

**ENGLISH HONOURS  
B.A. SEM. VI**

**“Look Back in Anger” Play**

**By:**

**John Osborne**

**Submitted To:**

Associate Prof. Mrs. Mamta  
(Head of the English Department)  
H.M.V Jalandhar.

**Submitted by:**

Poonam Laroyia  
Assistant Professor in English  
H.M.V Jalandhar.

# Contents

1. Introduction
2. Historical Context
3. Title
4. Structure
5. Plot
6. Symbolism
7. Conclusion

# INTRODUCTION

**“LOOK BACK IN ANGER”** is a strongly autobiographical play based on Osborne’s unhappy marriage to Pamela Lane and their life in cramped accommodation in Derby. While Osborne aspired towards a career in theatre, Lane was of a more practical and materialistic persuasion, not taking Osborne ambitions seriously while cuckolding him with a local dentist. This play is often dominated by strong articulate protagonists who express disgust with bourgeois, complacency and materialistic social values through outburst of abusive language.

It is a play about the state of England in the mid nineteen fifties. It became the symbol of angry generation. “Angry young men” were English men who wrote for a living; However their writings had quite a few common traits; anger, protest and rebellion of some sort.

Jimmy, the protagonist of “**LOOK BACK IN ANGER**” fits the description of an “angry young man” perfectly.

The play “**LOOK BACK IN ANGER**” is thought of as the first of the genre which focuses, on life and marital struggles of an intelligent and educated but disaffected young man of working class origin.

# HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 1950's economy prospered and most people saw themselves as middle class. There were three divisions of the society on the basis of occupation. Upper middle class, lower middle class and the working class. Most working class people moved to being middle class in the nineteen fifties but barriers of class were still up against them. They had to live in the margins of privilege and power. The desire to be part of the upper middle class perhaps is this range of sentiments that look back in Anger expresses. There was anger at the permanence of a class based power structure in spite of a movement towards a classless welfare scheme.

The war is for the power and privileges that go with the upper class. This explains the nostalgia for the “Edwardian twilight” which Edward VII (1901-1910). This era was marked by significant shifts in politics among sections of society that were largely excluded from wielding power in the past, such as a common labourer.

# TITLE

As per the title of the play, an emotion of anger is felt in the present times and it is this emotion which is a reason for looking back. The play is best remembered for Jimmy's tirades against the complacency of the British upper classes, especially against his wife Alison & then his mistress Helena.

Osborne chose to use a style of theatre called social realism – this is a style of theatre aiming to re-create real life with the intention of exploring issues relevant to that society. Through the character of the protagonist, Osborne revealed his feelings for the contemporary scene and the frustration and the temperament of the post war Britain found expression through the speeches of Jimmy. Jimmy's speeches go beyond realistic prose drama. Action of the play is a very little influenced by such social questions.

Social disparity between his working class origin and the upper middle class to which his wife belongs, is a reason for Jimmy's anger. Jimmy suffers for others. As a young boy he watched his dying father and learned more about love-death and betrayal than people like Helena would know all their lives.

Jimmy is over-demanding in his relationship. When disappointed he turns his wrath on them with savage resentment. Social passion occasionally helps Jimmy to overcome his frustration and assist him to escape his troubling mind now and then.

**LOOK BACK IN ANGER** is thus a painful portrayal of suffering and survival in a world that offers no hope.



# STRUCTURE

The play has got a circular structure. The three acts start and finish in the same places, Jimmy flat, at the same time a Sunday morning with the same setting with characters doing the same action in the third and first act; Jimmy and Cliff engaged in their even lasting discussion about Sunday's papers and Helena and Alison engaged with the ironing board, dressed in the same way wearing a shirt of Jimmy's.

The play follows the traditional pattern of the well made play; exposition, climax or complication or denouement final resolution of the action.

The play shocked the audience for the language, the accurate realism of its setting and for its socialist themes.

The language is genuine simple and straight forward but full of slangs and colloquialism, provoking crude, aggressive and violent.

