

The Frustrated Voice of Jimmy's Tirades in Osborne' *Look Back in Anger*

Keywords: frustrated tirades, mood of the angry man, working class generation.

Lect. Khalid Jaber Alogaili

University of Kufa/ Faculty of Arts/ Department of English

في مسرحيه "انظر خلفك بغضب" للكاتب جون ازبورن

الكلمات المفتاحية: الخطب المحبطة، مزاج الرجل الغاضب، جيل الطبقة العاملة

المدرس خالد جابر العكيلي

جامعه الكوفة/ كلية الآداب/ قسم اللغة الانكليزية

المستخلص:

يعد جون ازبورن واحد من كتاب المسرح الانكليزي البارزين. كذلك تعتبر مسرحية (انظر خلفك بغضب) والتي كتبها عام ١٩٥٦ علامة فارقة في المسرح الانكليزي الحديث وفقا لتركيبتها و موضوعها. استخدم الكاتب سيل من الخطب المسهبة ليصور حياة الطبقة الكادحة وحدث ثورة غضب مفعمة بالحيوية للمسرح ليصدم الجمهور. عززت الخطب التي أطلقتها الشخصية الرئيسية (جمي بورتر) موضوع المسرحية وأيضا لعبت هذه الخطب كقوة حيوية في استمرار المسرحية. تمثل هذه الخطب جوهر المسرحية وبدونها تعد المسرحية مفرغه وتقف بقية الشخصيات في موضع ردة الفعل منها. في هذا البحث يتم تحليل الأسباب لمثل هذه الخطب المسهبة وتأثيرها على الشخصيات. كذلك يوضح البحث كيف أطلق جيمي بورتر العنان لهذه الخطب ضد زوجته (السون) وصديقه (كلف) وضد ممارسات الكنيسة وضد كل شي من حوله.

ABSTRACT

John Osborne is one of the British prominent playwrights. His play *Look Back in Anger*, which was written in 1956, is a mark of distinction in British modern theatre due to its structure and theme. He used a torrent of tirades to depict the life of working class people and brought an energetic revolution of anger into the theater to shock the audience. The theme of the play is reinforced through several tirades by the protagonist (Jimmy Porter). These tirades take a role of a dynamic power, which keeps the play going on. The other characters are in a position of reaction to these tirades, so they (the tirades) represent the core of the play and it is nothing without them. In this paper, the reasons of these tirades are analyzed and their impact on the characters is also presented. The paper points out how Jimmy Porter unleashed his tirades against his wife (Alison), his friend (Cliff), the practices of the church, and against everything around him.

Introduction

Tirade originally came from French tirade , which means " volley, shot, speech", and from old Italian tirata, which means "volley" or the past participle tirare "to draw"(tirade, online).

It is an outburst of a long angry speech, which is resulted from a psychological oppression in which someone violently criticizes a person or thing. It expresses the emotions of anger and melancholy directly using an accusatory tone. It is sometimes used as a relief for those, who suffer in their everyday life, because it helps them to draw out their inner angry emotions.

John Osborne is interested in the image of one man fighting single-handed against his country, but he is not so interested in the issues that make fighting necessary. In his letter, as in Porter's tirades, the mood of disgust is clear and the gesture of rejection is also clear but the reasons for them are anything but clear. His play *Luther* is about a rebel, but it is only very superficially concerned with Indulgences and Justification by Faith, and it is scarcely concerned with other questions of dogma or abuses in the Roman Catholic Church. He presents the rebellion without bothering about the reasons beyond it. This is the reason why Osborne writes in terms of monologues and this is why his heroes usually dispose of the structures of the plays containing them. They are full of fighting spirit, but they are not sure what they fight for at all. They fight against neither limited to nor defined by the incidents and relations that make up the action, and while the mouthpiece monologue dictate the rhythm and shape of the whole play, as they do, it is possible for the spokesman-hero to be put into any sort of critical perspective(Hayman, 1968: 8).

