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### JOHN OSBORNE'S *LOOK BACK IN ANGER*: A CRITICAL CATCHES OF ANGER, ALIENATION AND ACRIMONY

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**Abstract:** The term “Angry Young Man” denoted the disillusionment and dilemma in young men which was caused by world war. The term represents the impatience with the tyranny laden over the lower/ middle strata of the society. At the time, John Osborne took the step to depict the frustration and alienation of young generation and created a protagonist, Jimmy Porter. The paper aims to analyses the character of Jimmy Porter by mapping the text based on real grounded society. The study is concentrated on the anger and fragmentation of not only of the protagonist but also of the whole society at a larger extent.

**Keywords:** Angry Young Man, Dilemma, Post War, Anger, Kitchen Sink Drama, Alienation, Disillusionment

After the Second World War the new era was hanging between cry and uncertainty. Cry, criticism and contempt were became the shared qualities of Society. It is at this Juncture a new movement called “Angry Young Man” was born in literature. It was based on nonconformity and anger that a group of writers felt towards

society of 1950's. The term “Angry Young Man” was coined in reference to John Osborne's 1956 *Look Back in Anger* by Royal Court Theatre. John Osborne was the man who turned anger into art and spearhead the movement called “Angry Young Man”, he began a new style, a new generation of playwrights. John Osborne captures

the spirit of his time. Youth of modern age are alike Prufrock and Hamlet. Disillusionment, dilemma, dissatisfaction and Depression shape their life. Drama of protest, projects angry young man image, they simply hate politics, upper class ideologies, church and superstitions. The twentieth century ushered in our time period of uncertainty and unhygienic regime. With the Second World War the energy of the nation turned to apathetic and cynical atmosphere and John Osborne was intensely conscious of his social milieu. He delineates the intellectual inertia of youth and Jimmy porter is the product of this new world. Disillusioned with society Jimmy is described as helpless and angry. The complex movement "Angry young man" is indeed a key to express emotional protest to the frustrated generation who were fitted to express the working class social milieu. The movement proved a tremendous boost to nationalism with many ideas stands out it. John Osborne caught the mood of the audience of his time and sketches the contemporary realistic scene and creates a character who denounces the church, the

conservative government and all the crumb and colossal things around him.

Many critics praised John Osborne for his dazzling aptitude for his clear character presentation, his personal grievances and for conveying the urgency of feelings, for his attitude to depicting truth and for the tone of his conversation and his vigorous drive beneath full on negative whine of this play John Osborne draw character with firm convincing strokes. But what Kenneth Tynan of *The Observer* wrote about the popularity of *Look Back in Anger* in most famous review in contemporary theatre and adds fourfold glory to its popularity. Kenneth Tynan has remarked:

That the play needs changes I do not deny it: it is twenty minutes too long and not even Mr. Haigh's bravura could blind me to the painful whimsy of the final reconciliation. I agree that *Look Back in Anger* is likely to remain a minority taste. What matters, however, is the size of the minority. I estimate it at roughly 6,733,000, which is the number of people in this country between the ages of twenty and thirty. And this figure will doubtless be

swelled by refugees from other age-groups who are curious to know precisely what the contemporary young pup in thinking and feeling. It is the best young play of its decade. (Tynan 97).

The present paper aims at search out the main causes of Jimmy Porter's anger. Jimmy Porter a tortured soul in many ways, lost in a maze of puzzlement of his own created world. Being hero of his time he has presented the discontentment and disillusionment of the younger generation. The quality of rebelliousness seen in Jimmy is common to all youth of his time. Porter has a love-hate attitude toward life despite of his anger Jimmy blasts with his furious heart and struggles in the self tormented behavior and self-exiled from the joy of world, he feel alienated and isolated because he cannot relate to the world. A lot of questions loom large in his mind. The character of Jimmy marks the beginning of a new chapter and there were so many forces working behind this new creation. The drab setting of one room flat of Porter, the old furniture and shabby leather

armchairs display the narrowness of their time. Jimmy Porter is the central modern character upon whom the play is based. John Osborne writes about Jimmy's confusing personality:

He is a mixture of sincerity and cheerful malice, tenderness and cruelty found in pirates which is very confusing. He seems to be restless, demanding, full of pride, a man possessing such qualities which drives away sensitive and insensitive alike. People like him do not make friends easily because of their apparent honesty which makes them harsh to time (144).

