



## Look Back in Anger

*John Osborne*

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The text of the play, first performed in London in 1956, depicts the despair of post-war youth.

### Look Back in Anger Details

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Author : John Osborne

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## From Reader Review Look Back in Anger for online ebook

### Diana Long says

I would rather scoop dog poop or watch paint dry than to sit in a theater and watch this play. I do realize this play is to reflect the post war attitude of the younger generation however, total lack of respect for older people especially parents of your wife and no respect for woman does not bode well with me.

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### Muhammad Shakhawat Hossain says

There are certain books in my life I regret reading and if I'm to list them, this play, 'Look Back In Anger', should find its place in the top 5. God! What a squalid exhibition of cheap melodrama! The play means to portray the conflicts between a husband from a working class origin and his upper middle class wife; the never failing age long formulated theme. As it requires, the protagonist is a tough and very 'intelligent' man, proud of experiencing all the harshness of life while the wife is cottony soft, always offering her never ending sea of love (the formula, remember?) Our protagonist ignores the love of his wife Alison and falls in love with her bestie, Helena, creating to some extent, a tension. Now, if you're much worried about the fate of poor dear Alison, don't worry! The formula is always up there. 'True love' always prevails.

One thing I'll admit about this book that John Osborne named his play very wisely. I read the book. I looked back in disbelief at what I read. It angered me.

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### Julia says

I can understand why when this play came out in 1956, it was a very controversial subject. There were many people who thought the play was brilliant and powerful while others thought of it as disgusting and detestable. Although Osborne's writing is extremely blunt and very harsh at times (mostly with Jimmy Porter), the play brings up important political and social issues that were prominent at this time in England (the separation of classes, sexism, etc.).

Jimmy is an "angry young man" and he despises his wife, Alison Porter, and her friends for being upper-middle class while he is a member of the working class. Alison's parents were tremendously upset with Alison for even thinking of marrying Jimmy and he holds this against her. He seems to try to hide his feelings of inadequacy for Alison and her family through his cruel words and by making himself out to be the victim in an unfair societal structure. His anger towards everyone around him seems to be stemmed from his experience as a child when he alone watched his father die.

Jimmy is constantly ranting because Alison and their housemate, Cliff Lewis, are not curious and enthusiastic enough. He longs for someone to have an intelligent, interesting conversation with. He seems to have a dislike for women, maybe because he needs them to take care of him, but he does not want to be dependent on anyone. Jimmy is bothered by pretty much everything (Alison's ironing, women's noisiness, Jimmy's handling of the papers, the church bells, etc.) and he cannot seem to be content. He plays the victim in many situations and it is very clear that he enjoys getting a rise out of others with his words.

I think in some ways *Look Back in Anger* can be compared to Swift's *A Modest Proposal*. Although *A Modest Proposal* may have been slightly more morbid and straight-forward, Osborne seems to have somewhat of the same idea as Swift. Both pieces use pure and deliberate shock value as a way to get the audience to pay attention to what they are saying. Jimmy's character in *Look Back in Anger* is unsympathetic and extremely insensitive to the point where the reader/listener is forced to listen to what he is saying just because of the pure ruthlessness of it. The intensity of Jimmy's opinions makes them naturally very obvious and unavoidable. I think, although controversial, this kind of strategy really works especially when trying to spread one's work and viewpoint to as many people as possible.

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### **Caraliotiscrivo says**

...Dio mio, quanto ho bisogno di un po' di normale entusiasmo umano. Solo un po' d'entusiasmo, nient'altro. Vorrei sentire una voce calda, piena di emozione che gridasse "Hallelujah" (*si batte teatralmente il petto*), "Hallelujah"! Sono vivo! Ho un'idea. Perché non facciamo un gioco? Giochiamo a far finta che siamo degli esseri umani, e che siamo vivi sul serio. Solo per un momento. Cosa ne dite? Sì, facciamo finta di vivere...

...Il guaio... è... il guaio è che ci si abitua alla gente. I loro gesti più comuni diventano indispensabili. Indispensabili...

...Mi sembra di non aver fatto altro in vita mia che dire addio alla gente...

