JOHN OSBORN'S LOOK BACK IN ANGER: HARBINGER OF POSTMODERNISM

Abstract:Some literary figures and literary works prove to be landmark of some movements and events in the history of literary creations from the critics' view point. They may reveal the demarcation of such changes and periods. Indeed, the works and even the authors are offshoot of the conditions of different origins. This paper using text clues analysis intends to reveal the way themes, settings, characters, and the problems of different types are manifested in John Osborne's great play, Look Back in Anger, to show the gradual termination of the already accepted rules of life and theatre as well as the transition and the beginning of a new social, personal, humanistic views alongside dramatic structure of a new theater as the offshoot of postmodernism. It also through the introduction of the features of postmodern theatre implicates the fact that what happens in the play may be taken as the beginning of postmodernism in theatre in its consummated form.

Keywords: John Osborne; Harbinger; Postmodernism; Look back in Anger

1-Introduction

Intellectuals have done their best to reflect what exists in the common trends of life. Many of them may have directly been affected or belitteled by the obsessions of their time came into existence by the common problems of different sources. The way they have tried to reflect the problems of the time is something which has attracted the eye view of the critics and the readers. The literary texts have had the power of attracting the viewpoint of the readers and the critics with this regard. Literary creators have done their best to show how the obsessions have dominated the world, the people, or even the author himself. This is exactly what we are going to do with analyzing the texts, unravelling different layers behind it, and conveying exaclty what is going on within the text, and what is being conveyed by the text as the theme or as its intending message. In twentith century which was the era lenient for the many diverse incidents and events happened by the idiosyncratic problems of the time including the first World War, the second World War, the danger of the possible third World War, and many more problems of the like has given rise to the creation of many new meanings to being and existence. The views which were once the most obvious and familiar ideas have now been turned to totally novel and different problems of the like.

Modern man has become strange in some respects and has proved to be highly illusive and ambigious in many respects specially his being and identity. The majority of the problems came into existence in some way or the other can be clearly identified and attributed to the delimmas originating from the reality of being and existentialism. Sometimes, for him, technology turns out to be strange; some other time, he is stuck in his own bieng, the other time, he gets involved in self torture and despair. For the clarification of such a human being, one can see that many works of art have turned to different tacts for the vivid representation of the reality of man and his obsessions. In this paper, the view of women as creatures dangerous and unkown have been dealt with by John Osborne who has a strong tendency to introduce the reality of human being and his obsession with social class categorization. Why he has tried to manifest this aspect of the gender of human being as encompassing vicious wills and deeds is something which has allured the researcher and, for sure, the readers. The inter interpretation of such manifestations forming a triangle of author, reader, and the researcher gives hints to the joy and clarification of the coding and decoding of what these three desire and aspire and at the same time are obsessed with them. Such themes turn out to be ideosyncracy of modern and postmodern world. The theatre of the time has adapted, modified, and tailored its elements on the line of handling such topics and with this regard Osborne's theatre tries

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to herald and announce such a way of theme development is in fact the beginning of post modern formation of drama in its modified version and format.

New Theatre Demand

The gradual reform and changes in the form and the orientation of theatre can be detected in the works and attitudes of the playwrights giving their place and lending their position to the many orientations of era. As for dramatic literature it is viable that "the modern(ist) drama is still persistently viewed as moving from the realistic (yet formally neoclassical) Ibsen and the naturalistic Strindberg to the socially, politically, and psychologically oriented "problem plays" of the twentieth century (and beyond), fed occasionally by assorted "techniques" from aberrant avant-garde movements"(Cardullo, 2008:1). Such replacement movements can be seen and detected into deeper and narrower layers of the playwrights' area of activities. Their detection in British theatre is fascinating.

