

ALIENATION AND LONELINESS AS THE MAJOR THEME OF JOHN OSBORNE'S PLAY "LOOK BACK IN ANGER"

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to present disillusionment, frustration and rebelliousness of post war .Jimmy Porter has been regarded as the spokesman of that war generation what after all is the reason for Jimmy's anger and resentment and what are his grievances? Jimmy seems to be a rebel against the society which had betrayed the young people and against an older generation which had let the founder people down. It increased our understanding of human nature and of a particular human situation.

John Osborne made his mark as a dramatist with the staging of his very first play " Look Back in Anger" at the Royal court theatre in 1956, and the play has been regarded by competent critics as turning point in the history of modern English drama. This young play right come from working class stock and so eminently fitted to express the emotional mood of the English youth after world war-II. With the publication of "Look Back in Anger", John Osborne came be known as the "angry young man". This label was both his good fortune and misfortune. The play marked the beginning of a new drama and it became a talking point in a way that had no precedent. Osborne has honestly explored in the play the ambiguities and weaknesses of anger. Anger is very changeable emotion changing with colour and mood unnoticed. Anger is good when it is selfless and allied to use full action and evil when it is selfish or frustrated. Jimmy Porter's anger hovers between these two poles. A.E. Dyson says,

"Jimmy porter, one is confronted with a man whose anger undoubted starts in human idealism and the desire that men should be more honest, more alive, more human than they normally are." ¹

As the play opens we find Jimmy speaking in a discontented, restless manner. He is discontented with Sunday newspaper, and he is dissatisfied with his friend cliff, Jimmy is also waging a war against class- distinctions. He himself comes from a working class family, while his wife comes from the affluent middle class. Alison's parents had opposed her marriage to Jimmy and Jimmy has never been able to forget this fact even though four years have passed. He

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is dissatisfied with his routine kind of life and with the behaviour of both his wife and his friend. He described the dullness of Sunday in the following manner-

“Always the same rituals, Reading the papers, drinking tea, ironing. A few more hours, and another week gone, our youth is sleeping away.”²

Most of the comments which Jimmy makes in persons and things are witty, though his wit is sarcastic and bitter. He specially shows his bitter with in his comments on his wife and her relations. As soon as the play opens, he tries to provoke Alison by criticizing her in a sarcastic manner for her remaining silent. He says to her-

“You can talk, can’t you? You can express on opinion. Or does the white woman’s burden make it impossible to think.”³

Later in the play, he says to cliff about her,-

“Don’t think I could provoke her. Nothing I could do provokes her. Not even if I were to drop dead.”⁴

In the play Osborne has honestly explained the ambiguities and weakness of anger and what is control and memorable in the play is the sound of a voice. For instance, in the famous speech in which Jimmy laments that people are no longer able to die for good causes. What is communicated is an unusual complex which is evident throughout the play. Jimmy’s character is so complex, it is insufficient to dismiss him. There is certainly a strong connection between the individual and psychological problems he faces, and the problems of a whole generation. Jimmy is an example of those people who, born into the working class, were educated out of it but were unable to find an acceptable role in the complexities of the English class system. The dramatic irony of the final speech in which Jimmy prays that Alison may conceive a child that will die, is an appealing image,-

“If I could have a child, and it would die. Let it grow, let a recognisable human face emerge from that little mass of India-rubber and wrinkles (she retreats away from him) please if only I could watch your face that. I wonder if you might even become a recognisable human being yourself, but I doubt it.”⁵

This is a terrifying speech, while his wish that she should have a child which would die possesses irony because subsequently his child does die even before it is born.

If we consider psychologically, jimmy is not the epitome of the angry young man of his generation. He is rather a very exceptional individual, a tortured soul, at war with itself and with the world, an important soul which, like Hamlet, finds the time out of joint, but has not the capacity to set it right. It is only a deeper, psychological study which makes us realize that his angry tirades outburst are not chaotic, but are psychologically motivated.