Look Back in Anger is about a group of people lived in Midland town in 1950s. Jimmy Porter the husband is an ex-undergraduate, who

married a woman from a class higher than his own. This marriage widens the gap between the husband and his wife, because they come from different social groups and they have different cultural, educational and social backgrounds. Jimmy's friend Cliff is sharing with them the flat and helps him in running a sweet-stall. The play is occupied by long frustrated tirades of abuse by which Porter heaps insult on his society, and its hypocrisy and absence of values. Most of this abuse spilled over into scathing attacks on his wife and his friend. He is used to mock his wife's origins and he can not find a way to reconcile the hatred created with the attraction and emotions, which he feels for her. Another character appears in the play adding a new atmosphere to the flat, this character is Alison' friend Helena, who, for the first time, tries to bridge the gaps and to find solutions to the non-natural marital relation of Jimmy and his wife but ultimately she is convinced that Alison should leave the flat (Jeffares,2002:91).

In this play the convention employed is called natural convention, in which the audience is asked to accept that what occurs on the stage is a credible imitation of a real or natural behavior. Most of the characters remain speechless on the stage and the meaning of what is said is modified by their reactions, but Jimmy's speech occupies the whole dialogue, thus this character is given a wide space to speak since he acts as a representative of the working society (Ibid: 140).

The Mood of the Angry Young Man

Anger is the right word John Osborne used in his title "angry young man" which stayed as a catchphrase for a long time, but anger should be directed against something and if it is about everything, then it is not anger. Jimmy Porter has the same quantity of sulphuric energy poured into attacks he launches on everything around him; Alison, Helena, Cliff , the social system, women in general, Sunday papers and conservative Parliament members etc (Hayman,1968:2).

Jimmy is the most significant character in the play due to his sophisticated personality in comparison with the other characters, who are simple ones. His anger plays a prominent part in his personality. Psychologically, he is angry and dissatisfied with life in general and he can not blend himself with the environment and people around him. So, he throughout the play is attacking things: he exposes the absurdity of evening invocations to the Coptic goddess of fertility, in which some people of Midland are indulging. Due to a newspaper report, a participant in those rites killed a small cock and drank its blood. Then, he finds a chance to have a sarcasm at Alison's mother, saying that she must have been sticking pins into his waxen image for years. He also attacks the concept of sacrifice, justifying that people are sacrificing things they do not need in the first place. He illustrated this point saying that people give up their beliefs, careers or pleasure of sex because they are not capable of ever wanting them. So, they are not appreciated because their action is not really a sacrifice but a pretence of sacrifice. He reveals the hypocrisy of people who offer sacrifices to their gods (Lall, 2011: 80).

The fundamental point of Jimmy's character is his relation with the past. The title of the play contains the essential contradiction that Jimmy's character explores. He becomes angry when he looks back at the past in which he longs to be contained, but he can not ever quite accept. It is not because he has a better dream to offer, but because he can not accept the dreams of the past except by a process of sentimentalizing them. He is survived by idealizing the past and by the mental image of the past, which for Jimmy is a resort and a place of recuperation to which he travels when emptiness of present and desolation of future become unbearable.

His anger starts in human idealism and the desire that men must be more honest, alive and more human than they normally are. His sense of outrage is little controlled by either stoicism, selflessness or any elucidative discipline of the mind that it degenerates into moods profoundly destructive to life. His motives are mixed, so his anger with Alison centers either in a solid desire to save her or in ugly kind of possessiveness heavily disguised (Taylor, 1968: 26).

Certainly, Jimmy's anger is vital in the play; it drives and moves the wheel of the play. Anger is the prominent feature of the play as well as the origin of energy, which is as unclear as its direction; it is a devastating force. Jimmy is called a repressed homosexual, a frustrated artist, sadomasochist and idealist without causes. No one of these descriptions seems to help, because Jimmy eluded them. His tirades would look to many spectators what they already are: irrelevant, silly and unbearable. Jimmy's views are the product of his energy quarrelling with a society that seems to be small for him. He must be eccentric

rather than ego–eccentric and the refusal of English society must imply a moral judgment on that society. He mustn't be allowed to erupt as a volcano, smothering Cliff, Alison and Helena with his energy (Mander,1961: 145).