The setting is the typical habitat of the working class families, depicted in accurate details a shabby and gloomy room.

The play highlights the widespread uneasiness of the young generation who is enraged with the social injustice and the persistence of rigid class privileges and were dissatisfied with the stagnation of the economic and intellectual life of Britain. The play also deals with existential failure and the pain of being alive.

There are five characters in the play Alison and her father, Colonel Redfern, Jimmy porter the protagonist cliff, jimmy's friend and Helena and actress.

They belong to different social classes. Alison and her father are from upper middle class, Helena from the middle class, Jimmy and Cliff are from the working class. The main character is Jimmy Porter. He becomes the voice of the young generation of post-war England. He expresses their way of thinking and their ideals of rebel, both also their frustrations.

# PLOT

The action of the play develops in a logical and coherent manner. In Act I, the protagonist Jimmy Porter is introduced who is a man at odds with his wife, with his wife's family, with his friend and with the world at a large too, His wife and his friend Cliff are feeling uncomfortable under his censorious and contemptuous remarks.

In second Act, a new character, Helena is introduced. She is an old friend to Alison. Alison confides in Helena the kind of sordid life she had to lead with Jimmy under the roof of his friend, Hugh.

She also makes reference to Hugh's mother, Mrs. Tanne, who had established Jimmy in the sweet stall which he is running for his livelihood. In the same scene news comes that Mrs. Tanner has suffered a stroke and has been admitted to a hospital in London. Jimmy gets ready to go to London to attend upon the dying woman, but Alison refuses to go with him.

In the mean time Helena has sent a telegram to Alison, father to come immediately as Alison is unhappy with Jimmy. Alison leaves her father while Helena stays behind. When Jimmy returns from London after Mrs. Tanner's death and talks in his usual offensive manner to Helena she slaps him but immediately afterwards kisses him, drawing him down by her side.

In Act III, Scene I, Jimmy lives happily with Helena as his mistress but just when they are making plans for the future Alison unexpectedly returns. In Act III, Scene II Helena leaves Jimmy, while Alison gets reconciled to him.

# SYMBOLS IN THE PLAY

**Newspaper** – Newspaper is a symbol of Jimmy's education. He mimics the habits of the upper class university educated elite. He repeatedly comments on what he is reading. He also uses newspaper articles as a way to belittle the intelligence of Cliff and Alison. The newspaper in the apartment also forms a "jungle" showing that in a working class environment, this status symbol becomes something that upper class characters like Alison would consider chaotic and dangerous.

Alison and Jimmy's bear and squirrel game is an access to a simple affection for each other which they cannot achieve in normal life. The animals symbolize the fact that social norms and conventions interfere with the love that these two characters have for each other.

Church bells symbolize a respectable middle class morality that Jimmy finds oppressive.

Jimmy's Jazz trumpet is heard off stage at various points in the play. It symbolizes Jimmy's desire to be a voice of resistance in society.

The play describes the British post war theatre, the phrase "angry young men" was coined to refer to a group of British writers of the 1950's who shared Osborne's desire to protest against the political and social conditions of post war England, while the term "Kitchen Sink Drama, also has its roots in **LOOK BACK IN ANGER.**



# CONCLUSION

The play brings forth the idea how some people have their own ways of thinking and reacting, which are highly contrasting to the social norms. The play demonstrates striking parallels with Osborne's own life. The character of Alison is a representation of his Ex-wife, the voice of Osborne is audible in Jimmy Porter and Cliff's character refers to his friend Anthony Creighton. The major theme of **LOOK BACK IN ANGER** is a social protest. It was the first British play that openly dramatized bruising emotion and it was the first to give the alienated lower classes and youth of England a weapon.

# REFERENCES:-

1. [englishliterature24.blogspot.com](http://englishliterature24.blogspot.com)
2. Aditya Nandwani
3. [neoenglish.wordpress.com](http://neoenglish.wordpress.com)