

## PROBLEM OF CLASS IN JOHN OSBORNE'S *LOCK BACK IN ANGER*

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John Osborn's *Lock Back in Anger* is one of the most famous play. The play seems to be a response of unprivileged British youth to the structure and spirit of the welfare state. The vitality of the play lies in the expression of the anger and perplexity of the younger generation, represented by Jimmy Porter .Osborne seems to have summed up with remarkable effectiveness, the case of these young men who were having a sort of marginal existence, economic as well as spiritual, in a affluent society eager to advertise its progress and high sense of justice. The hollowness of the contemporary British Society has been forcefully projected before the British Public, in bullying Alison Jimmy is certainly getting on easy revenge on the class he detests. Alison thinks that Jimmy treats her as a 'Hostage' from the ruling class. Jimmy a working class intellectual, has a hatred for the middle class or ruling class and this becomes evident from the behavior of Jimmy and Hugh at the parties of these middle class people. John Osborne successfully "caught the mood of 1950s with uncanny accuracy: even the confusion in *Look Back in Anger* represented real confusion among real young men at the time". { Daiches 1114) It was with this play that Osborne made his reputation as dramatist. *Look Back in Anger* Spoke, "for a generation it might be added, to grow up the shadow of the atom bomb and in doing so brought a new vitality to English drama" (Daiches1115) the play *Look Back in Anger* is a reaction to the social and moral deterioration of his times. Osborne was acutely conscious of the class division in the British society and its repercussions on the lives of sensitive individuals, especially those who come from the lower section. In the play Osborne exhibits the working class of his period who had been promise a classless society with equal educational and economic opportunities, but was discouraged by the still intact class structure existing in the society.

1950 saw the recovery of the British economy and a general improvement in the living standards .Along with Britain's improved economic condition; came state support for the arts, since greater attention could now be given to them and to leisure industries. One important development was the National Theatre Act of 1949, which provided for a new theatre to be financed and built by the Labor government..State intervention in the economy through or control such as bringing the trade unions directly into the government ensured that greater equality, both of income and of opportunities for employment, the prime concern of the time. Behind this change was the experience of the war years, not only those of the recently ended war but also the earlier one i.e. the First World War. The changes were as desirable by all the political parties except by some belongings to the upper and middle classes who stood to lose by them.

The policies of the welfare state, when put into practice, resulted in a distinct change in the social structure of Britain. The term "working class" itself becomes a vague category since more and better paid jobs had resulted in increasing social mobility. Common styles of living with similar housing food and clothing, as well as the common forms of entertainment provided

by the mass media, especially television, replaced the former class distinctions between the classes. Another major change that affected all levels of society in both private and public spheres come about as a result of many women choosing to retain the jobs they had to take up during the war, and a large number choosing to work in areas than the traditional ones of teaching and nursing, though housework did still remain the woman's charge. These new realities and ideals resulted in a certain amount of class tension. Most ordinary people were now letter off than ever before , but at the expense of a minority who saw them as a threat .With the increasing presently and stability of the working classes, the 'old condition of England' changed.

Social conflicts however, remained and were heightened by these economic developments resulting into disillusionment. The disillusionment remained however aimless and undefined, taking no form of direct political protest and this inaction was in itself cause for discontent. The question that what place the traditional values of patriotism, loyalty to family, and chivalry to women had in the social order became the contemporary problem.

Look Back in Anger is the story of jimmy porter, his wife Alison, his friend Cliff, and Alison's friend Helena. The action of the play takes place in flat in a town in the English Midlands. The occupants of this flat are jimmy porter, his wife Alison, and his friend Cliff Lewis Who is a Welshman, Both jimmy and his friend are of working class origin while Alison comes from an upper-middle class family. All the three are merely of the same age , being about 25. Jimmy is well educated but earning his livelihood by running a sweet stall where he is assisted by Cliff. He is dissatisfied with life. The reason for being dissatisfied is perhaps that the society has not treated him well and he feels that he is unwanted by society. The rigid class system has generated frustration and anger in the hearts and minds of the ordinary Britons who no longer regard the elite and the affluent classes as sacred or indispensable.

