

THEMES IN JOHN OSBORNE'S , "LOOK BACK IN ANGER" WITH REFERANCE TO KITCHEN SINK DRAMA

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Introduction

- Look Back In Anger is a John Osborne's play of 1956, that deals with a love triangle
- It was a genuine drama, about real events and people; an authentic picture of the younger generation in post-war English society; for this it became a kind of myth.
- First well-known example of "Kitchen Sink Drama," This style of theater was given the name "Kitchen Sink" because of its focus on the interior domestic and emotional lives of ordinary people.
- It was about the raw emotions and living conditions of the working class.

John Osborne

- John James Osborne was an English playwright, screenwriter, actor, known for his excoriating prose and intense critical stance towards established social and political norms.
- Born : December 12, 1929.
- Died : December 24, 1994.
- Movies : Get Carter , Look Back in Anger , The Entertainer , Tom Jones , First Love.
- Books : A better class of person , Damn you, England , West of Suez.

The Kitchen Sink Drama

- ◉ Kitchen Sink drama is a term used to denote plays that rely on realism to explore domestic social relations.
- ◉ Osborne's play returned imagination to the Realist genre by capturing the anger and immediacy of post-war youth culture and the alienation that resulted in the British working classes.
- ◉ Look Back in Anger was able to comment on a range of domestic social problems in this time period.
- ◉ Most importantly, it was able to capture, through the character of Jimmy Porter, the anger of this generation that irritated just below the surface of best British culture.

Themes

1. Alienation and loneliness
2. The Angry Young Man
3. Apathy and passivity
4. Class conflict
5. Identity crisis
6. Sexism
7. Loss of childhood
8. Real life
9. Sloth in British culture
10. Rise and fall of British empire
11. Masculinity in Art

1. Alienation and Loneliness

- ⦿ He cannot reconcile himself to upper classes.
- ⦿ He is a social rebel.
- ⦿ Though he is graduate, he is earning his livelihood by running a sweet stall with the help of Cliff.
- ⦿ He has tried his hand at many other occupations but he could not stick to any one of them.
- ⦿ He is dissatisfied with his wife because the society has not treated him well.
- ⦿ He feels that he is unwanted by society because he has been unable to find a suitable carrier.
- ⦿ so he may be regarded as a maladjusted person both at home and outside.

2.The Angry Young Man

- Osborne's play was the first to explore the theme of the "Angry Young Man."
- Usually disillusioned with British society, Jimmy as "angry young man" perfect.
- Jimmy is continually described as being both "helpless" and "angry."
- Jimmy always blames his friends and his society for his own failures.
- As a result of his own failures, Jimmy is angry as he sells inexpensive candy at the market.
- Another way that Jimmy fits into the "angry young man" category is his hatred of Alison's relatives ,they belong to upper class.
- Anyone in the "angry young man" movement, due to their low social class, would be "required" to dislike anyone of upper-class heritage.

3.Apathy and Passivity

- ⦿ Although Alison is the direct target of Jimmy's criticism, her apathy and passivity are just the immediate representation of the attitudes that Jimmy sees as discouragement in the whole of society.
- ⦿ It is the satisfied showiness of society that infuriates Jimmy.
- ⦿ The Church, too, comes under attack in part because it has lost relevance to contemporary life.
- ⦿ Jimmy sees the Church as providing an easy escape from facing the pain of living.

- ◎ For Helena it spells a safe habit, one that defines right and wrong for her — although she seems perfectly willing to ignore its limits against adultery when it suits her.
- ◎ Of course, Jimmy has also slipped into a world of sameness as illustrated by the three Sunday evenings spent reading the newspapers and even the direct replacement of Alison at the ironing board with Helena.
- ◎ Deadly habit is portrayed as insidious.

4. Class Conflict

- Jimmy comes from the working class and although some of his mother's relatives are "pretty posh," Cliff tells Alison that Jimmy hates them as much as he hates her family.
- It is the class system, with its built-in special treatment for those at the top and exclusion from all power for those at the bottom, that makes Jimmy's existence seem so meaningless.
- He has a university degree, but it is not from the "right" university. It is Nigel, the "straight-backed, chinless wonder" who went to Sandhurst, who is stupid and insensitive to the needs of others, who has no beliefs of his own, who is already a Member of Parliament, who will "make it to the top."
- Alison's father, Colonel Redfern, is not shown unsympathetically, but her mother is portrayed as a class-conscious monster who used every method she could to prevent Alison from marrying Jimmy.
- The only person for whom Jimmy's love is apparent is Hugh's working-class mother.
- Jimmy likes Cliff because, as Cliff himself says, "I'm common."

5.Identity Crisis

- ⦿ While Jimmy criticizes everyone around him to open themselves to honest feeling, he is trapped in his own problems of social identity.
- ⦿ He doesn't seem to fit in anywhere.
- ⦿ As Colonel Redfern points out, operating a sweet-stall seems an odd occupation for an educated young man.
- ⦿ Jimmy sees suffering the pain of life as the only way to find, or “earn,” one's true identity.

- ⦿ Alison does finally suffer the immeasurable loss of her unborn child and comes back to Jimmy, who seems to embrace her.
- ⦿ Helena discovers that she can be happy only if she lives according to her perceived principles of right and wrong.
- ⦿ Colonel Redfern is caught out of his time.
- ⦿ The England he left as a young army officer no longer exists.
- ⦿ Jimmy calls him “just one of those sturdy old plants left over from the Edwardian Wilderness that can’t understand why the sun isn’t shining anymore,” and the Colonel agrees.
- ⦿ Cliff does seem to have a strong sense of who he is, accepts that, and will move on with his life.