As a young boy Jimmy Porter watched his dying father and learned more about love and death. He experienced the bitterness, he recall those time with huge hatred he has no scintillating past to recall, everything was ordeal for a ten year boy after that he became a veteran of suffering. Progressive building of conflict and tension find their echoes in his character. For the first time in modern drama, the venomous youth with vitriolic rhetoric takes birth and it was intended by the writer to represent

whole generation. There's no warm pack for his boiling anger. Martin Banham gives an exact exploration of Jimmy Porter's character. According to him, "Jimmy's anger, his bitterness, his hysteria and his cruelty are cries from the heart for recognition, and nothing more" (Banham 16).

Being a university graduate he has nothing good to do in his career, he tried his luck at many occupations and finally running a sweet stall with cliff Lewis, his friend. But his attitude of uncertainty never ends. The intellectual genius in him rebels against it. The study aims to figure out the main reason behind Jimmy's anger. A man of twenty five years age fought with society for a no clear reason how can survive a peaceful life? A man who have an unglamorous Job, untenable wife, wearisome constancy humdrum connection to the world, no pomp in family, what he have is an venomous tongue, how can react in a peaceful manner. Jimmy porter's anger is the main theme of the play and his angry eyes gives us a curious wish to know what is the reason behind his anger and why he suffers alike a fish enmeshed in net. Jimmy porter is

dissatisfied with routine kind of life, he complains about the monotony of Sundays he regrets that why he reads the newspaper every Sunday. For him the "Posh" Sunday newspaper is a thing which is only suitable for upper class society and contains only insensitive news items. For a young man Sunday should be an enjoying day but here the matter revert. He regrets over Sundays because the storm in his mind does not permit him to make his Sunday a fun day which we usually do. Jimmy Porter says, "I really hate these Sundays. They are so disappointing and depressing. The same routine, no change of any kind. We don't seem to be moving ahead at all. The same routine is observed on every Sunday" (156).

Jimmy Porter is a storm of the venomous waves to whom it seems thrust by the society to live like a frog in boiling water with his boiling mood. He complains, "Nobody is willing to think about anything. Nobody cares for anything. Nobody has belief or convictions about anything or enthusiasm about anything. It is just another routing Sunday like all those past" (160). We can easily catch the

mental trauma of Jimmy when he wants to act like that he is a human being. What a irony is this that a human being wants to act like a human being, it shows the deadpan of his life. In words of Jimmy Porter, "Let us pretend for a while that we're human being who feel and express and react: Let us pretend that we are animate human being. What is your opinion. Let us do so for a short while. Let's pretend we are human beings" (156).

Jimmy Porter targeted his anger towards upper class and considers his upper class wife as a hostage. As the play develops each and everything is criticized by him: The church, the Bishop, the Sunday newspapers, his own friend Cliff Lewis, his wife and wife's parents. The play in reality is not all about the condemnation of class system but a study of psychotic marriage relationship on the part of a young intellectual couple. The play paints the sorry state of their bitter married life. Jimmy Porter is totally devoid of capacity to feel. He is symbolic of the class-conflict between high and low and the rich and the poor. He is

annoyed at the lack of responsiveness of her wife and scolds her for her silence. In a very disgusting and blunt manner he wishes that in order to open her mouth she must lose something which is very dear to her and he curses that she could have a child, a child of her own flesh, her own blood, which dies only to teach her about the pang of suffering:

Oh my darling wife you are so ignorant about so many things about which you will have to gain knowledge. I hope you learn about them someday. I really wish that something drastic happens to you which awaken you out of your state of indifference... I wish you have a child and that child should die, a child born out of your body and flesh...(200).