"Whether social or domestic the 'Kitchen Sink Drama changed the trajectory of British theater. Though many of authors considered to have written in this genre such as Osborne, Arnold Wesker, Shelagh Delaney and John Arden never claimed the title of 'Kitchen Sink Dramatist', these authors plays contained themes of common life that deeply resonated with British culture of the period. These types of plays signaled a resolute shift of British theater into the 20th century" (Shrikant Jadhav, 2015:3). The way drama could have been more impressive has been the prime aim of dramatists on the line of conveying what they want to get at. Osborne has done this reform in his drama delicately. Through close scrutiny, one can see that Osborne's works target and harbinger new horizons as the prime and sole objectives of their works indicating that a new type of drama emerges which is supposed to be totally in congruent with the features of new eras in art and literature. In his drama, man's view of his existentence is remarkably different from the past. In the past, this idea prevailed in the society that, "the very consciousness that created such invincible heroes as Achilles, Siegfried and the like testifies to the fact that man has always tried to escape from the absurdity of his existence through courage, heroic actions and, above all, the power that was gained either through knowledge (e.g. Odysseus) or unlimited physical strength (e.g. Achilles)". At this post modern ancient times, "allegorically portraying a man (namely, Sisyphus) rolling a piece of rock to the top of the hill and finding it downhill again, and the one experienced by era, the idea of absurdity is significantly different from the one that existed in the the twentieth-century man who is deeply involved in the absurdity of his life", (Aliakbari and Pourgive, 2006:2) existence, and view of his self and identity. Indeed, the prime concern of modern man has targeted his sense of his self, his centre of his own view upon that views of other things are built. To Osborne, modern man's attitudes regarding social classification and gender descrimination has turned out to be the great obsession of his characters which shows this new and modern aspect of drama in its theme development power. It is made more clear as Esslin has indicated that, as one of the great underlying causes of man's existential problems and specifically his blurred view of his self and identity, we can obviously detect that the,"sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of human condition is, broadly speaking, the theme of the plays of Beckett, Adamov, Ionesco, Genet" (Esslin ,1969: xix)and other writers like Harold Pinter, John Osborne and his *Look Back in Anger*. No matter what else it might possibly be, as the name suggests, postmodernism signifies the quest to move beyond modernism. Specifically, it involves a rejection of the modern mind-set, but launches under the conditions of modernism. Hence, to understand postmodern thinking, we have to view it in the context of the modern world that gave birth to it and against which it is reacting. (Grenz, 1996, qtd. Li Ma, 2013).

As for its predessor, modernism is a revolutionary movement including all of the creative arts that rooted in the 1890s, and a transitional period during which artists and writers sought to liberate themselves from the constraints and polite conventions associated with Victorianism. (Murfin, 2003, qtd. In Lima, 2013). They try to get away form the the already established and taken for granted rules of science and art. Through exoperimentation they have a strong tendency to

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reviatalize the reality of their concepts and ideas to justify and mirror the dominant sense of loss, displacement, dislocation, ambiguity of identity even disappointment at the break of the First World War.

5-Osborne And His Time

With the advent of technology and the World Wars among nations, trends of different types became prevelant in the society. Norms changed, social classes were called into question, the already established rules were drastically reviatalized, reformed, discarded or found new applications. In the realm of literature, the events after the Second World War of 1939-1945 demanded a new type of drama. "The end of the war seemed to mark the beginning of a new era for drama. Post-War Britain was a period of serious social and political upheavals, especially with the breakdown of the class system. It was a society where so much was expected from those in authority but nothing was forthcoming. This ultimately led to disillusionment and despair. However, there was liberalisation in education which made many people in the middle and working classes able to go to university despite the unavailability of jobs" (Ward 1964, 17qutd. In Afolayan, 2012). Such changes and demands were the basis of new structures and movements in theatre and literature. Thus the vast alterations of this era provided the basis for the "new dramatic efflorescence championed by new playwrights and writers like John Osborne, Ann Jellicoe, Kingsley Amis, C. Wilson, Alan Sillitoe and John Arden. These writers were young and felt more keenly the deleterious effects of the malaise in the society. They, therefore brazenly used their art to encapsulate this despair and negotiate social change. They were not subtle and ironic but belligerent and vitriolic, "left-wing" and irreverent" (Bosede F. AFOLAYAN 2012:3).

5-1Osborne's Novel Ideas

The World Wards gave rise to the rapid change of wishes and trends in every aspect of the society leaving every thing at the mercy of suspicion and reconsideration. Dramatic literature proved to be flexible and promising regarding the new demands of humanity and the society. With this regard, Osborne asserted a remarkable capability for "dramatizing the dilemma and the sense of inadequacy felt by the younger generation in the fifties. He shows small group of young people of the very present day living in a sorry state of emotional and physical squalor. His writing is the very penetrating truth. In 1957 Osborne wrote: I do not like the kind of society in which I find myself. I like it less and less. I love the theatre more than ever because I know that it is what I always dreamed it might be: a weapon". (Verma, 1977: 1)

In such societies women are often assumed to serve the men of their household and, when conflicts do arise, it is often the man who is portrayed as the suffering protagonist. Osborne gives rise to the creation of characters who are obsessed in any way not tangible to the other. Both men and women are obsessed in their own ways. Right at the onset of the play, one can see the couple deeply surrounded by the magazines and books and are both involved in their own studies, reading, and thinking. Although they are living together, they are totally far distant from each other. Each is obsessed in his/her own way and can not help the other. The only salvage possible is assigning the responsibility of one's obsession against the other. Osborne's obsessions for assigning approperiate changes upon dramatic liteature regarding his own view of his own desired theatre leads to his belief that there is always room for the theatre which would fullfill the expectations of the time and the era. He Says: "There is room for many kinds of theatre, but the one that matters the most is one that offers vital, emotional dynamic to ordinary people, that breaks down class barriers, and all the many obstacles set in the way of feeling. What is most disastrous about the British way of life is the British way of feeling, and this is something the theatre can attack. We need a new feeling as much as we need a new language. Out of this feeling will come the language."(Verma, 1977: 4)

