

## LOOK BACK IN ANGER- A PSYCHOTIC MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP

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### ABSTRACT

"Look Back in Anger" by John Osborn Shocked the audience by its content. The play deals with many themes but basically it deals with perverse marriage. The playwright explores how marriage becomes a burden on those who cannot understand its sanctity and look at it as a sacred bond. "A Happy Marriage is heaven on earth, a paradise that even the gods yearn to enter" Says a poet. But what goes wrong in marriage? Why does it fail? These are some of the questions that Osborn indirectly deals in the play. Marriage as a bond needs to be understood

culturally as its meaning is different in different contents.

**KEYWORDS:** Marriage, Heaven on Earth, Wrong in Marriage & Sacred Bond

### INTRODUCTION

Let us first try to understand in the context of the play. We see Alison had left her husband Jimmy because of mutual daily bickering and constant arguments. In her absence her friend Helena had replaced her and started living with Jimmy. Then one day unexpectedly Alison returns to Jimmy, Where she was shocked to find Helena. Their conversation actually is defining marriage before we talk about Jimmy Alison relationship as a psychotic marriage, we can have an opinion through their conversation.

**Alison:** (Covering her face), Oh, Why am I here! You must all wish me a thousand miles away!

**Helena:** I don't wish anything of the kind. You have more right to be here than I.

**Alison:** Oh, Helena, don't bring about the book of rules.

**Helena:** You are his wife, aren't you? Whatever I have done, I've never been able to forget the fact. You have all the rights-----

**Alison:** Helena -----even I gave up believing in the divine rights of marriage long ago. Even before I met Jimmy. They've got something different now----- Constitutional monarchy. You are where you are by consent. And if you start trying any strong arm stuff, you're out. And I am out.

We can see how Alison now is able to see marriage not as a Christian ceremony but as a Constitutional monarchy. She in a way allows Jimmy the 'freedom to flirt' and dissolve marriage with his consent. She no longer believes in the divine rights of marriage. Here we see she had rejected the traditional approach of being married. Marriage is more of 'Consent' not of a divine right. In modern times marriage is nothing but 'a mutual consent' Helena though rejects Alison's idea of 'married by consent' she says "And you pass around to anyone who happens to want it for five minutes...."

**Alison:** You loved him, didn't you? That's what you wrote, and told me.

Helena: And it was true.

Alison: It was pretty difficult to believe at the time.

I couldn't understand it.

Helena: I could hardly believe it myself.

Though this conversation it is quite clear that because of the failure of understanding between Jimmy and Alison, Helena had entered Jimmy's life as a Substitute for Alison. But soon even Helena comes to know that Jimmy is a little eccentric she points it out about Jimmy to Alison.

**Helena:** There is no place for people like that any longer----- in sex, or politics, or anything. That's why he's so futile. Sometimes, when I listen to him, I feel he thinks he's still in the middle of French Revolution. And that's where he ought to be, of course. He doesn't know where he is, or where he's going. He'll never do anything, and he will never amount to anything. We see Jimmy's problem is not the vicious injustice and hypocrisy of the social order. It is his suppressed awareness of the insoluble psychological paradox that he suffers from. His biting sarcasms are in a sense really directed inwardly against himself in the manner of guilt ridden Dostoyevskian hero who tortures himself by torturing others. His real purpose, as he tries to destroy his wife's love for him because it is not the love he had imagined is self-destruction.

Another reason of the perverse marriage of Jimmy and Alison is the class war. British society is deeply class-conscious, and Alison and Jimmy's marital problem partly derive from their different, social class origins. Jimmy, who belongs to a new, socially mobile generation which reached adulthood after the Second World War, finds himself through his marriage to Alison and his university education, in a limbo between two social classes. He can still identify the old enemy of dying imperialism in his wife. But the gap of haves and havnots is visible in their mutual conversation. Alison who belongs to an upper middle class is not able to understand the lower middle class ideology of Jimmy. Jimmy is always in anger, this anger is not for Alison as a person but it is for her rich parents. Moreover Jimmy experiences a kind of social alienation which was common to many young people at the time. While he continually insults Alison because of her upper class background and reproaches her with not being able to feel and express her feeling, he does nothing concrete to change or improve society. In this battle Alison does not know how to cope.

According to Raymond Williams Look Back in Anger is "the beginning of a revolt against orthodox middle class drama" because he believes that "what passes for realistic drama is in fact telling lies, it is not about real people in real situation, but about conventional characters in conventional situation" For the great number of critics Jimmy porter is regarded as the first non-middle class, provincial, anti establishment anti hero in modern British Drama. Before Osborne there were successful examples of working class drama for instance in Germany Gerard Hauptmann's the weavers and in the United States of America Tennessee Williams. A streetcar named Desire. However what made Osborne different from them was the fact that he was exploring the British background with a university degree. But he has a bitter feeling of belonging to a lower middle class family.

Moreover Jimmy doesn't have a good relationship with women, this is the one reason his marriage fails. His hatred is visible in following words:

"Why, why, why, why we let these women bleed us to death?"