The consciousness of class a difference has shaped the attitude of Jimmy towards the press, the Church, the government and educational system and has also damaged the psychological; markup of his mind, Which has influenced his marital relationship. The theme of the play highlights this moral deterioration of the times, through feelings of anger, doubt, hope and fear. Osborne explores the moral texture of his age and dramatizes the chief moral crises and dilemma in Look Back in Anger. It is through the anger of Jimmy porter that Osborne has made the moral crises apparent in the play. Jimmy is shown to be the angry young man defining characteristics of post-war youth.

A great deal of the plays action is centered around the relationship between Jimmy and Alison. To explore the theme of the play the paper would be focusing on only those incidents where the conflict due to the intact class structure is surfaced. The title of the play Look Back in Anger embodies the two themes in it, the action of "The question arises what exactly is to be looking back at. The possible answer could be the warriors as well as the early post war period. Everyone I the play seems to be looking back. Jimmy is looking back in the most angry ad resentful manner, both against the older social system and at the halfhearted attempts at reform.Colonel Red Fern looks back at the same period with a nostalgia and a sense of loss.

The old Edwardian brigades do make their brief little world look pretty tempting. All home-made cakes and croquet, bright ideas, bright uniform, always the same picture: high summer, the long days in the sun, slim volumes of verse, crisp linen, the smell of starch. What a romantic picture, phoney too, of course. It must have rained sometimes. Still, even I regret it somehow, phoney or not. (Osborne 17: Act 1)

Alison also looks back at her post, at the years of her marriage to Jimmy, usually with regret, or with a longing for missed happiness. She sends a

good deal of time recounting these memories of Cliff and Helena and in the process revealing her present state of mind “I keep looking back as far I remember and I can’t think what it was to feel young, really young” (Osborne 28: Act 1)

Jimmy is a complex modern man; neither admirable nor heroic, often draws in fantasy showing weakness of character and exhibiting his limited strength by crushing on other weaknesses. His suffering results from the dominance of bourgeois value system and is intensified by the lack of understanding by them of the working man’s plight. In the opening scene his anger is targeted at the “posh” papers. He criticizes the cruelty and stupidity of a world where as women can be trampled in blind religious fervor. “No body even knew she was there” (Osborne 14 : Act 1). His fury against the absence of care and compassion is explicit once again in the same scene. “Nobody thinks, nobody cares. No believes, no convictions and no enthusiasm” (Osborne 17; Act 1). Kenneth Tynan rightly states the plight of such youth:

He (Jimmy Porter) represented the dismay of many young Britons Whose childhood and adolescence were scarred by the depression at the war; who came of age under a socialist government, yet found, when they went out into the world that the class system was still mysteriously intact (Osborne 193).

At the tender age 10 he becomes aware of the neglect of human dignity by these ruling classes. He keeps a vigil at the bedside of his dying father a man whose involvement in the Spanish Civil War resulted in his being mutilated by certain “god fearing gentlemen” (Osborne 57; Act 2 sc.1) and his family being embarrassed and irritated Jimmy “learnt t in early age what it was to be angry-angry and helpless” (Osborne 58; act 2 sc.1). These early experiences have taught Jimmy too well how the upper classes manipulated the social and political system in lieu of their private vested interests.

Jimmy’s most violent outbursts are directed towards towards his wife Alison .He criticizes her for ironing the clothes endlessly and for being too noisy, saying:

She is so clumsy...The way she jumps on the bed, as if she were stamping on some one’s face and draws the curtains back with a great clatter, in that casually destructive way of hers.It’s like someone launching a battleship.

