident image of the town's toleration of a limited corruption"* (66). Thus, it can be argued that she is powerful and functioning in the sense that she is a part of the system. Both Mrs. Sweetman and Mrs. Boocock act within the political system of the town. According to McKernie *"[t]he wives of both Sweetman and Boocock are equally adept at involving themselves in the action of the System in order to aid their husbands"* (159). With the collaboration of Gloria and Wellesley, Mrs. Sweetman comes up with the issue of Butterthwaite's gambling debt to bring him down. Thus, both wives present a political mind to some extent. Moreover, they are as corrupted as their husbands are for their own benefits.

As another significant female in the play, Wellesley, through her choices, exemplifies politics. In the play, Wellesley, as an outsider to some extent since she comes to town to meet her father, is forced to take a stand with the disguise of

choosing a husband partly to protect her father. As opposed to Feng who chooses to be loyal to his position and its responsibilities rather than favouring a particular political side, Wellesley makes political decisions. She rejects Feng's proposal because he rejects releasing Blomax from jail. Feng is caught between what is true to his working ethics and what is expected normal in the corrupted politics of the town. Yet, Feng puts his conscience before his feelings for Wellesley remaining uncorrupted. In other words, he follows his integrity rather than his love for Wellesley when she asks him to release her father. Although both Wellesley and Feng are outsiders in the corrupted society of the town, they have different attitudes towards the society. While Feng remains loyal to his position and uncorrupted, Wellesley, on the other hand, adapts to the society and their life full of corruptions. As an example to this situation, Wellesley's demand from Feng to release her father affects her decision on not to accept Feng's proposal. Moreover, she decides to marry with Young Sweetman just because corruption is the generally accepted situation of the society as she declares to him: *"Don't worry, I will marry you: because I don't have to respect you and I don't have to continually involve myself in the curls and contortions of an extraordinary code of ethics"* (III.iv.224). She joins the people of the town and their established principles since Wellesley easily figures out the requirements of the local politics. She is aware that she can survive if she plays the game according to its own rules. As Crick indicates, *"[p]olitics allows various types of power within a community to find some reasonable level of mutual tolerance and support"* (25). Wellesley, representing another type of power within the political system of the town, alters herself according to the politics of the town. Consequently, through her choice of a husband, she strikingly draws attention to the corrupted system of the town. In this regard, it can be also claimed that she has political awareness towards the system unlike Feng himself. She adapts herself to the political corruptness as a way of survival in the society.

Not only Wellesley's position in the political system of the town, but also remaining characters' contribution to the corruption in politics also represent the interesting analogy Crick comes up with. He argues that

Politics, then, like sexuality is an activity which must be carried on; one does not create it or decide to join in—one simply becomes more and more aware that one is involved in it as part of the human condition. One can only forsake, renounce or do without it by doing oneself (which can easily be done—and on the highest principles) unnatural injury (21).

In the play, as a condition of living in the town, the characters can be observed as they are vigorously involved in the political system. As briefly touched upon, Wellesley is such an example that, Unlike Feng, she contributes to politics of the town to be carried on as it is. The threat Feng poses for the system can be further explained by Crick and his analogy of sexuality and politics:

Sexuality, granted, is a more widespread activity than politics, but again the suspicion remains that the man who can live without either is either acting the beast or aping the god. Both have much the same character of necessity in essence and unpredictability in form. Both are activities which must be carried on if the community is to perpetuate itself at all, both serve this wider purpose, and yet both can become enjoyable ends in themselves for any one individual (20).

Yet, Feng's idea of politics as away from both political parties and his subordination to law above everything harm the political system as much as the corrupted politicians.

In terms of the technical qualities of the play, it presents thirteen different settings ranging from public spaces to domestic ones. Each setting is carefully structured to serve the play. Malick discusses the significance of the setting for Arden as following: “[...] [A] situation is defined and delimited socially so that it acquires a gestic quality in the Brechtian sense of term. Each scene is written in such a way that it foregrounds some socially significant and specific aspect of the dramatized events and relationships” (69). Thus, the play lays out a constant shift between the settings underlying the social structure of the society as well as the political relations. In this regard, the play opens up in a political atmosphere jumping to the private sphere of Sweetman's where only invited upper class members can join. The formal atmosphere is broken as the scene changes into the public scene of the bar in which informal relations between the characters can be observed. Thus, the audience and/or the readers get a chance to be a part of the town and to become one of the residents of the town in order to witness the different sides of the political system.