These words of Jimmy become fruitful at the end.

Social disparity between his working class and his wife's upper middle class creates a chasm in their marital life. He wants to possess a complete unquestioning love to his wife, which is not only unbearable, unrealistic but also untenable for

Alison. Despite of all she makes her mind always ready to compromise with her husband on almost any term for which she suffers a lot of mental torment. Alison confesses to Helena that she did many effort to understand Jimmy but all she receive in return in his hatred, "...I think it is me whom he wants to kill. I have never been hated so much by anyone as he hates me. It really frightens me-his hatred" (206).

In a very ironical way Alison told Helena that Jimmy is obsessed with suffering. She says, "Oh don't try to take his suffering away from him-that's his armour and he will feel defenseless without it" (232). When Helena and Alison are engaged in conversation, Jimmy plays the trumpet loudly, which causes irritation to Helena and Alison but pleases Jimmy. Jimmy's rhetoric condemnation of Alison's mother and her brother Nigel irritates Alison. He scolds her for ceaseless ironing even for her being virgin because he believes that her virginity has deceived him in a strange manner. He accuses Alison for having excessive passion and devouring him like a huge python. Jimmy is of the opinion that all good causes came to an

end in the thirties and forties when he was a child. Jimmy expects everyone to be loyal to him. He sarcastically says that there in nothing good for us to die except butchered by women. He accuses Alison of being noisy on bed and in her all day-to-day activities. He calls her 'Lady pusillanimous' because he sees her as a coward, non-judgmental and non committal woman. Jimmy's wit is sarcastic and bitter which he especially shows in his comments for Alison, he always mounts aggressive attacks. The silent posture which Alison uses as defense hurt more to Jimmy. The sound of the pious church bells is for him the noise, the hell bell. He bursts in anger and says that somebody has become mad if these bells will continuously makes noise, inner frustration of Jimmy Porter force him to anticipate church bell as the bloody hell bell. He feels unsecure when Alison and Helena are going church he screams at Alison that you do not have believe in God but you are going to the church to hurt me and to plot any conspiracy against me. Whenever Alison is not at home Jimmy check her all belongings to unearth the conspiracy against him, we can easily

catch the mental breakdown of Alison that even she has not permitted to write letter to her mother because Jimmy scorns letters because of having no reference of himself. In every aspect of life Alison differs to Jimmy and so far one of most difficult soul to understand. Despite of her love marriage she suffers in her married life. She had married Jimmy against her parent's wishes especially against her mother. Perhaps it would be the reason why Jimmy constantly criticizes her mother.

Jimmy has always a pitiless gaze for Alison. He mentally tortures Alison beyond limit because of his daunting anger and Alison suffers beyond limit because of her tolerance. She seems to be a staunch believer of the phrase "silence conquers all" but for her husband her silence seems more piercing than her insulting language. By nature Alison is not a very demanding woman but a lot of questions loom large in her mind. She feels fear to share that she is going to have a baby to her husband; she shares this to Cliff because he is the only person who makes life tolerable for

both. Cliff is like a balm to the couple, he is the only spectator it would be vaguer to say him a passive spectator of the whole drama between the couple. Cliff serves himself like a catalyst between the two; he tries his utmost to protect Alison against Jimmy's verbal attacks. He presents himself like a confidant to Jimmy which Jimmy wants to his dear wife. Being with Alison for Jimmy is to take breathe in the air of superiority. She always maintains her calmness but expresses her opinion about her husband to Helena:

He wants someone who would be different from either of us. What kind of a woman he wants is not clear to me-a woman who would be able to look after him like a mother as well as satisfy his sexual appetites completely...a rare combination of a powerful, attractive, dominating personality like Cleopatra and respectful admiring person devoted to another's life and work like Boswell (306).