Many of Jimmy’s impressive tirades are no doubt concerned with the debased values of modern life, but the action of the play is only indirectly influenced by such social questions and the class system. Alison surely describes Jimmy’s invasion of her upper class world as part of the class war. One principle reason for his own working class origin and the upper middle class to which his wife belongs. In other words he is conscious of class distinctions of which he strongly disapproves.

There is certainly a strong connection between the individual and psychological problems he faces All the problems of a whole generation of people in the early 1950’s. The

spread of educational opportunities, which on the surface might have been seen as only desirable, had an unfortunate side-effect. Jimmy is an example of those people who born into the working class, were educated out of it but were unable to find an acceptable role in the complexities of the English class system. In the flowed world of post-war England, these people had no place to go. As a result, Jimmy Porter sentimentalises the working class because he is no longer part of it and belongs to no world. There is no route back for him into the working class world suspect since his mother and father are clearly belongs to working class.

When Helena asks Alison why she married him, she gives a description of Jimmy which recaptures the fascination, and the complexity of her original response to him that captures the heart of Alison and she at once feels fascinated by him,-

“I met him at a party. I remember it so clearly I was almost twenty one. The men there all looked as if they distrusted him, and as far the women they were all intent on showing their contempt for this rather odd creature----- he’d come to the party on a bicycle, he told me and there was all over his dinner Jacket.”⁶

The language which Alison uses when she talks of Jimmy illustrates very clearly her confused response to the situation, she finds herself in. She is aware that her fascination is potentially self destructive from the start, however Alison understands quite clearly that Jimmy cannot really ever become part of her world, nor even really accept her. As she says-

“We could become little creatures with little furry brains. Full of dumb, in-complicated affection for each other, playful careless creatures symphony for people who could not bear pain of being human beings any longer, and now, even they are dead, poor little silly animals they are all loved and no brains.”⁷

Here Alison shows that she is aware that no woman can ever really satisfy Jimmy. There is no tenderness in their relationship, not even the possible false escape of squirrels and bears. Their passion is only an aspect of their enmity, a mutually inescapable challenge. And before long they openly acknowledge this.

“You made a good enemy, didn’t you? What they call a worthy opponent You stood up and came out to meet me.”⁸

The audience is drawn into a sense of how much Alison, really does understands of the impossibility of her situation, and the source for this in Jimmy’s personality. At this point, Alison shows a depth of understanding that Helena will never be able to achieve. She is aware of the escapist nature of the fantasy, and the way in which it serves to allow them to express a love for each other which they cannot express with their social, intellectual and personal differences are visible to each other. As she says-

“We could become little fury creatures with little furry brains. Full of dumb, uncomplicated affection for each Playful careless creatures in their own cosy zoo for two. A silly symphony for people who could not bear pain of being human beings any longer. And now, even they are dead, poor little silly animals they are all loved and no brains.”⁸

Even here Alison shows that she is aware that no woman can ever really satisfy Jimmy. His education has forced him out of one would and yet simultaneously barred him from accepting the alternative world of Alison’s family.

Jimmy's account of his father's death which follows is moving and revelatory but it is not offered by Osborne as a full explanation of Jimmy's position. We are not meant to take Jimmy's statements at their simple face value. By this time in the play the complex interaction of character and event has provided us with a means of viewing Jimmy's rhetoric through alternative eyes. He looks back in anger because he cannot find his way back, except by a process of sentimental idealizing, to a world where beliefs can be simply accepted and acted upon. All the complicated information he gleans from the 'Posh' Sunday newspaper serves only to make the possibility of any significant choice of action recede farther and farther away. His awareness and sensitivity serve only to expose in acts of senseless cruelty the weakness and inadequacy of those around him. When he finally destroyed all the possible shelters there will be nothing left to destroy but himself.

Jimmy's outburst against Alison which follows, his desire to be able to stand up in your tears, and splash about in them and sing is a demand that she strip away the last defences and join him wholly in his agony and despair. He wants Alison to give away her refuges too – her silence, her ability to accept life, her links with her secure past yet even when he makes this demand he is aware that there is nowhere this can lead except to their mutual destruction. Alison acknowledges this in her images of Jimmy as raider and barbarian.

