

Look Back in Anger as a Play of Angry Young Man Movement

Garima

Asst. Prof. Department of English

GCW Madlauda, Panipat

Abstract

It is an established fact that in the late 1950s a number of young writers, among whom A. Wesker, Kingsley Amis, and above all, John Osborne who are worthy of detailed consideration, had an immense success in Britain. They were grouped under the label of “Angry Young Men”. They gave voice to the young generation who, dissatisfied with the world they lived in, wanted to create their own way of living. They struggled against the Establishment and some of its values: family, patriotism, the Established Church and culture. They began to cry out against conventions, tradition and authoritarianism. They felt cheated as the promises of the Welfare State had revealed to be empty: society fed them well, educated them well, but still kept them trapped in a class system that opened the doors to the rich public school members of the upper-middle class and kept them closed in the faces of the members of the working class.

Paper

The post-war Britain of nineteen fifty is largely believed to be a free society, characterized by the widespread affluence and political stability. Political discontent become the thing of past; the new Britain was marked by a spirit of euphoria, and an acute emphasis on the established British ruling class traditions.

A generation of new men was emerged and the writers like Kingsley Amis and John Braine started writing around 1953, but their importance was not recognized until 1956 when John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* was hailed as a landmark achievement in the history of English literature.

John Osborne belongs to a group of dramatists who makes a powerful expression of the disillusionment sense of defeatism, nihilism or what Soren Abby Kierkegaard has rightly called the angst in the post-war society. *Look Back in Anger* is a superb work of art where we find the two important streams of modern drama converging in to a single vision of life; the theatre of absurd, and the angry Youngman, both blending and harmonizing into what Martin Esslin roughly calls, the theatre of angry absurdist.

Like Samuel Beckett and Edward Albee, John Osborne does not adhere to the conventions and convictions of the past decade which are a logical connection between the situations and persons. Osborne does not highlights the utter futility of human existence like the angry young man dramatists where all vital causes are lost leaving man mentally disorganized and frustrated self.

The writers of the nineteen fifty show their protagonists protesting against the richer sections of society, but their protest lacks moral substance and despite of showing their rebellion, their restlessness is actually a manifestation of their egoism. Like Jim Dixon of Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim*, and Joe Lampton of John Braine's *Room at the Top*, Jimmy Porter of *Look Back in Anger* is also the angry

young man who represent the whole generation of disenchanted youth because heroes like them fire the imagination of young generation as they feel the pulse of the age; and capture the mood of the moment, mood that is one of despair and disillusionment, failure and frustration.

This is what we find in the character, personality, career and interpersonal relations of jimmy porter, the heroic hero of the play look back in anger. By making a radical departure from the traditional norms, Osborne divides the play in to three acts instead of five acts in which almost a static situation is expressed and explored to delineate the anger and frustration of the hero vis-à-vis the passive and docile demeanor of his wife Allison porter; and innocence, harmless and hatred sarcasm of his friend, Cliff Lewis.

At the outset of the play, Jimmy is shown criticizing and even debunking the posh newspapers with their trash and meaningless information like the appeal of Bishop of Brimley to contribute generosity for the making of hydrogen bomb. Jimmy is also angry with the monotony of Sunday newspapers where the news items speak of the religious Janatism of a lady who has broken her rib for the so called of holio cause.

In fact, jimmy represents all the important existences, social and political traits and trends of the post-war English – a drift towards anarchy, instinctive leftish-ness, surrealist sense of humour, casual promiscuity, and bankruptcy of noble and brave causes. The uneasy discontent and frustration embody disillusionment and rebelliousness which is translated by Osborne in terms of jimmy's relationships

with his wife, Allison, his friend, cliff, his mother-in-law, his father-in-law, Colonel Redfern, followed by Helena.

At the social level, Jimmy is waging a war against class-distinction as he comes from a working-class, and his wife from a middle-class family as he evident through jimmy, and Hugh considers it as a hostage who is also called as lady pusillanimous with the passion of python. So, the whole of the play is a powerful indictment of the things, persons, and institutions ranging their hatred for ringing church bells, posh-Sunday newspapers white tiled university and midnight invocations to the Coptic goddess of fertility by the people of midland.

Albeit, scholars like A.E Dyson analyses the play in terms of author's self-portrait, but John Russell Taylor finds jimmy as an embodiment of the completely bored with life and in order to give a new meaning to his life and existence, he involves himself in reading newspaper, and even playing on the trumpet and, that is why, Jimmy is not only a folk-hero like the Byronic heroes, but also a cult-figure like Jim Dixon of Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim*.

That is why, jimmy tries his hands in so many things like journalism, advertising, vacuum-cleaner, organizing a jazz band and now as a sweet-vendor who considers his wife as an outdated because of her being chased and moral, and Helena Charles as an expert in the economics of supernaturalism who look forward to the past. In fact, jimmy is not completely disenchanted and disillusioned with his wife and family, but also has a moral concept of his own in where he cares for the virtues of

fidelity and solidarity which he finds only in his friend cliff and not in Helena and Allison.

Jimmy porter is, in fact, a moralist and political neutralist, expending his energy in avoiding social commitment. He is, at his best, a romantic and a political context, inflamed by his interests and causes that are outside him. His emotional outbursts are the result of his psychological resentments and are never aimed at any concrete achievements.

According to Lindsey Anderson, both *Look Back in Anger*, and *The Entertainer*, are dense with social and political topicalities on which john Osborne explores a complex psychological and social perspectives in the form of a powerful and superb vision of despair, disillusionment, disgust and nihilism which express and illustrate the dominant moods of the post-war English society of nineteen fifty.

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