Alison says that Jimmy is such type of person who has his own moral norms. His views are liberal but

even his liberal views are hard to tolerate. In a very pathetic manner Alison is apprised by Jimmy that what he thinks about love, "Everyone wants to run away from pain and suffering which are part and parcel of human life. And most of all, from love... and your artificial feeling would not be able to tolerate it" (310). Mary McCarthy puts Jimmy's character into her center of thinking and says about Alison and Helena, "His women appear, so to speak, wearing his colours: both girls while they are his, are seen wearing one of his old shirts over their regular clothes (McCarthy 124)." Both of the girls try to embed deeply in Jimmy's colour but his excessive anger has always an aim to devour them. He shows his hurt that no one taken what he says seriously. He shouts at Alison when she remains silent and given vent to his anger, "Yes, I know you were not listening. Everyone is disinterested in what Jimmy Porter says. As soon as Jimmy Porter starts speaking everyone goes off to sleep because of boredom (148)". Jimmy's anger has deep rooted he adopt the miseries of world as his own. Beneath his crude and offensive behavior is a sensitive person. He

suffers for Hugh's mother and it shows the soft side of Jimmy's heart. He criticizes Bishop of Bromley's appeal to all Christian for support in the manufacturing of Hydrogen bomb. He criticizes the narrow life of upper class society that how they pretend to be attractive and regards himself as the representative of the working class. He is a non-believer is religion; he criticizes the religious customs of slaughtering of animals on the name of God. Damn is a word which is revealing the consciousness of the speaker and Jimmy Porter utter this word for Alison and Cliff. He cursed them when they were not listening him: "Damn you, Damn both of you, Damn them all (156)". Jimmy Porter seems many to be a misogynist because of his uncontrollable verbal assaults and censorious remarks over his wife his masculinity reigns over Alison's femininity. Jimmy Porter a man who was constantly being tortured by either natural or unnatural ways and grows up with a brutal heart. In spite of love marriage the young couple is constantly wounding each other. Sexual passion offers a little bit of relief but does not suggest any permanent



solution. Jimmy is even fade up with normal kind of sexual life and wants to try homosexuality for a change of taste and in this reference he emulate the example of French writer Andre Gilde. When he decided to live with Helena perhaps he was in a way to find a counterpart for himself, who can match to his angry and assaulting spirit and for a change in sexual mood. This is the frustration within jimmy when he says to Cliff that we should only quarrel because it is the thing in which we are skilled. Alison open her heart's secret to her father that probably Jimmy had a motive of revenge behind married her. Alison reveals her father that Jimmy's cynical outlook and angry temperament always spearhead their marital life.

Human mind follows no set patterns, mind is its own master such as Jimmy's mind and his anger follows no set pattern. Osborne has given a dramatic presentation of tortured human being through psychological insight into the psyche of different characters and psychotic state of their mind. According to a well-argued Freudian study of Jimmy's neurosis by

M.D. Faber, "Jimmy has problems whose ultimate origin lies is the stresses of the oral stage. The Symptoms of the orally fixated characters include Sadistic and Cannibalistic tendencies combined with passivity, dependence and fear of retaliation (Faber 132)". Faber's Conclusion is a more elaborate sense in that Jimmy has some oedipal tendency so he cannot relate naturally to young woman like Alison. John Osborne uses symbols an agent who paints another side Jimmy Porters character, it allows readers to go beyond what is seen by creating an associative linkages. Jimmy Porter Criticizes Alison for ceaseless ironing, for him ironing represents the routing of life with which Jimmy shows his impatience. The sounds of the church bell annoy him and drive him to distraction. Perhaps the existence of a world beyond his own angry world annoys him. Music and game given anybody a soothing and Jubilant moment but throughout the play we cognize that Jimmy Porter has only two hobbies-one is to belching fire and second in to playing on the trumpet. Playing trumpet pull him into another world, he sound of the trumpet annoys

other but pleases him; there will be two things that either he loves the harsh sound of the trumpet or he uses it as an instrument to annoy other. In words of A.E. Dyson, "His trumpet can mock the universe but not sound call to battle. Song lowers stress and reduces depression and elevates mood but Jimmy Porter dauntingly uses it as an armour (Dyson 52)". The song composition by him shows his enervated love. Jimmy compares himself to great poets and tries to escape from his inferiority by playing superior and different roles. The title of Jimmy's poem "The cesspool" is ironical in itself in which Jimmy compares himself to a stone which is deliberately dropped in cesspool in so funny that Cliff poke fun at him.