Throughout the play, Jimmy is cursing people and several things because he is dissatisfied with life. What causes his anger seems to be the inequality between his origin of working class and his wife's upper class. One more reason beyond his dissatisfaction is the routine of life he follows which does not offer a variety or excitement. He dislikes Sundays because they annoy him by their sameness: "Always the same rituals. Reading the papers, drinking tea, ironing. A few more hours and another week gone. Our youth is slipping away" (p.8). Since Cliff and Alison are empty from any kind of enthusiasm, this plays a role in Jimmy's bitterness: " Oh heavens, how I long for a little ordinary human enthusiasm. Just enthusiasm that is all." A little later he complains: " Nobody thinks nobody cares. No beliefs no convictions and no enthusiasm. Just another Sunday evening" (p.9). His father's death is still clearly an apparent reason of anger; he saw his father dying when he was ten years old and this experience at this age made a very deep impression on his mind: "You see, learnt at an early age what it was to be angry–angry and hopeless. And I can never forget it. I knew more about love, betrayal and death when I was ten years old" (p.52). The estrangement of emotions by his wife also took part in his frustration: "There's a hardly moment when I'm not watching and wanting you. Nearly four years of being in the same room with you night and day and I still can't stop my sweat breaking out when I see you doing something

as ordinary as leaning over an ironing board" (p.27). These reasons grouped together to create an angry young man, who feels frustrated, because society is callous and does not treat him gently (Lall: 132–133).

The Representative of Working Class Generation

Look Back in Anger led to the emergence of working-class drama at a particular stage of cultural and social change in Britain. The life that comes through is disorganized and drifting, poverty and youth are factors in this, but the general condition of feeling matters is more in these plays than any precise social setting. The true social experience is of a general disorganization, restlessness and frustration which had elements in common with an utterly different dramatic style it replaced (Williams, 1968: 367).

Jimmy porter is merely a spokesman for his generation and there is a solid connection between the individual and the psychological troubles he encounters; the troubles of the whole generation in the early 1950s. He is a good example of people who were born into the working class (Jeffares: 129).

Jimmy regards himself and is regarded by the author as a spokesman for the younger post-war generation, which looks round at the universe and finds nothing right with it. He shares his forlorn bohemia with his wife and his friend who assists him at running a sweet shop. It is not difficult to understand that his restless displeasure, which is expressed in a set of speeches of great length and cruelty, should make the place uncomfortable for the others (Taylor: 35).

Definitely, Jimmy makes cool cutting remarks concerning contemporary society as a result of his own peculiar personality problems. He is an extremely peculiar young man and anything but a representative of a generation of young men. His ranting is usually the natural outgrowth of his psychotic state: it is a defense mechanism he uses to hurt his wife, Alison. He is a sort of those who need but they are too proud to ask, absolute devotion, which he needs from his wife who came from upper-class family. His dilemma is not the hypocrisy and vicious injustice of social order, it's his suppressed awareness of insoluble psychological paradox resulted by his desperate dominating need to have a woman's complete love and his simultaneous constitutional inability to get along with anyone. His bursts are the overflow of bitterness when his wife fails to measure up to the levels of devotions he is looking for from her. He intends and tries deliberately to destroy his wife's love for him, because it is not the one that he imagined(Wellwarth,1964: 115).

I suppose people of our generation aren't able to die for good causes any longer. We had all that done for us in the thirties and forties, when we were still kids. There aren't any good, brave causes left. If the big bang does come, and we all get killed off, it won't be in aid of the old-fashion, grand design. It'll just be for the Brave New-nothing-very-much-thank-you. About as pointless and inglorious as stepping in front of a bus. No, there's nothing left for it, me boy, but to let yourself be butchered by the women(act iii:78).

This quotation shows both political skepticism and personal frustration. It is both a comment on society and a way for Jimmy to show the churning within him, an anger that originates in his inability to

communicate with others especially women as fully and meaningfully as he feels. It also reveals Jimmy's grudge for upper class, which is represented by his wife Alison, whom enlarges this grudge via her daily routine and her frozen feelings towards her husband. Additionally, the final sentence of the quotation defines realm as the entire play illustrates in which communication could be important or meaningful(Gindin, 1963:184).