6.Sexism

- ⦿ A contemporary reading of *Look Back in Anger* includes a reading of sexism in which Jimmy's anger and hatred is directed at women in general.
- ⦿ The examples in the play that are taken to represent a greater sexism on Jimmy's part are his relationships with Alison and then Helena, the most striking point of which is that after a time, Helena stands silently and emotionally passively at the ironing board on Sunday night just like Alison used to do.

- ◎ The similarity between Helena and Alison is that they are both from the upper class and are both religious with "establishment" church affiliations.
- ◎ Jimmy's great criticism is against the satisfied, unthinking privilege given to and assumed by the upper classes who have no need to think or be intelligent, as Nigel represents, or feel, as Alison and Helena represent.
- ◎ When Jimmy's treatment of Alison and Helena are seen from a 1950s perspective as representative of Jimmy's hatred of a class division that defrauds individuals--on both sides of the class divide--of their humanity, the undertones of sexism take a secondary position.

7. Loss of Childhood

- ◎ A theme that impacts the characters of Jimmy and Alison Porter is the idea of a lost childhood.
- ◎ Osborne uses specific examples -- the death of Jimmy's father when Jimmy was only ten, and how he was forced to watch the physical and mental demise of the man -- to demonstrate the way in which Jimmy is forced to deal with suffering from an early age.
- ◎ Alison's loss of childhood is best seen in the way that she was forced to grow up too fast by marrying Jimmy.

- ◎ Her youth is wasted in the anger and abuse that her husband levels upon her.
- ◎ Osborne suggests that a generation of British youth has experienced this same loss of childhood innocence.
- ◎ Osborne uses the examples of World War, the development of the atomic bomb, and the decline of the British Empire to show how an entire culture has lost the innocence that other generations were able to maintain.

8.Real Life

- In the play, Jimmy Porter is consumed with the desire to live a more real and full life.
- He compares this burning desire to the empty actions and attitudes of others.
- At first, he generalizes this emptiness by criticizing the lax writing and opinions of those in the newspapers.
- He then turns his angry gaze to those around him and close to him, Alison, Helena, and Cliff.

- ⦿ Osborne's argument in the play for a real life is one in which men are allowed to feel a full range of emotions.
- ⦿ The most real of these emotions is anger and Jimmy believes that this anger is his way of truly living.
- ⦿ This idea was unique in British theater during the play's original run.
- ⦿ Osborne argued in essays and criticisms that, until his play, British theater had subsumed the emotions of characters rendering them less realistic.
- ⦿ Jimmy's desire for a real life is an attempt to restore raw emotion to the theater.

9.Sloth in British Culture

- ◎ Jimmy Porter compares his quest for a more vibrant and emotional life to the slothfulness of the world around him.
- ◎ It is important to note that Jimmy does not see the world around him as dead, but merely asleep in some fundamental way.
- ◎ This is a fine line that Osborne walks throughout the play. Jimmy never argues that there is a nihilism within British culture.
- ◎ Instead, he sees a kind of slothfulness of character. His anger is an attempt to awaken those around him from this cultural sleep.

- ⦿ This slothfulness of emotion is best seen in the relationship between Alison and Cliff.
- ⦿ Alison describes her relationship with Cliff as 'comfortable'.
- ⦿ They are physically and emotionally affectionate with each other, but neither seems to want to take their passion to another level of intimacy.
- ⦿ In this way, their relationship is lazy.
- ⦿ They cannot awaken enough passion to complete their affair.
- ⦿ Jimmy seems to subconsciously understand this, which is the reason he is not jealous of their affection towards one another.

10. The Rise and Fall of the British Empire

- The character of Colonel Redfern, Alison's father, represents the decline of and nostalgia for the British Empire.
- The Colonel had been stationed for many years in India, a symbol of Britain's imperial reach into the world.
- The Edwardian age which corresponded to Britain's height of power, had been the happiest of his life.
- His nostalgia is representative of the denial that Osborne sees in the psyche of the British people.
- The world has moved on into an American age, he argues, and the people of the nation cannot understand why they are no longer the world's greatest power.

11.Masculinity in Art

- ◎ This is seen in the play in specific examples in which Jimmy Porter emotionally distresses Alison, his wife, and delivers a grisly monologue in which he wishes for Alison's mother's death.
- ◎ Osborne, however, declare that he is attempting to restore a vision of true masculinity into a twentieth century culture that he sees as becoming increasingly feminized.
- ◎ This feminization is seen in the way that British culture shows an "indifference to anything but immediate, personal suffering."
- ◎ This causes a deadness within which Jimmy's visceral anger and masculine emotion is a revenge against.

- ⦿ He berates her in a rude attempt to get her to strike out at him, to stop “sitting on the fence” and make a full commitment to her real emotions; he wants to force her to feel and to have vital life.
- ⦿ He calls her “Lady Pusillanimous” because he sees her as too cowardly to commit to anything.
- ⦿ Jimmy is nervous to give a great deal and is deeply angry because no one seems interested enough to take from him, including his wife.
- ⦿ He says, “My heart is so full, I feel ill — and she wants peace!”

Conclusion

- ◎ Kitchen Sink dramas, however, turned this notion around and made the kitchen the center of familial and social life.
- ◎ In the case of the Porter's attic apartment, the kitchen and living spaces were all one room on the stage.
- ◎ The boundaries of intimate domestic life and public life were blurred and created a realism not seen before in British theater.