



شبكة المعلومات الجامعية
التوثيق الإلكتروني والميكروفيلم

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم



MONA MAGHRABY



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Dramatizing Power: A Reading of Selected Plays by Alan Ayckbourn with Reference to the Works of Michel Foucault

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The word power is originally derived from the Latin word *posse*, which means “to be able” (“power.” *English Oxford Living Dictionaries*). Power is most commonly defined as the ability or capacity to do something, to produce an effect or to act in a particular way. However, when the word power is uttered, what immediately comes to mind is *domination, authority, constraint, repression, or control* over someone’s behaviors or actions. For this reason, power has often been identified as a negative notion, i.e. a thing that only an individual, or a group, possess as an advantage over the rest of the community, using it as a means of accomplishing one’s goals and repressing the desires of the rest. Contrary to such pejorative connotation of the term, the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) identifies power as a positive notion. The most succinct definition of his ideas about power would be his designation of it as *a transformative capacity*.

John Gaventa (1949 -) the political sociologist, educator and civil society practitioner, recognizes the radical change of conceiving power in Foucault’s works in comparison to the preceding approaches in dealing with the concept. He asserts that Foucault’s perception of power cannot be integrated easily with the previous concepts and notions. He explains how Foucault’s power is “embodied and enacted rather than possessed”. It forms individuals rather than being employed by them. Power is not necessarily repressive, it is a necessary, productive and positive force in society (1-2).

Foucault dedicated his life to the research and the analysis of power. He focused on the relations of power among individuals in general, and, between them and society, especially institutions, in particular. His lifetime work concludes that: when an institution exerts its power on an individual, it is the latter who chooses to affirm their identity and resistance to the effects of such power. Consequently, Foucault did not believe power to be a thing that the institution possesses and uses to oppress individuals. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault criticizes the notion that power is oppressive. He advocates that even in the extreme cases, oppression does not mean that the individual becomes totally repressed and his actions utterly prohibited. In fact, such an individual would still be productive and cause change (224).

This thesis handles the theme of power in a selection of Ayckbourn's plays, with reference to Foucault's works. It studies how power is represented in the plays, and analyzes its positive effects of resistance. It also investigates the power of discourse as it gets utilized in the plays for the purpose of changing the power relations through resistance. Using Foucault's concepts of knowledge, power, resistance and discourse, the researcher focuses on the characters' transformation inside the three plays under study.

This Introduction is divided into two parts. The first part introduces the playwright Alan Ayckbourn, whereas the second part provides a literature review and presents the research questions.

The Playwright Alan Ayckbourn

Sir Alan Ayckbourn (1939 -) was born in London in 1939, and has worked in theatre all his life. He has undertaken various roles including actor, writer and director, encouraged by his mentor Stephen Joseph, who founded the Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough. Almost all of his plays, written to date, were first performed in this theatre, of which he was the Artistic Director until his retirement in 2009. Some of his plays were subsequently produced in other theaters, such as the West End or at the National Theatre (Gatie, “Sir Alan Ayckbourn”).

Ayckbourn is a prolific writer. He is one of the world’s preeminent dramatists. He has written more than eighty plays (Murgatroyd, “Alan Ayckbourn”). He has won numerous awards for his plays, which have been translated into 35 languages, and are performed worldwide on stage and television. Seven of his plays have been performed on Broadway Theatres (Gatie, “Sir Alan Ayckbourn”). He has received many honorary degrees: in 1986, he was appointed “Freeman of the Borough of Scarborough” and in 1987 a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE). He was also knighted for his services to theatre in 1997 (Gatie, “Sir Alan Ayckbourn”).

Ayckbourn is a modern British dramatist. In 1969, he began his career as a playwright “with comedies of sexual intrigue and misunderstanding” (Leggatt 269). As he continued, the comedy darkened as his plays “exposed the cruelties of marriage and the emptiness of the characters’ lives” (269). Ayckbourn has stated that he likes to write “comedies with dark shadows or dark comedies with patches of sunlight ... There’s a lot of funny stuff, but it’s about human nature – and there’s darkness in that” (“Ayckbourn Influences: Playwriting Influences”).

In 1981, Ayckbourn’s focus started to shift from the domestic and broadened to the state of society. However, he still wrote some adult plays, in which fantasies turn sinister. The range of his genre expanded to include “futuristic science fiction and the thriller” (269). He has also written a number of children plays, for which he prefers the term family plays, since “he wants the whole family to enjoy the play at different levels” (270). It is important to note that it is often that when labels are applied to his work, they tend to “come unglued” (270). Therefore, it would be better to focus on his plays themselves rather than trying to label them. “Ayckbourn formally declared that in the future he would simply call his plays plays, and leave the pigeonholing to others” (270).

Ayckbourn constantly challenges himself. He persistently experiments not just with genre but also with the basic conditions of theatre itself; that is

time, place and action, in the sense of storytelling, which is defined as “the activity of writing, telling, or reading stories” (“storytelling”, *Cambridge Dictionary*). In his plays, Ayckbourn is not so concerned with pointing morals, as much as he likes to show situations, play with possibilities, and in the process raise the audience’s awareness of the conditions of both theatre and life (Leggatt 271, 277).