The Frustrated Voice of Tirades

The definition of *Look Back in Anger* is not difficult, indeed it has been widely made. Its details of atmosphere, talk and through these expressions of intense feelings, a frustrated anger, a prolonged wait which should be broken at any cost by a demonstration and shouting which has authentic power. It is the traditional room of the naturalist theatre; the room as a trap with messages and sounds of determining and frustrating world coming inside from outside. It is a trapped angry slang of people shut up so long in just this condition and of one man raging on behalf of them all but in default of a visible general condition at each and all of them as victims. Jimmy Porter, the main character is raging at himself through the outrage at others in intolerable general state. The social sickness is reenacted in this particular enclosed form as the sickness of available relationships and of this sick man at their center. What comes through the play is a new voice and a different edge; not the measured despair and the sweet hopelessness, but directly disordered talking and crying, the cruelty, the social criticism, the sentimentality of a trapped certain group. The sound of a voice is pivotal and memorable in *Look Back in Anger*. The sharp edge of this voice draws on those apparently separable emotions which felt as a single

emotion, the play is not a voice only; it is an action around that voice. The action serves to release the voice, which can hide itself behind an apparent action (Williams:366).

Osborne invites the audience to consider the character of Jimmy Porter in a very complex way. The actor is instructed to play the part of searching the character for its hidden possibilities. There is a stress on Jimmy's uncertainty and weakness, a strong hint that the verbal force and energy are the product of a nervous tension within the character and also there is a contradiction in his physical appearance. Jimmy is tall, thin young man, he smokes a pipe, which he uses as a device to assert his masculinity. He has a need to compensate on the surface for weakness within himself, the one that he perceives but not too much or too completely. There are possibilities latent in Jimmy to capture the sympathy of the audience if they perceive the real figure behind the mask, the unsure, tender and honest young man beyond the cruel and arrogant surface (Jeffares: 112).

Jimmy is a rebel without cause, a self indulgent young man who does not know what he wants, screams and shouts through several frustrated tirades because he can't get it. His behavior is of a childish pattern, for example his screaming at Alison to make tea then he screams he doesn't want. He behaves in the opening act, where the audience experiencing his character for the first time, like a spoilt boy. He wants the moon, but beneath the self-indulgence, the small hints in the text are enough for an actor with skill to indicate that this is a symptom rather than the roof of his character. His responses are selfish, restless and egotistic; they are rooted in a legitimate anger against a

world where people have no demands but content to accept what they are offered. His anger is directed to those who come close to struck, but his dissatisfaction is with himself and with his inability to change the world:

Oh heaven, how I long for a little ordinary human enthusiasm. Just enthusiasm that's all. I want to hear a warm thrilling voice cry out Hallelujah! Hallelujah! I'm alive! I've an idea. Why don't we have a little game? Let's pretend that we are human beings and that we are actually alive. Just for a while. What do you say? Let's pretend we are human(Act I: 9).

Jimmy, the hero, is a brilliant young clever adrift who can find no other way of using it. He uses his brilliance to punish himself and those around him. It is a splendid performance and he knows that and it's an outrageous one and he also knows, but he can not stop it. He sees through all the tricks of self-deception by which people convince themselves that life is worth living and taunts them in a funny series of tirades (Taylor: 52).

However, he is a saint-like who longs to right values in a world gone wrong and a mouthpiece of protest for a dissatisfied generation. What makes this interpretation sticks in the playgoer's mind is the burning rhetoric of his frustrated tirades even their motif is to be found in pretty personal disagreements and simple skirmishes in the battle of sexes. What matters is not that Jimmy is a mass of contradictions, but Osborne managed to insert them into a convincing dramatic representation of a

very complex human being and one who offered a rallying–point for a number of people from past war generation who felt that the world today was treating them according to their desire(Taylor, 82: 1963).

Jimmy is suspicious in any case and he is morbidly sensitive to 'foreign' noises, and also he is unnerved by silence. He confides the sound of his voice only, which he keeps turned on mechanically. This voice is buffoon and funny that it appeases censure; it is 'as nice as a show' but other characters beseech him to be silent: they cannot read the papers or do anything in peace because of his voice. Jimmy requires an undivided attention even when he is absent and he quickly knows when no one is listening: 'I'm sorry; 'I wasn't listening properly', Alison said at the beginning of the play and he returned 'You bet you weren't listening'(McCarthy, 1959:153).