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What heralded this attitude was in a sense originating from the fact that had been originated from the reality of the life and view of his people who, for sure, had obsessed the view of people too. He scrutinzed the view of the young generation and asserted his own deep dissatisfaction with the conditions of his time "There was a strong dislike to the traditional values among the youngsters, and they were in quest of new values. A very high propotion of young people were fighting hard to adjust themselves in an out-dated, socio-moral convention. Even the rich who enjoyed the material comforts did not cultivate a sense of communal belonging and experienced lonliness in the mass society" (B.Sangamitra, 2015: 2).

The ideas of reforming and welcoming plausible changes upon literature reveald the fact that changes would be inevitable but the way such changes would be exercised upon dramatic literature, for sure, was in need of great care gaurrenting its success and approperiacy.

As Sangamitra further asserts, he tries to assign whatever changes necessary to his own time conditions. Hence, he tries to apply his own framework to the theatre at the service of his themes on the line of his artistic goals. "The first thing that strikes about Osborne is his concern about a new feeling. He found that the old, overworked and irrelevant themes of the English drama were a boring stuff. They did not announce any emotions, so he changed the drama to the extent of attacking new situations which were wholly characteristic of the post-industrial capitalist society. The new situations gave him freedom to exploit new feelings and that created new language, which is Osborne's language" (B.Sangamitra, 2015:1)

5-2 His Aim

Osborne has tried from a political view point to introduce the social norms of the society of his time. He has asserted so many times that his prime objectives were interpreting and analyzing the social obsessions and problems of his community so as people would be able to find and settle over their existential problems. Osborne through linking and applying ancient elements of drama to the modern drama paves the way for the post moderism succeeding modernism. With the drastic changes of the norms and modes of feeiling, thinking, and behaving, for sure, if drama wants to be informative it should lend itself to self explanatory and justifying elements which are welcomed by the readers and the viewers. Osborne has proved to be highly successful with this regard. In *Look Back in Anger*, he shows "Like other 'Kitchen Sink Drama' pioneers, the real lives and social inequality of ordinary working class people and its protagonists 'Jimmy' described as angry young men. Jimmy, husband of Alison, runs the stall of sweets with his friend Cliff for their bread and butter. He never tries to live happily with his wife Alison because she belongs to upper class family and Jimmy thinks that the upper class people always underestimate the working class people. So, throughout the play Jimmy troubles his wife a lot. He even cannot bear her small mistakes"(Shrikant Jadhav, 2015 :3-4) which are committed by everybody. All he has got to do is challenging his being and the trabquality of their lives.

Osborne's Major Theatre Features

The definition of literary eras is mainly formed by its accompanying features and characteristics. The eras mainly dominent at 20th century are known as modernism and postmodernism which are overlapping in many respects. Each decode of this century due to the rapic advances in changes in views and concepts calls for its own ideosyncracies. It is not easy to find an exact definition for a postmodern work. Through the features one can see and identify a work as following postmodern features."Postmodernism neither suspends the referent but works instead to problematize the activity when the postmodernist work speaks of itself, it is no longer to proclaim autonomy, its self-sufficiency, its transcendence; rather, it is to narrate contingency, insufficiency, lack of trnscendence(Craig Owens, 2017:80)

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The dominant factors at this century are social and political motives. Social life and community with its labyrinth of relationships either virtual or the real one as one of the manifestations of post modern era has harassed people psychologically by the idea of seclusion, that is, losing their membership to a party, a society, a specialized centre, or the like. The detection of such an attitude can be directly inferred from the hostile attitude of Jimmy towards the upper social class and his obsession with the differentiation of such a classification. Playwrights' attempts to form a special class of theatre to revolt against the norms of the society has played a leading role. Osborne was a member of Kitchen-sink theatre. "The so-called "kitchen-sink" playwrights, those interested, like Arnold Wesker, Brendan Behan and Shelagh Delaney, in the daily dramas of the lower-middle and working classes, had somehow lost momentum. Despite their efforts, it is difficult to say to what extent they succeeded in creating a genuine working-class theatre in England" (Sara Martín Alegre, 25).