...Tutti vogliono sfuggire alla pena di essere vivi. E soprattutto vogliono sfuggire all'amore. (*Va alla "toilette"*) Ho sempre saputo che qualcosa del genere sarebbe successo... un dramma di coscienza tipo la moglie malata... che avrebbe sconvolto i tuoi sentimenti di fiore di serra. (*Raccoglie la roba di Helena sulla "toilette" e va all'armadio guardaroba. Fuori cominciano a suonare le campane.*) È inutile cercare di ingannarsi sull'amore. Non puoi accettarlo come si accetta un impiego facile, senza sporcarti le mani. (*Le porge la roba e apre l'armadio*) Ci vogliono muscoli e coraggio. E se non riesci a sopportare l'idea... (*stacca un vestito dalla stampella*) di sporcare la tua bell'anima di bucato... (*le si avvicina*) farai meglio a rinunciare decisamente alla vita e avviarti alla santità... (*le dà il vestito*) perché come essere umano sei fuori strada... Bisogna scegliere fra questo mondo e quell'altro...

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### **Rachel says**

I've decided to start reading plays. Why?

- a) they are generally short. I like short
- b) they get to the point. I love getting to the point
- c) no awful descriptions or indulgent purple prose. I do quite like that kind of thing, but it can so kill a book, so why bother.

Gawd, i'm becoming such a pragmatist, it's awful.

ANYWAY, am enjoying this muchly in a stomach churning way. Jimmy has to be one of the most loathesome, confused and anger inducing leads of all time. My jaw literally clenches when I think about him. Rage. I picked it because I was really intrigued by the title and felt bad for not having any idea what it was about. Well, it's about anger about your childhood, anger about other people's inability to feel or live in a

way you endorse, and being trapped. so much about being trapped, you feel really trapped yourself when you read it.

Anyway, am half way through so will report back.

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### **Paul Bryant says**

I think what happened was that after the huge horror of World War Two and the major effort to remake society in Britain (welfare state, National Health Service) there was a kind of national exhaustion, a slumping into armchairs, and those too young to have fought those battles took the exhaustion for complacency and in the early 50s got really fed up about it, and hence the Angry Young Men – Jimmy Porter in *Look Back in Anger* (first produced in May 1956) was more or less the first of those. He arrived at the same time that the teddyboys were smashing up seats in cinemas when they went to see *Rock Around the Clock* (released March 1956). Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard and the rest of the rockers were just around the corner, waiting to turn the anger into joy.

So you might think that this angry play was just the kind of kick-start required – that's what it was seen to be at the time. But when you get to actually read it, or see it or see the 1959 film, it's like sticking your hand in a food blender. A really unpleasant experience.

Jimmy Porter is a guy who pours out a constant stream of belittling bile and contempt over anything and everything in his poxy life but mostly all over his wife and her female friend. He's almost but not quite the guy who when his wife undercooks the bacon gives her a black eye and then says look what you made me do. The wife meanwhile is a total doormat. She takes the hours upon hours of psychological bullying because she understands that really he's a tortured genius who loves her and his pain is caused by the wicked world which persists in not recognising his genius and forcing him to live in a tiny one room flat and sell confectionary in a market place even though his brain is the size of the planet Jupiter at least and he's really sensitive and watched his father die when he was 10, boo hoo. What Jimmy Porter needs is a solid pistol whipping from Sonny Corleone, but (spoiler alert) this does not happen.

### **A FEW OF JIMMY'S AMUSING REMARKS**

*Have you ever noticed how noisy women are? Have you? The way they kick the floor about, simply walking over it? Or have you watched them sitting at their dressing tables, dropping their weapons and banging their bits of boxes and brushes and lipsticks?. I've watched her doing it night after night. When you see a woman in front of her bedroom mirror, you realise what a refined sort of butcher she is.*

*I know that the only way of finding out what's going on is to catch them when they don't know you're looking. When she goes out, I go through everything – trunks, cases, drawers, bookcase, everything. Why? I want to know if I'm being betrayed.*

*My wife... sweet and sticky on the outside, and sink your teeth in it, inside, all white, messy and disgusting.*

*I've no public school scruples about hitting girls.*

*Why why why do we let these women bleed us to death?*

The plot of the play is pure male fantasy – he spends an hour bullying his wife, then her female friend arrives

so he bullies her too, then the wife leaves him (hurray!) then the wife's friend falls into his arms saying she just loves a bit of rough. Jimmy's nastiness is all explained by his acute sensitivity and how he was a lonely little boy and now he's an over-educated market trader in a world where he should be president of everything. So that's why he hates women.

