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# LOOK BACK IN ANGER

Critically comment on the drama.

Look Back In Anger is rightly assigned a seminal responsibility for the flowering of the New England drama in Harold Pinter, John Arden, Arnold Wesker and Samuel Beckett. John Osborne is an instinctive craftsman, with an unerring theatrical flair. There is a forthrightness in his plays, and unequivocal sympathy with the proletariat, a commitment not to 'causes' but to people. Like Shaw, he believes that the theatre can be "one of the decisive weapons of our time".

[Look Back In Anger] adapts the familiar mechanics of naturalistic problem plays, but Osborne is hardly concerned with social theories and panaceas. A.T. Dyson writes that his concern, like that of Shakespeare is to tell the truth of the situation not to offer final moral reflections on it. [His dramas reflect society in the sense that they give the picture as it is, and leave the problem to be solved by the people themselves. As Chekhov - "The task of the play is to state a problem and not to give a solution"]

The play depicts the angry mood of a young man Jimmy Porter, who has graduated from a state aided university but has chosen to operate a sweet stall for livelihood. Jimmy's wife comes from the upper stratum of society and is unable to understand his feelings. He has bitter memories of past betrayal of ideals. He has watched his father, who had fought in the Spanish civil war on the Republican side, die a slow death. Jimmy has learnt "at an early age, what it is to be angry, and helpless". As he tells Helena, "I knew more about love, betrayal and death when I was ten years old than you will probably

Jimmy suffers and is frustrated. He becomes angry partly due to the burning need of the time and partly due to his own bitter experiences. He considers aristocracy to be solely responsible for all the ills of society -

"They have been philandering and fooling everybody for generations."

His hatred for this class goes to such an extent that he takes his wife's correspondences with her parents in terms of conspiracy and betrayal.

In Hugh's mother, he finds a proletarian substitute for the mother from whom he felt himself estranged. When she dies he appeals to Alison to come with him to the funeral, but she does not respond.

This brings him to a desperate state of mind he becomes almost a neurotic, a misfit like Hamlet: -

"The time is out of joint, O, censored spite,  
That ever I was born to set it right."

Critics came out quickly with the label, "Angry Young men" for Osborne and writers of his generation like John Wain, Kingsley Amis etc.

A. E. Dyson suggests that anger can be anything from an indispensable virtue to a most degrading and dangerous vice. Look Back In Anger is a moral exprolation of the emotion of pity.

Jimmy regards his almost morbid sensibility to suffering as evidence of moral superiority. His tenderness for his wife is unable to survive the restless suspicion that turns love into conquest, marriage into revenge and normal reticences of others into insult.

Jimmy can accept neither life nor death with ease. The sound of the church bells torment him with the possibility of worlds other than his own. Jimmy is so perplexed that his insight gets mingled with illusion, his idealism with cruelty.

his desire to save with an appalling capacity for destruction. His trumpet only mocks at the universe, it cannot sound a call to battle, this is why he is not a representative and an ideal character. He has been shaped by personal circumstances which have left him consciously proletarian and sexually uncertain.

Jimmy is almost Victorian in his insistence upon keeping the sexual relationship to its proper place - bed. Outside bed, brawling is the only thing left. He does not talk to his wife except in anger or in allegory. He is not a hero in the traditional sense, but a hero in the modern-anti-hero sense. He has been conceived in a far more complex way than a mere emblem of harassed poverty. Osborne's anger, like that of D.H. Lawrence has its deepest roots in class antagonism rather than in economic deprivation.

Cliff and Helena function in the play rather than like catalytic agents than as characters. Cliff describes himself as a "no-man's land" between Jimmy and Alison. He is much more credible person than Helena and he does instil stability and a sense of pity into the play, without ~~an~~ which Jimmy's astrigency might turn into tiresome rhetoric. Helena is a dramatic device to inject action into a naturally static situation. ~~She~~ But she is altogether too perfect an embodiment of the thing Jimmy despises. The affair between them is necessary to the formal shape of the play. When Alison goes to her father's house as she is pregnant, Helena remains with Jimmy. Both Helena and Jimmy declare their love for each other.

But when Alison comes back, having lost her baby and known real suffering, Helena realises

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her invidious position and leaves the house  
Timmy and Alison are again united. The  
purifying agent is of course, suffering. At Timmy's  
feet, Alison collapses and he lifts her saying  
that, he is the 'bear' and she the 'squirrel'.  
Thus in the play, the status quo is restored.  
The curvature of action follows the well-made  
semi-circle - from exposition, to development  
to resolution.

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