Lack of communication creates two parties in the play in which Jimmy Porter belongs to active party while Alison Porter belongs to passive party. Jimmy spits venom always while silence seems solution to Alison. A good relationship demands a good conversation and a better mutual understanding but in their relation they lack both. One loves to speak while one loves to remain silence in a

very passive tone. Games fuel our problem solving abilities but in Porter's case game change its meaning. The bears and squirrels game provides them a little bit of adjustment. Jimmy's paroxysm and Alison's passivity turns a new form for a moment. The game offers them some relaxation; game was the only way through which they escape the every bitterness of their marital life. Through the game they try to find some mutual harmony and love. They try to learn to co-operate each other and forget the cruelties and complexities of their life for a while. Alison clears it to Helena, "We become little animals with animal brains that did not understand anything of the unkind world (p- 218)". Alison accepts to Helena that a senseless and dumb game of Bears-and-Squirrels unites them and offer momentary care and love for each other.

John Osborne is not concerned with social theories although social questions loom large in his works but they do not form much action. He did not intend to write only upon animosity of the times but to write upon a psychotic marriage relationship of the couple is their general life. John

Osborne said many time that his main purpose behind writing *Look Back in Anger* was not to write about social disease on behalf of Jimmy's anger but rather to make people feel to awaken their own consciousness to think. Jimmy's attacks are not against the abstract ideas but against the dead ideas of society in which he lives. Michael Billington wrote about the emotional simplicity and moral commitment in *Look Back in Anger*. The ability to move an audience and force them to feel is a great gift of play writer and John Osborne has this gift and *Look Back in Anger* with all its climaxes and slackening of tensions is a well made play. Michael Billington critic for The Guardian asserted that:

Good plays change their meaning with time; and it is a measure of the quality of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* that it now seems a very different work to the one staged at the Royal Court in 1956... the play seemed less an incendiary social drama than [a Eugene] O' Neill-like exploration of personal pain ( Billington 156).

No specific causes for Jimmy Porter's anger can be shortlisted but

we can grasp from his speeches in which we belch fire towards society, institution, church and everything in general. We find Jimmy jumping from one to another without any clarity of understanding. But his anger is the shaping force which shapes his character and action of the play. Jimmy gives vent to his wrath in a very harshest term, "One of us is not normal. One of us is mean and stupid and crazy. Which is it? Is it me, who is standing here behaving like a hysterical girl and is hardly able to express myself because I have lost control over myself? Or is it she? (244)".

After all own experience is the best healer and Jimmy Porter and Alison Porter learn from their experiences of suffering and of loss, which came to them as loss of their baby. Their experience to take life as sufferer will work as a healer. At the end after their long estrangement Jimmy and Alison Porter decided to live in their mirthful dream world of bears and squirrels. The drama could end at the frustrated point that the two love birds never got united, but John

Osborne artistically provide their characters some relaxation after a long outburst of anger Jimmy's stone like heart finally find some humility after a very painful situation of losing his unborn child helplessly he divulge his heart to his wife:

Do you think I was wrong to suppose that there is an intense vigour of mind and spirit in a person which seeks equal vitality in people, relationship etc? The heaviest, strongest creatures are generally lonely, for it is rare that they will find people of their kind. An independent mind is always alone because few minds are genuinely alone. A strong man is as alone as the bear who has no one to give him company in dark forest (312).