Look Back in Anger was one of those famous British productions I had never read or seen before so I thought I'd tick it off, and now I'm sorry I did.

??? ??? says

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<http://naqderooz.ir/oa>

## Barry Pierce says

*Look Back in Anger* is the play that literally changed everything in British theatre. I'm currently doing a module in uni on British theatre of the 1960s and my lecturer keeps referring to *Look Back in Anger*. Not five minutes will go by before she mentions *Look Back in Anger* and just how *important* it was. So I thought to myself, "hmmm, I probably should read *Look Back in Anger*.

So, we have Jimmy, a loud, rude, obnoxious, violent, angry young man. He's the main guy. The play's all about how awful he is. We observe his utter abhorrence for over two hours but somehow in that time John Osborne manages to make us *feel* for him. It's reminiscent of how Nabokov makes us actually really care about Humbert Humbert even though he is literally a pedophile. It's first-class manipulation and it's fucking

astounding.

As for the overall plot, there isn't much to say. It's a pillar of kitchen-sink drama, a genre which usually puts emotion over storyline. Many parts of the play dragged due to the dialogue being made up of lengthy monologues that essentially talk about nothing and I really felt that the first act was just never going to end. If you like really talky plays however, you'll love this. I'm sort of ambivalent towards the whole play but at least I now have some clue as to what the hell my lecturer is harping on about...

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### **Cbj says**

The play Look Back in Anger was interesting for a number of reasons, the primary reason being that it echoed the feelings of alienation and anomie felt by the ordinary man in post-imperialistic Britain. For me, the play was representative of a time when British control and power over the rest of the world was on the wane. With their best already behind them, the British were trying to find a new purpose.

This aspect of the play is emphasized by the character of Colonel Redfern. Colonel Redfern was a commander of the Maharajah's army in India and he longs for the old certainties of the Edwardian age. Even Jimmy who mocks the phoniness of the Edwardians utters the following quote: "Still, even I regret it somehow, phoney or not. If you've no world of your own, it's rather pleasant to regret the passing of someone else's. I must be getting sentimental. But I must say it is pretty dreary living in the American age – unless you're an American of course. Perhaps all our children will be Americans".

In the second act of Look Back in Anger, Colonel Redfern looks back with nostalgia for his life in India – "I had the Maharajah's army to command – that was my world and I loved it, all of it. At that time it looked like going on forever when I think of it now, it seems like a dream. If only it could go on forever. Those long cool evenings up in the hills, everything purple and golden. Your mother and I were so happy then. It seemed as though we had everything we could ever want."

In post-imperialistic Britain, Colonel Redfern is awkward and reserved as his former position as a commanding officer in India does not amount to much anymore.

I was reminded of A PASSAGE OF INDIA while reading this play. Here is E.M. Forster's description of Mr. Turton, the collector of Chandrapore lamenting to himself when the most powerful British bureaucrats and their families are gathered at their exclusive club to discuss the alleged rape of Miss Quested, an Englishwoman (and fiancée of Ronnie Heaslop, the city magistrate) by Dr. Aziz, an Indian doctor.

"There seemed nothing for it but the old weary business of compromise and moderation. He longed for the good old days when an Englishman could satisfy his own honor and no questions asked afterwards."

Both A Passage to India and Look Back in Anger (especially the former) convey the sense of anomie that seems to have permeated into the British psyche as their empire which once seemed to be unassailable was now crumbling to pieces. There is a sense of despair and purposelessness. I couldn't help but feel that even Jimmy was in some ways longing for that kind of world where people had a reason to live (like beating the Nazis or even conquering other lands). But Jimmy is disillusioned and angry with what he perceives as the lack of enthusiasm in post-world war two Britain and he takes it all out on his wife Alison.

I was moved by the sense of anomie experienced by the characters in Look Back in Anger which helped me understand the psyche of the British people in the post-imperialistic world. John Osborne was successful in portraying the sloth into which British society was descending into in the post-imperialistic world.

The play had a lot of great lines. Strongly recommend it.

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### **Shalini Sinha says**

Another literary work that I happened to read in my "Masculinity in Literature & Popular Cultures" coursework.

The background is the post WWII British society in the disposition of "Edwardian Twilight" which represents that the sun of British Imperialism has set. And the main protagonist Jimmy Porter represents the plight of the young generation of Englishmen in post-imperial world who went to college, got educated but still ended up jobless, angry and distasteful towards upper middle class society as well as their own culture and values.