Ayckbourn’s Contemporaries

The 1980s, the most prominent dramatists included Michael Frayn (1933 -), Alan Bennett (1934 -), Tom Stoppard (1973 -) and Ayckbourn. As John Bull noted in *Stage Right* (1994), the works of these writers represent a complete retreat from “the idea that theatre could function as a diagnostic tool for those engaged in progressive politics” (Pattie 390). On the contrary, the work of Harold Pinter (1930 – 2008) and Caryl Churchill (1938 -) “bucked the trend” (390). Pinter’s plays were openly political. Churchill’s work increasingly scrutinized “war, genocide and man-made threats to future survival” (390). Alan Ayckbourn, on the other hand, has been described by Harold Clurman, in the *Nation*, as “a master hand at turning the bitter apathy, the stale absurdity which most English playwrights now find characteristic of Britain's lower-middle-class existence into hilarious comedy” (“Alan Ayckbourn”).

Literature Review

So far, to the knowledge of the author of this research, there has been no academic research published on the plays selected for study in this thesis. In 1986, Bernard F. Dukore wrote an article discussing the characters and comedy in Ayckbourn's play *Woman In Mind*¹ (1985). In 1993, Timothy Wood Slover wrote a Ph.D. dissertation about the evolution of the domestic themes in Ayckbourn's *Time And Time Again* (1971), *Absurd Person Singular* (1972), *Sisterly Feelings* (1979), *Just Between Ourselves* (1976), *Woman In Mind*, and *The Revengers' Comedies* (1989). Also, in 1993, another Ph.D. dissertation, written by Gerhard Schulte, discussed the unity of actions, times, and places, in Ayckbourn's *How The Other Half Loves* (1969), *The Norman Conquests* trilogy (1973), *Bedroom Farce* (1975), *Taking Steps* (1979), *Invisible Friends* (1989), *Woman In Mind*, *A Small Family Business* (1987), and *Wildest Dreams* (1991). In 1994, Robert Russell Moore submitted an M.A. thesis discussing marriage as a social metaphor in Ayckbourn's plays *Family Circle* (1970), *Way Upstream* (1981), *Intimate Exchanges* (1982) and *Woman In Mind*. In 2003, Judy Kem published an article about Alain Resnais's *Coeurs*

¹ The titles of all of Ayckbourn's plays, whether mentioned in the Literature Review, or selected in the present study, have the first letter in their words capitalized. This goes for articles, prepositions, and conjunctions. Ayckbourn's titles do not follow the rules of punctuation, but this is how he presents them.

(2006) as an adaptation to Ayckbourn's *Private Fears In Public Places* (2004).

A few more theses, dissertations, and academic journals have been written on Ayckbourn's earlier plays, especially those of the 70s and 80s, of which some are mentioned above, but none has discussed the plays selected in this thesis.

On the other hand, there has been many academic articles published, which apply Foucault's ideas on literary works. In 2004, Don Latham wrote *Discipline and Its Discontents: A Foucauldian Reading of The Giver*. In 2010, Sima Farshid and Jala Sokhanvar published *A Foucauldian Reading of Morrison's Novels*. In 2015, there was Abolfazl Ahmadiania's *Power, Knowledge, Resistance: A Foucauldian Reading on Bertolt Brecht's Mother Courage and Her Children*, and Mahboobeh Davoodifar and Moussa Pourya AslIn's *Power in Play: A Foucauldian Reading of A.O. Soyinka's The Trials of Brother Jero*. Moreover, recently, in 2020, Narges Raoufzadeh, Fatemeh Sadat Basirizadeh, and Shiva Zaheri Birgani published *A Foucauldian Reading: Power in Awakening by Kate Chopin*. However, none was published on the three plays selected in this study.

The researcher intends to fill this gap through this examination of Foucault's concepts of power in Alan Ayckbourn's plays *This Is Where We Came In* (1990), *My Very Own Story* (1991) and *The Boy Who Fell Into A Book* (1998).

Research Questions

The study aims at answering the following questions: How is the theme of power and resistance reflected in Ayckbourn's *This Is Where We Came In?* (1990); How is the interrelated relationship of power and knowledge portrayed in *My Very Own Story?* (1991) And what is the effect of this interrelatedness on the characters' development in the play?; How does discourse embody the actions of power and resistance in *The Boy Who Fell Into A Book?* (1998). The selection of these three plays is based on their common handling of the theme of power, and their representation of its resistance through discourse.

Foucault's works which provide the theoretical frame of the analysis are *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (1978), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977* (1980), *The Subject and Power* (1982), *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977–1984s* (1988), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1991), and *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews 1961-1984* (1996).

The theoretical frame highlights specific key concepts. These are the productivity of power, its relationship with knowledge, power as relations and as a mode of action, the necessity of the freedom of the object of power, government, resistance, and discourse. Drawing on *Michel Foucault*, the