Jimmy has such qualities which in spite of the negative qualities within his character enabled him to win audience's sympathy. At the end of the story, the plot delineates a new story of hope whose experience will surely teach the lesson of love. Jimmy Porter a dour and graceless angry young man, a frustrated wretch lives in a state of fitful hibernation has an

animal like vitality in his nature. He is the sort of man who draws his own damning indictment for spiritual elevation. He musters his all anger to erupt like a volcano. In spite of the alarming Juxtapositions and carping nature of himself, Jimmy Porter involves in vibrant acting and realistic refinements. When a man suffers in his own mind with his own created miseries then life becomes anomalistic and atypical for him and such type of imaginative suffering is worst kind of suffering. A kind of solitary and companionless experience haunts always in Jimmy's mind Tragedy of Jimmy Porter shakes us in our books, he is a worst type of sufferer. He has a lovely wife, Alison, a caring friend, Cliff, settled career and his own charming personality in spite of all he had to survive a crummy and junky life. Jimmy Porter is a suffering hero, and all the action and scenes are painted by John Osborne to illuminate Jimmy's own sufferings. He simply considers himself to be unjustifiably squeezed down with no obvious hope to ever stand up. Jimmy Porter believes that his anger is his true way of surviving life.

Perhaps Jimmy's anger is an attempt to awaken society from flurry sleep, to make aware of the past war effects on youth that how war causes a huge loss of lives and ultimate death of morality, elation and comity from their lives. "Angry Young Man" is a nickname given to the entire generation of that time. Jimmy sees everything through his own lens; he condemns Bishop of Bromley, the sound of church bell, "posh" newspaper, his mother-in-law, Alison's brother and more exclusively to Alison. His angry gaze exposes his mental demise and his visceral anger for everything. Jimmy can be understood as both a hero for his out-and-out anger and can also be considered a villain for his negative approach towards life; he expresses his frustration and anger in both verbal and physical way. Jimmy actually rails against the absence of authenticity and reality in human interaction. His frustration is build around the tragedy of living in a society which in unfair to him. A.E. Dyson grasps a new dimension of Jimmy Porter's personality. Dyson argues that Jimmy's anger is controlled by his own idealism in his own ideal world beyond the real

world in which he lives; he expects honesty, sass, graciousness and love from everyone. According to A.E. Dyson:

In Jimmy Porter, one is confronted with a man whose anger was undoubtedly starts in human idealism, and the desire that man should be more honest, more alive, more human than they normally are. Very soon, however, corruption creeps in: his sense of outrage is so little controlled by either selfishness, stoicism any clear discipline of the mind that it readily degenerates into moods profoundly and dangerously maladjusted (Dyson 90).

The pitiable condition of Jimmy Porter can be considered to a car that is trapped in traffic. No matter how many times car honked as similar to Jimmy's cries, no matter how much Jimmy annoys anybody, no matter how loud he screams, nobody would clear up the road for him as in the play nobody actually understands jimmy's angry forlorn conditions. One cannot help but only feel compassion for the couple. In *Look Back in Anger* John Osborne dramatizes that how class

consciousness makes home into the love relationship between the couple.

To conclude, *Look Back in Anger* is a deeply ambient drama of personal consociation. In the outset of the play Jimmy Porter's grin never widens, he always snorts with disbelief. Jimmy simply responds to his social milieu and contemporaneous society. Jimmy Porter's anger shakes ruthlessly to cocktail shakers, cigarette holders, bed sitters and the whole generation dynamically to comprehend over his anger. Jimmy Porter's anger is not about tearful cheeks but all about tearful heart. There's no warm pack for Jimmy, he believes that he is duped by Alison, he always wants her as confidant to whom he could pour out his heart. *Look Back in Anger* is a rich and complex work of art with many themes and idea, basically colored by lessons in feeling. Our own reaction depends on our own optimistic and pessimistic persona. An optimistic person who is happy with his life has no relevance of Jimmy's anger. He can go with the remark of Helena. What she says about Jimmy "He is completely a misfit in the present age (302)". On the contrary pessimistic person who

suffers from helplessness can identify himself with Jimmy's angry persona. Overall, the general state of feeling mattered more than any social treatise and its purpose is to assign an unvarying importance to the younger generation. Perhaps, Colonel Redfern's Wryly observance actually what John Osborne himself wants to say about Jimmy Porter's anger is apt "Perhaps you and I were the ones most to blame (127)".

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