An excellently written drama, full of symbolism especially sartorial, metaphorical & equivocations. Indeed one of the best character introductory depictions with firm convincing strokes and provoking & stimulating dialogues.

A must read!  
Yet difficult to love!!

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### **??? ??? says**

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"He was born out of his time."  
"He doesn't know where he is or where he is going. He'll never do anything, and he'll never amount to anything."

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### **Laura says**

*From BBC radio 4 - Drama:*

*To celebrate sixty years since John Osborne wrote his classic play, Richard Wilson directs a new radio*

*dramatisation with David Tennant as Jimmy Porter. The play that launched the Angry Young Man movement has lost none of its bite and still disturbs and questions in equal measure.*

*Directed by Richard Wilson  
Produced by Clive Brill  
A Brill production for BBC Radio 4.*

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b078mc9p>

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### **Tony says**

Osborne, John. LOOK BACK IN ANGER. (1956). \*\*\*\*. Osborne's drama is credited with initiating the cycle in British plays known as "the angry young man." Once you have encountered his main character here, you will understand why. The author went on to solidify his achievement by writing other ground-breaking plays, including "The Entertainer." The premier was directed by Tony Richardson and starred Kenneth Haigh, Alan Bates, and Mary Ure. The film based on the play was also successful. It is the story of Jimmy Porter (our angry young man) and his wife, Alison. Jimmy is the kind of man who would normally repel all types of friendship and he goes out of his way to do so. We never quite work out way into his motivation for such anger, but learn about his through his effects on Alison and his friend, Cliff. This is a high-tension drama. Recommended.

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### **Christian Nielsen says**

Definately one of the best plays i have read in a long time. Jimmy's hatred, inspired by the undeniable class division of 50s England, creates a uniquely relatable character. Despite his grotesquely critical hatred for all that surrounds him, you cant help but feel pity for the cynic, "born out of his time".

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### **Cheri says**

I know that this is an important play in British theater history, and seen within the context of the times, I'm sure it must have seemed pretty radical when it first came out. Overall I've enjoyed reading it, but have enjoyed it much less in performance.

The play suffers greatly from being so completely of it's time. When it's staged now, I feel it is more of a history lesson than an active meaningful experience. Reading it, it feels right in it's own age and context. Live, it lacks the feeling of connection to the material that one feels when one is confronted with living, breathing truth.

Of course, I'm a modern woman and the writer is a man of his times, (even more than some) so the female characters in the play act in ways which could only happen in years past. I've seen several wonderful actresses take on the play, and mostly they seem to be either making excuses for their behavior, or trying to fill in the enormous gaps in the character's motivation. I find this distances me from the material even more.

Still, worth a read.

**Manab says**

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**alex says**

I read it for my English Literature class. I didn't like it that much.

### **Kristy says**

This play is an object lesson in how to write an unintentionally hilarious memoir piece. It's also just seems like badly constructed theatre; no action onstage, just this unbelievably wordy inertia with Jimmy just yapping off at the jib while all the other actors have to dig within their souls to find reasons to a. stay in the room with Jimmy, b. not immediately ball-gag and/or kill Jimmy. The Colonel thinks Jimmy was right after all?!? The scene with the two women talking about who gets to STAY with him?!??! This fucking British bro-ham wacking off writing a scene about two women talking about who deserves his love more????!??! I'm not even exaggerating, this HAPPENS. Fuck OFF, John Osbourne, fuck OOOOOOOOOOOOFF.

There are so many moments in this play that just seem like watered-down Streetcar, it made me want to put Jimmy in an ultimate fighting ring with Stanley Kowalski. Think you're a tough guy, Jimmy? That's some action I actually want to see happen. No more pointless monologuing, just Jimmy getting punched in the face SO much/so hard/over and over again/blood on the highway/this play sucks/thank you and goodnight.

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### **The Literary Chick says**

Overrated, I'm all for anti-heroes but there is simply nothing interesting about this bitter misanthrope with no compelling reason for his cruelty. Nor is there anything to explain why his wife and her 'best' friend love him so. Passive, one dimensional females who serve as a sounding board for this misogynist - actually why limit the guy, he hates everybody - if you're still interested, by all means help yourself to this one.

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### **Samadrita says**

Jimmy, I recommend a cold shower and enrolling yourself in Feminism 101.

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