( Osborne 24; act 1)

Sometimes Jimmy becomes extremely harsh in his criticism and refers to his wife as “ this monument to non attachment” (Osborne 21; act 1) He describes her as “ lady pusillanimous, which means a woman wanting of firmness of mind of small courage or having a little mind, mean spirited ,cowardly, timid of mind”( Osborne 22 ; act 1) .He criticizes Alison for writing letters to her mother in which he is never mentioned as if his name were a dirty word.Indeed, he feels so bitter about Alison’s general attitude towards himself and towards life as a whole that he almost utters a curse upon her in the following words: If only something- something would happen to you, and wake you out of your beauty sleep! If you could have a child ,and it would die”(Osborne 37; act 1) Subsequently , Alison does loose her child through a miscarriage and thus Jimmy’s evil wish is tragically fulfilled. He also describes her sexual passion in such a way as to try to lower her in the estimation of Cliff and in order to hurt her feelings. This is how he describes her passion. She has the passion of a python. She just devours me whole every times,

as if I were some over large rabbit. . .she'll go on sleeping and devouring until there is nothing left of me (Osborne 37 -38; act 1).

Jimmy is also unsparing in his condemnation of Alison's parents and her brother Nigel. And he has very hard things to say about each of them, especially about Alison's mother and brother. He describes Alison's father as a man who can never forget his past list, and as one still casting "well fed glances back to the Edwardian twilight from his comfortable, disenfranchised wilderness"( Osborne 15-16 Act 1).

About Alison's brother, Jimmy has very nasty things to say. Her brother Nigel says Jimmy in a sarcastic manner is just about as vague as he can get without being actually invisible, Jimmy goes on to say : And nothing is more vague about Nigel than his knowledge. His knowledge of life and ordinary human beings is so hazy, he really deserves some sort of decoration for it (Osborn 20; act1).The whole speech in which he condemns Nigel is a masterpiece of rhetoric. Jimmy concludes the by describing both Nigel and Alison with following words of contempt: "Sycophantic, phlegmatic and pusillanimous"( Osborne 21; act 1)

But Jimmy's keenest hatred and bitterest words are reserved for Alison's mother. He makes fun of Alison's mother for having tried to protect Alison against Jimmy's desire to marry her. Alison's mummy, says he, locked up Alison in her eight bed roomed house. And he goes on criticize Alison's Mother in the following manner: There is no limit to what the middle aged mummy will do in the holy crusade against ruffians like me (Osborne 52; act 2 sc.)dead. He states this view as: "she'll pass away, my friends leaving a trail of worms gasping for laxatives behind her-form purgatives to purgatory" (Osborne 52;act 2 sc.1). Jimmy's criticism of Alson's mother is so unpalatable that Helena, after listing to it, being to feel sick.

Jimmy attacks on jimmy and Nigel off-stage who are representative of the Bourgeois class due to mistrust and betrayal.Mary Mccarthy aptly comments jimmy's "profoundest quickest, most natural instinct is mistrust"(Osborne 150)

What jimmy tries to establish through his trades is that for the working class, in the post war class dominated Britain , the social situations continuous to be as vitiated and stagnated as ever. To avenge himself against the enemy class Jimmy holds as 'hostage' of the upper classes. Wherever he condemns Alison for her attitudes he seems to condemn the social order she represents, Jimmy's savage personal attack on Alison as individual reveals that it is the absence of caring which is responsible for his anger. Indifference, a sign of absence of caring enrages him. Alison is not able to show her concern because of his anger. Jimmy's anger is partially responsible for Alison's indifference. Osborne in the speech of Alison very vividly communicates the ideology of Jimmy:

. . . he expects you to be pretty literal about them .Not only about himself and all the things he believes in, his present and his future but his past as well. All the people, he admires and loves, and has loved. The friends he used to know, people I've never even known and probably wouldn't have liked. His father, who died years ago. Even the other women he's loved.  
(42; Act 2 sc 1)

Alison hints that Jimmy's desire for a genuine bond is demonstrated in a number of ways: his anger at his own mother for failing to take his father seriously: his unwillingness to submit to the conventional notion of success; his insistence that people be interested and enthusiastic about life or else be betrayed or ignored by him.



All the major incidents taken up till now refer to the fact that what angered Jimmy were his isolation and alienation and his inability to communicate with any of the characters. His conversations are mainly epithets, which make the other characters indifferent to him; the result is a series of monologues with little or no response from others. The characters project themselves consciously as dramatic being and even their silence are deliberate and have a dramatic purpose.