Individuals form their mode of thinking and behaving according to these needs whether true or false, harmless or useful, agreeable or miserable. The immediate need of characters to avoid seclusion which is in a sense one of the many politically oriented social constraints on the private lives of people drives them to the threshold of losing their sense of self and identity within this vortex. The implementation of such feelings places and determines the status of the individuals. Whatever forms the major trends of the behaviour in the characters of Osborne derives them to look bitter in anger at everything. Many an individuals are trapped either in these webs or are obsessed in their deep thinking and feelings in their deep layers of id or ego forming some threatening attitudes towards themselves or the rest of the society. "The first performance of John Osborne's famous play Look Back in Anger at the Royal Court Theatre on 8 May 1956 is commonly regarded as the beginning of a new era in the British Drama" (Emine Tecimer, 2005). Many other critics call it a revolution in British theatre. During this era man's detachment from any other source of help and salvation has thrown him into infinity of nothingness, suffering, and alienation. This is what staged in modern drama. "In modern drama, the patriarchal relationship between God and the individual soul has been replaced by the adversarial relationship between man and his own psychology, his will to comprehend himself, even as the patriarchal relationship between ruler and subject has been replaced by the adversarial relationship between man and society, in the form of society's drive to marginalize all those that it cannot or will not homogenize" (Cardullo Bert, 2008), 5).

These alongside other succeeding characteristics of the time such as subservience, dislocation, obsession, alienation, detachment, and chaos all proved to be the igniting fuel for dislocating and dispossessing man of his own being and existence which is the core theme of Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. This play can be classified as the tragicomedy of humanity at the mercy of random, gratuitously kind or brutal inner or outer forces" (Lois Gordon, 2002: 11) which have targeted man's sense of his self, identity, and his existence. Jimmy's restlessness and his uneasy feelings of being and thinking confirms the paradygm of modern and the oncoming postmodern man's mode of thinking and being.

Osborne's Theatre

The setting in time of his play is placed during the World Wars which have put the whole globe in a turmoil of reform and dispair, for sure, has affected the selection of Osborne's setting selection in a family in which the couple in constant turmoil of dispair, excitement, and bitter quarrel over the social norms and trends. The action throughout takes place in the Porters' one-room, flat in the Midlands. The description of the scene shows the accompanying modern and postmodern characteristics which are in accordance with the times' era. The properties, the position, and the very involment of each of the chareacters in reading newspapers indicate the class status of the apartment dewellers and their mode of thinking as well as their lifestyle.

> "The scene is a fairly large attic room, at the top of a large Victorian house. The ceiling slopes down quite sharply from L. to R. Down R. are two small low windows. In front of

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> these is a dark oak dressing table. Most of the furniture is simple, and rather old. Up R. is a double bed, running the length of most of the back wall, the rest of which is taken up with a shelf of books. Down R. below the bed is a heavy chest of drawers, covered with books, neckties and odds and ends, including a large, tattered toy teddy bear and soft, woolly squirrel. Up L. is a door. Below this a small wardrobe. Most of the wall L. is taken up with a high, oblong window. This looks out on to the landing, but light comes through it from a skylight beyond. Below the wardrobe is a gas stove, and, beside this, a wooden food cupboard, on which is a small, portable radio. Down C. is a sturdy dining table and three chairs, and, below this, L. and R., two deep, shabby leather armchairs. AT RISE OF CURTAIN, JIMMY and CLIFF are seated in the two armchairs R. and L., respectively. All that we can see of either of them is two pairs of legs, sprawled way out beyond the newspapers which hide the rest of them from sight. They are both reading. Beside them, and between them, is a jungle of newspapers and weeklies" (*LBA*, 2).

As for the setting in time one can see that

ACT I
Early evening. April

ACT II
Scene l. Two weeks later.
Scene 2. The following evening

ACT III
Scene 1. Several months later.
Scene 2. A few minutes later (*LBA*, 1)

The time course of the play lasts for several months showing that the social movements are lengthy process, its reform and changes calls for long endeavour, thinking, and fighting.

10-Conclusion

John Osborne has tried to restructure drama to make it approperiate for the revelation of the existential probems of his time. He has made and exercised desirable changes upon the theater so that he would politically introduce the social delimmas of his time. In *Look Back in Anger*, he has made alterations in the structure of the theater to make it approperiate for modern England society. The changes he has exercised on every aspect of the drama reveal the fact that he has made drama suitable for the postmodern characteristics on the way. He has proved to be successful in reforming dramatic literature on the line of deploying it for the introduction and manipulation of obsessions of his time. It can be concluded that the changes he has made to the structure of the drama from theme to the setting, characterization, language, etc. alongside a new social, personal, humanistic views as well as dramatic structure all can be good indicators of postmodernism via the lense of his theatre.

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