The involvement of the audience and/or the readers to the political system of the town is also enabled with a minor detail in the play. In his last verse lines, Feng utters the line “*You, sir, and you, your democratic Punch and Judy*” (III.iv.227). Here, Feng refers to the puppet show *Punch and Judy* signifying the way of exercising politics in the town. *Punch and Judy* is a traditional puppet show which

has become a part of British culture over the centuries (Avery 194). The puppet show has been used for political satire, as well as social criticism, through its characters Mr. Punch and his wife Judy. Mr. Punch reminds the character of Butterthwaite through his behaviours in the show which Avery defines as “*Punch not only cocked a snook at the majesty of the law; he also had no reverence for the institution of marriage or the teaching of the Church*” (194). Thus, both characters display extreme qualities against the established norms. In this sense, since it criticizes political system, the play is in some form of a Punch and Judy show. Just like the play, the puppet show is comic in its nature and involves songs and music. Moreover, the counterpart characters of the play are also in quarrel just like Punch and Judy in the show. Thus, the puppet show illustrates the play as a whole. This metaphor also proves that as an outsider of the town, Feng is a successful observer of the true nature of the politics in the town. As an outsider, Feng also represents the audience who watch the same puppet show. Even the Brechtian elements contribute to the audience’s understanding of the play as a Punch and Judy show in which typical characters quarrel with each other to entertain the audience while criticizing the politics distancing the audience from the illusion created. When the play is considered to be a form of Punch and Judy show, the idea of politics in the play, once again correspond to another comment by Crick:

Political activity is a type of moral activity; it is free activity, and it is inventive, flexible, enjoyable and human; it can create some sense of community and yet it is not, for instance, a slave to nationalism; it does not claim to settle every problem or to make every sad heart glad, but it can help some way in nearly everything and, where it is strong, it can prevent the vast cruelties and deceits of ideological rule (136).

Hence, the play presents the small town politics as enjoyable and human as can be experienced in the global level. Moreover, corrupted or not, the play eventually presents a sense of community as well, since Arden suggests that similar things will be experienced in the town, or anywhere else around the world, with another name acting as the mayor.

In conclusion, written in 1963, *The Workhouse Donkey* lays out not only John Arden’s approach towards political issues before he develops a much more radical perspective, but also exemplifies his theatrical style. He borrows medieval festive traditions enriching his play. Although Arden insists in his interviews on the locality of this play, it evidently deals with global issues pointing out the corrupted

political systems. Arden neither makes propaganda of a certain political ideology nor depicts the political arena as black and white. He merely illustrates the corrupted and disfunctioning political systems through his observations. Thus, *The Workhouse Donkey* is a significant play by John Arden for criticising political systems as well as for exemplifying Arden's stylistic importance in post-war British drama.

WORKS CITED

- Arden, John. *Plays: One*. "Author's Preface." London: Methuen, 1977. 112-114.
- . *Plays: One*. "The Workhouse Donkey." London: Methuen, 1977. 115-236.
- . *To Present the Pretence: Essays on the Theatre and Its Public*. London: Methuen, 1977.
- Avery, Gillian. "The Punch and Judy Show." *Children's Literature* 15 (1987): 193-196. *Project Muse*. Web. 16 March 2016.
- Clayton, Philip Terry. "The Drama of John Arden as Communal Ritual." U of Cincinnati, 1973. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*. Web. 07 March 2016.
- Crick, Bernard. *In Defence of Politics*. U of Chicago P, 1962.
- Dermiş, Hüseyin H. *The Conflict Between the Individual and Society in John Arden's Commercial Plays*. MA Thesis. Hacettepe University, 1987. Ankara: Hacettepe University, 1987.
- Gaston, Georg and John Arden. "An Interview with John Arden." *Contemporary Literature* 32.2 (1991): 147-170. *JSTOR*. Web. 08 March 2016.
- Malick, Javed. *Toward a Theater of the Oppressed: The Dramaturgy of John Arden*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1995.
- McKernie, Grant Fletcher. *Politics in Modern British Drama: The Plays of Arnold Wesker and John Arden*. Diss. Ohio State University, 1972. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*. Web. 07 March 2016.
- Wager, Walter, Simon Trussler and Kelly Morris. "Who's for a Revolution?: Two Interviews with John Arden." *The Tulane Drama Review* 11.2 (1966): 41-53. *JSTOR*. Web. 07 March 2016.