Jimmy's bitterness is aimed in the first place at the modern life of the British society and his wife because she is a part of this society. He finds her as an easy target of his invectives, anger and tirades. Their day–to–day verbal skirmishes and verbal assaults create the domestic ambiance tense and tiresome beyond endurance, leaving his friend, Cliff in a bitter mood. Cliff laments, "I cannot go on watching you two tearing the insides out of each other. It looks pretty ugly sometimes" (28). The play dramatizes the collapse of conjugal affairs between an immensely resentful young graduate from working class and passively resilient young woman from the upper–class. It is clear that the temperamental incompatibility between them leads to the sexual incompatibility and then to the breakdown of their marital relations(Kadyan,2006:34).

Conclusion

Osborne is no latter-day Shaw with a program of social reforms and his principal feeling seems to be that if there are no any 'good brave causes' left which are worth dying for, then there can not be any causes that are worth fighting for. This is a romantic and negative assumption but Osborne manages to lend a positive ring to it and one of the basic reasons for Porter's popularity has been his success as an embodiment of the man of action who is frustrated because there is nothing he can go into action for. Jimmy longs to see things changed but he doesn't have any idea about what they should be changed to. It is comfortable to identify with him on this score and thousands of people took him to their hearts who in ordinary life would find such a man boorish, tiresome and arrogant, but they forgive him because he makes disaffection sound like a credo and he revamps apathy into a wildly spirited aggression that hits out at everything including apathy. Jimmy fights on two confrontations: sex and talk. In sexual episodes, Osborne uses him as a conventional character in a traditional play but in his speech-making, he doesn't. Osborne uses the stage like a platform and the character as a mouthpiece for a large mixture of points that he wants to make badly.

The domesticity of the play makes it a milestone in the twentieth English theatre. It explores details of the married couple; their background, their education, their collapsed emotions and their struggle. The play is a mixture of two completely different ambiances: one is domestic about the affairs of a conjugal life and the other one is peculiar presented by Jimmy Porter, who represents and talks on behalf of the twentieth century generation. He creates his own world via his frustrated tirades, which are feedbacks of the sad past events and the harsh

circumstances of the present. They make a ring around him and that prevents others from approaching. So these tirades are results of Jimmy's anger. In other words, his anger is uttered orally through his speech. Out of these tirades, Jimmy evacuates his anger and frustration and distributes them evenly on people and things around him and then he succeeds to change psychological anger into daily behavior via his tirades.

Bibliographies

Gindin, James (1963), '*Point of view*', in John Russell Taylor (ed.), *John Osborne: Look Back in Anger*. London: Macmillan Casebook.

Hayman, Ronald (1968), *Contemporary Playwrights: John Osborne*. London: Heinemann.

Jeffares, A.N (ed.) (2002), *John Osborne, Look Back in Anger*. Beirut: York Press.

Kadyan, Asha (2006), *John Osborne: A Playwright of Social Conscience*. Delhi: S.S. Publishers.

Lall, Ramji (2011), *John Osborne: Look Back in Anger*. New Delhi: Rama Brothers India PVT.LTD.

Mander, John (1961), '*The Writer and Commitment*' in John Russell Taylor (ed.), *John Osborne: Look Back in Anger*. London: Macmillan Casebook.

McCarthy, Mary (1959), '*A New Word*', in John Russell Taylor (ed.), *John Osborne: Look Back in Anger*. London: Macmillan Casebook.

Taylor, John Russel (ed.) (1968), *John Osborne: Look Back in Anger*. London: Macmillan Casebook.

"Tirade" Online Etymology Dictionary. Douglas Harper. Historian 18 November, 2017.

Dictionary.com <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/tirade>.

Williams, Raymond(1968), *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*. Harmondsworth Middlesex: Penguin Books.

Wellwarth, E. George (1964), *John Osborne: 'Angry Young Man'*, in John Russell Taylor (ed.), *John Osborne: Look Back in Anger*. London: Macmillan.

الصوت المحبب لخطب جيمي بورتز المسهبة