The only characters about whom Jimmy expresses a favorable opinion are Webster, Madeline, and Cliff. Webster is one of Alison's friends and Jimmy likes him because he gets from Webster what he does not get from others because he has got: bite, edge and drive (Osborne 18 ACT 1). Madeline was Jimmy's mistress at one time. Jimmy had found her to be really alive. He praises Madeline to Cliff and Alison "she had more animation in her little finger than you two put together" (Osborne 18; Act 1)

As for Cliff, Jimmy thinks him to be a loyal and generous friend. He is a man with a big heart and he has got the virtue of solidarity, which is a working class virtue of even Cliff approves :

. . . I suppose he and I think the same about a lot of things, because we are alike in some ways. We both come from working people, if you like,  
(Osborne 30; Act 1)

The theme of the play which reels around the problem resulting out of class distinction is very effectively handled by John Osborne. He uses mainly verbal images that from pictures and evoke scenes. Sometimes these scenes are pleasant, romanticized one like "brief little world" of Edwardian England, but their intention is more often to shock or disgust. The use of Invective as a device of an attack through speech, which abuses, rails against and strongly denounces the object of the attack is very frequently used by Osborne. Almost all the invective in *Look Back in Anger* is Jimmy's directed at different times against the upper and middle classes, Americans. The clergy, the evangelist, the imperialist, politicians, academics, homosexuals women, the older generation and everything i.e. 'phoney' Jimmy's long speeches the function of revealing certain state of mind.

Jimmy's relationship with Helena cannot be overlooked as it is she replaces Allison in Jimmy's life and after Alison has left they come quite close and promise to be loyal to each other by the end of Act 3. But finally when Helena decides to leave Jimmy it comes as great surprise to him. He accuses Helena of having no guts and says one can either live as a human being or as saint. He takes Helena's action of leaving him as an act of desertion and disloyalty. The particular value Jimmy is looking for is love, the value, which can make him alive. It is the lack of this value, which is responsible for the crumbling of social structure around him. This is indicated by the failure of social institutions particularly the church which should be the embodiment of love. When the church bells ring out in the play Jimmy screams saying: "O hell now the bloody bells have started. . . Stop ringing those bells! There's somebody going crazy in here! I don't want to have them! (Osborne 25: Act 1).

Love also fails in the relation between Alison and Jimmy, for they can express their love only when it is disguised in animal fantasy. This animal Imagery runs right through the play, and is not restricted to the "bear and squirrel game". It is also used to convey the sense of solitude as Jimmy speaks of the old bear, following his own breath in the dark forest and there warm pack, no herd to comfort him as well.

Jimmy learns about his highest value, love after a lot of suffering and humiliation: "they all want to escape from the pain of being alive. And most of all from love. I always knew

something like this would turn up- some problem, like an ill wife and it would be too much for those delicate, hot house feelings of yours” (Osborne 93; Act 3sc.1). The quotation suggests an attempt to life with love in a real world rather than of the Edwardian past or animal fantasy.

Though love Jimmy might also be successful in establishing a new relation with Alison at the close of the play. Alison also realizes that she cannot longer endure her loneliness. The fact is that she had suffered deeply, as deeply as any women can suffer, because the loss of her child is the greatest misfortune that can befall any women. She is able to respond plainly to him and reveals that she does care about him and his value. The lines: “ I was wrong , I was wrong! I don’t want to be neutral, I don’t want to be a saint”( Osborne 95; Act 3 sc.1 )convey real feeling of Alison .Listening to them Jimmy for the first time in the play drops his mask and reveals his true feeling:

We’ll be together in our bear’s cave and our squirrel’s drey, and we’ll live on honey, and nuts – lots of nuts. And we’ll sing songs about ourselves about warm tress and sung caves, and lying in the sun. (Osborne 96,Act 3 sc.1)

Hence at last the two have been successful in their efforts to establish a real a kinship and there is hope in near future as well.

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