

DISTINGUISHED PLAYWRIGHT JOHN OSBORNE'S ROLE IN THE "ANGRY YOUNG MEN" MOVEMENT BY HIS PLAY "LOOK BACK IN ANGER"

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Abstract. Radically new age of Britain (1950s) was labelled as the *Angry Young Men* Movement. John Osborne changed the face of British Theatre and demonstrated the angry young man prototype through his famous play "Look Back in Anger". The hero of the play, Jimmy mirrors the tensions of the contemporary lower and middle class young-men. The play had also a profound effect on British culture.

Key words: British Theatre, Angry Young Men movement, playwrights, drama, play, John Osborne, protagonist Jimmy Porter, postwar generation, modernism, culture, social insecurity.

*"We need a new feeling as much as we need a new language. . .
Out of the feeling will come the language"
(John Osborne)*

The Second World War left a tumultuous impact on the civilization. The post-World War II period was essentially characterized by depression and anxiety as the postwar reforms failed to meet exalted aspirations for genuine change. This very desolate prospect is also evident in the literature of the 20th century. These adverse impacts of World War II helped to create several new traditions in literature. The fact that the Movement did not have any proclamation or program meant its logical end. The decline of the Movement prepared ground for the emergence of the Angry Young Men. Other genres than the Movement poetry came into focus of literary audience and newspaper readers. The post-war changes had given a chance to a large number of young people from the more democratic layers of the society to receive higher education at universities. Nevertheless, on graduating, these students found they had no prospects in life. Unemployment had increased after the war. No one was interested to learn what his or her ideas on life and society were. They felt deceived and became angry. Works dealing with such characters, angry young men, who were angry at everything and everybody. It is important to note that outstanding writers of this trend did not belong to a clearly defined movement. They criticized one another in press.

However, they had one thing in common - an attitude of unconformity to the established social order.

The Oscar-winning screenwriter John James Osborne, better known as one of the most important British playwrights of the 1950s generation that revolutionized *English-speaking Theater*, was born in London (1929). He was introduced to the theater through a job tutoring a touring company of junior actors. Smitten by the theater, he became a stage manager and actor, eventually becoming a member of Anthony Creighton's provincial touring company. British playwright and film producer John Osborne, 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".

Osborne's first play, *The Devil Inside Him*, was written in 1950 with his friend and mentor Stella Linden. He made his first appearance as a London actor in 1956, the same year that *Look Back in Anger* was produced by the English Stage Company. Although the form of the play was not revolutionary, its content was unexpected. On stage for the first time were the 20- to 30-year-olds of Great Britain who had not participated in World War II and found its aftermath shabby and lacking in promise. The hero, Jimmy Porter, the son of a worker, through the state educational system, reached an uncomfortably marginal position on the border of the middle class from which he can see the traditional possessors of privilege holding the better jobs and threatening his upward climb. Jimmy Porter continues to work in a street-market and vents his rage on his middle-class wife and her middle-class friend. No solution is proposed for Porter's frustrations, but Osborne makes the audience feel them acutely. Osborne's protagonist, Jimmy Porter, captured the angry and rebellious nature of the postwar generation, a dispossessed lot who were clearly unhappy with things as they were in the decades following World War II. Jimmy Porter came to represent an entire generation of "angry young men." It had a profound effect on British culture. The play not only influenced playwrights such as Joe Orton and Edward Albee, but it also threw cold water in the face of a sleepy popular culture. All manner of writers, actors, artists, and musicians (including the Beatles) soon reflected the influence of Osborne's "angry young man."

Modernism can be clearly seen in this play, which focuses very strongly on concerns that are central to modernism and the way that modern man finds himself in an incredibly isolated. One way in which the theme of Osborne's drama has relevance to the modern setting is how Jimmy still exists today. Jimmy feels fundamentally slighted by the world around him. This work depicts how there is a frustration and anger within the younger generation because of the lack of fulfilled promises. One of Jimmy's consistent lines of social critique is the fact that modern England consists of

people who do not "feel" anything. *Look back in anger* is a suitable title for the play. It has two parts - *look back* and - *in anger*. Certainly, there is enough anger in the play. Its hero Jimmy Porter is an angry young man. One of the central themes of this important play is that of alienation and loneliness, that is of course presented to us in the character of Jimmy Porter. Jimmy Porter operates out of a deep well of anger. His anger is directed at those he loves because they refuse to have strong feelings, at a society. Jimmy Porter is a loud, obnoxious man, rude and verbally abusive to his wife, Alison. Alison comes from an upper-class family that Jimmy abhors and he berates Alison for being too reserved that did not fulfill promises. *Look Back in Anger* reflects the social tension of 1950. Through the hero Jimmy the playwright mirrors the tensions of the contemporary lower and middle class young-men. The impact of the 2nd world-war, its political images, discontent and frustration caused by unemployment and social insecurity.

Osborne's next play, *The Entertainer* (1957), projects a vision of a contemporary Britain diminished from its days of self-confidence. Its hero is a failing comedian, and Osborne uses the decline of the music-hall tradition as a metaphor for the decline of a nation's vitality. *Luther* (1961), an epic play about the Reformation leader, again showed Osborne's ability to create an actable rebellious central figure. Osborne's last play *Déjàvu* (1992), a sequel to *Look Back in Anger*, revisits Jimmy Porter after a 35-year interval. Having come to the stage initially as an actor, Osborne achieved note for his skill in providing actable roles. He is also significant for restoring the tirade or passionately scathing speech to a high place among dramatic elements. Most significantly, however, he reoriented British drama from well-made plays depicting upper-class life to vigorously realistic drama of contemporary life. A press agent came up with the phrase "Angry Young Man" that would stick to Osborne and his compatriots, who created a new type of theater rooted in Bertolt Brecht and class consciousness.

Osborne's career continued strong in the 1960s. He won the Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay for Tony Richardson's movie version of *Henry Fielding's*, which won Richardson an Oscar as Best Director and was named Best Picture of 1963. Osborne and the legions of playwrights he influenced made language important, as well as introduced an emotional intensity into the theater. Osborne's works transformed British theater. He helped to make it artistically respected again, throwing off the formal constraints of the former generation, and turning the attention once more to language, theatrical rhetoric, and emotional intensity. He saw theatre as a weapon with which ordinary people could break down the class barriers and that he had a 'beholden duty to kick against the pricks'. He wanted his plays to be a reminder of real pleasures and real pains. David Hare said in his memorials: "*John Osborne devoted his life to*

trying to forget some sort of connection between the acuteness of his mind and the extraordinary power of his heart.”¹ Osborne did change the world of theatre; however, work of his kind of authenticity and originality would remain the exception rather than the rule. In the following, some personal quotes of him are given and through reading and analyzing them, one can easily understand his care for the theatre and literature:

“Some actors are little better than strolling psychopaths”.

“I do not like the kind of society in which I find myself. I like it less and less. I love the theatre more and more because I know that it is what I always dreamed it might be: a weapon. I am sure that it can be one of the decisive weapons of our time”.

Angry Young Men is significant segment of British literary and social history with a conclusively positive impact on literature, culture and society from the Nineteen-Fifties onwards -until the present day.

The list of literature

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¹ David Hare (J. Osborne)