We realize that almost all of his savagery in the play is directed against women- Alison's mother, his own mother, his various lovers; the landlady Only Hugh's mother has escaped his hatred. He hates Alison from the core of his heart and condemns her for her non-involvement-

"When you see a woman in front of her bedroom mirror, you realize what refined sort of butcher she is. Did you ever see some dirty Old Arab, Stitching his fingers into some mess of lamb fat and gristle? Well, she's just like that. Thank God they don't have women surgeons! Those primitive hands would have your guts in no time....."

It is to this primitiveness in woman that Jimmy's attacks are directed. He treats Alison as a Python, a reptilian snake swallowing him alive when he makes love to her. We see Jimmy's outbursts are the overflow of his bitterness whenever his wife fails to rise to the standards of devotion that he expects from her. He is a kind of guilt ridden hero who tortures himself by torturing others and in away spoils his marriage.

Jimmy Calls women as 'refined butchers' bleeding one to death. He taunts Alison with her virginity, as if she is deceiving him- "He seemed to think that an untouched woman would defile him."That's why Alison hesitates to inform him about her pregnancy, not sure if Jimmy would be pleased or not. He often tries to assert his false strength by smoking a pipe and calling himself the macho bear. He lashes at women simply to exhibit his vain masculinity. His bullying now and then, his nagging for tea and refusing it when prepared, his habit of gulping bulks of food, everything reveals his childlike vulnerability. Actually he needs motherly protection from women. He is an unsecured person, a parasite, like Arthur in 'Sons and Lovers'.

If we analyze Jimmy more profoundly we see, he suffers from 'Borderline personality disorder' it is a kind of mental illness which is marked by unstable moods, behavior and relationship. Experts say that people who suffer from BPD have brief psychotic episodes. People with this disorder have repulsive and repulsive and reckless behavior, unstable relationship with other people and they always have problems with regulating emotions and thoughts. Jimmy has seen so much poverty, he has witnessed his father's death and he holds his own mother responsible for this. He doesn't know his own behaviour. He mars his marriage. As a wife Alison could have enquired about the reasons of his eccentricity and tried to cure Jimmy. But she remains 'passively aggressive' Which hurts Jimmy more and he tortures her. Jimmy himself didn't know that he was psychologically sick. He always thought that Alison didn't take much interest in him. He wanted her to behave and talk much interest in him. He wanted her to behave and talk intellectually but she never responded to his over-enthusiastic discussions. It has also led to their perverse marriage. Jimmy says,

".....You two will drive me mad. Oh heaven, how I long for a little ordinary enthusiasm. Just enthusiasm-that's all. I want to hear a warm, thrilling voice cry out Hallelujah (He bangs his breast theatrically.) Hallelujah! I am alive! I have an idea. Why don't we have a little game? Let's pretend that we're human beings, and that we are actually alive. Just for a while. What do you say? Let's pretend we're human. (He looks from one to the other) oh, brother, it's such a long time since I was with anyone who got enthusiastic about anything."

This speech of Jimmy verifies his abnormalities. He over-emphasizes every bit of his thinking. It is clear he suffers from a psychosis which makes his marriage a hell. The problem with Jimmy and Alison is that Jimmy is hyper active, over-enthusiastic and abnormal, whereas Alison is his energy. This incompatibility lingers on an on. She has started treating him as a callous, Heartless fellow who cannot care about her emotions and sentiments. There is yet one more speech of Jimmy when he satires her:-

Jimmy: - "She's a great one for getting used to things. If she were died and wake up in paradise after the first five minutes, she'd have got used to it." Jimmy is so upset about everything about Alison, about system and his restlessness is visible in his boredom and anger.

He says, "Nobody thinks cares. No beliefs, no convictions and no enthusiasms. Just another Sunday evening..."

All these things together lead to failure of marriage.

Now the questions arises, was there any solution to this situation which Jimmy and Alison Caught in? We need to understand Alison also. Alison like Helena also represents society having her own ideology. She symbolizes upper class society which her husband defies, and her decision to marry him creates a veritable conflict in her mind. According to Osborne,

"She is turned in a different key, a key of well bred malaise that is often drowned in the robust orchestration of the other two. She is basically a quiet, well-bred person who in the style of her class refuses to 'stoop' to Jimmy's level, to retaliate against his provocations."

Now the point is why does she fall in love with Jimmy who is so very different? Jimmy is very different from his generation because his generation has accepted the gap of haves and have-nots but Jimmy defies it. After marriage she finds it difficult to accept Jimmy's way of life. There is always a part of Alison's mind which resists Jimmy's ways. If Jimmy is savage to her, it is partly because he doubts her commitment to him and his values.

Dyson says,

"She has never given her self  
To her husband with the honesty  
Which she knows he demands and need."

## CONCLUSIONS

The play we see ends in a compromise, Jimmy and Alison accept each other but they are not able to understand each other which shows they continue suffering 'this psychotic relationship' Alison has chosen a 'temporary respite' by Compromising to her ideals.

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