This point is reinforced at end of Act two when she seeks to explain to her father the nature of the attraction between Jimmy and herself. Helena in Act two scene One for refusing to face up to the ugly problems of the twentieth century and retreating into a vision of an idyllic rural past and yet he too would often appear to be guilty of a similar retreat. His escapist fantasy with Alison reflects just this process as does his obsession with the romanticized vision of working class solidarity that he associates with the inter war period Jimmy fails to make any clear comment on how the future might be changed Look Back in Anger illustrates the essentially modern problem of a loss of certitude. In this sense it is as much concerned with the past as with the future. Osborne, as a writer is clearly deeply involved with an idea of the past which is often romantic and occasionally sentimental. His patriotism, and his sense of the importance of traditions, which strengthens in later plays is present as early as this first success. But in the overall dramatic context it seems to be effectively balanced by genuine anguish which reinforces Jimmy porter's attacks and which finally allows us to view him, if not as an attractive figure or even a very clear sighted one, at least as a man who is driven by a genuine desire to render an account of himself in compromisingly human terms.

Finally the answer might indicate Osborne has succeeded in creating a very complex, individual character whose personal failures expresses many of the predominant concerns of his time. Jimmy's demand for a moral idealism is symptomatic of his awareness failed, and that nothing beyond a pragmatic and opportunistic vision has replaced them.

The question turns on the extent to which we believe that the other characters are realized in and through stage action. Alison certainly develops considerably as a character and the need that she and Jimmy have for each other is clearly shown to affect Jimmy as much as her. By the end of the play she and Jimmy are shown to be locked in a very complex personal relationship which has fundamentally altered both of them. Alison has been forced to accept the loss of her assured values and Jimmy has been forced to face the cost in personal terms of the desire for an absolute commitment to honesty and moral openness.

The class conflict that colours Jimmy's outlook on life so profoundly responsible for ruining his career. An educated man like him has been unable to find an occupation better studied to his education and intellect than the entirely unintelligent task of running a sweet shop his frustration has its roots in his meaningless occupation and his constant conflicts with his wife most famous speeches from, "Look Back in Anger" when he says.

"I suppose people of our generation aren't able to die for good cause any longer. We had all that done for us, in the thirties and forties, when we were still kids. They aren't any good, brave cause left."⁹

Thus a study of Osborne's play reveals his pre occupation with a number of themes. But all is coloured by his writing class orientation and this make his work distinctive and different.

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Look Back in Anger study guide contains a biography of John Osborne, literature essays, quiz questions, major themes, characters, and a full summary and analysis. Osborne's play was the first to explore the theme of the "Angry Young Man." This term describes a generation of post-World War II artists and working class men who generally ascribed to leftist, sometimes anarchist, politics and social views. According to cultural critics, these young men were not a part of any organized movement but were, instead, individuals angry at a post-Victorian Britain that refused to acknowledge their social and class alienation. Jimmy Porter is often considered to be literature's seminal example of the angry young man. In 1956 John Osborne's Look Back in Anger forcefully signaled the start of a very different dramatic tradition. Taking as its hero a furiously voluble working-class man and replacing staid mannerliness on stage with emotional rawness, sexual candour, and social rancour, Look Back in Anger initiated a move toward John Osborne, playwright and film producer whose Look Back in Anger (performed 1956) ushered in a new movement in British drama and made him known as the first of the Angry Young Men. Tony Richardson's Theatre production of John Osborne's Look Back in Anger (1956), the play that became The play Look Back in Anger was interesting for a number of reasons. The main reason being that it echoed the feelings of alienation and anomie felt by the ordinary man in post-imperialistic Britain. For me, the play was representative of a time when British control and power over the rest of the world was on the wane. With their best already behind them, the British were trying to find a new purpose. The character Colonel Redfern represents this longing for the past. Colonel Redfern was a comma The play Look Back in Anger was interesting for a number of reasons. The main reason being that it