



THE VOICE OF FEELING IN THE WORKS OF JOHN OSBORNE

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ABSTRACT

It has been admired by many a critic that Osborne effected a 'turning point' a 'break through', an 'upsurge', a 'revolution' by his fascinating dramas in the history of British theatre. But this kind of break through could be brought out by the playwright only by the authority and humanity of his voice. Indeed his voice is unique and alone in his ability to put on stage – the raising and slowing down of the pitch of the voice, bewildering range from tenderness to cold fury. His words have a star quality and they are "longer than life". This is not by the virtue of the length of the speech or even its content but it is achieved by the measure of organization. It is achieved by the technique in which the words and the sentences are arranged, and how changes of speed, mood and the tone are achieved. Every dialogue and monologue of Osborne's protagonists are at first will measured and are controlled in their delivery.

KEYWORDS : authority and humanity, critics criticize Osborne's plays.

INTRODUCTION

It needs to be mentioned that if a majority of critics criticize Osborne's plays it is the idea expressed but never the expression. Even if we take exception to some of his ideas or statements, we do not deny the quality of language that is used to voice them. Osborne has his own way of making his characters speak so that we never question their words. The most significant feature of his play writing is that he wants to "make people feel, to give them lessons in feeling".

Osborne, in order to reach his messages to the masses applies his own style of expression to confront with the audience. He discovered the fact that it is in the speaker's state of feeling that the true impact, the real anger lies, rather than in what is said. His long dialogues and monologues are arranged with words which come together and express with feeling. Naturally the condition of feeling from which they emerge will shape the voice with which they are expressed on the stage. The voice is that of a caged animal, the voice of human beings who are miserably trapped in the vicious web of society. It is the voice of the desperate struggle to disentangle themselves from the heavy tentacles of an octopus who can only cry against but defenseless to defeat the social conditions of the society symbolized in octopus. In other words, the voice of Osborne's protagonists is a kind of vocal self-analysis in which they exhibit their existential and psychological conditions of their lives. While making such demonstrations they question the nature and valuelessness of their surrounding society which they inhabit. If they get angry with the evils and defects of the system, they repeatedly ask against such defects until the audience 'become' well aware of it. If the portrayal of all the protagonists of Osborne's plays is observed, we do not fail to recognize the same type of words, the same idioms and the same colloquial phrases. Mary McCarthy gives a well rounded description of the voice of Osborne's chief characters in the following words :

He writes by ear, listening anxiously for the musical cue that will give him his pitch...At the same time such a writer must get tired of hearing the Sound of his own voice, just as the hero of *Inadmissible Evidence*, who is always on the witness stand, testifying, gets tired of hearing himself.... Reiteration is the basic mode of the Osborne harangue and repetition is the basic plot of the Osborne plays . (McCarthy, 172)

The power of his language necessarily makes the audience to feel and experience what he intends to convey. If Osborne wants to project the wickedness of a particular force, his language nevertheless sounds very much the desired passion in unequivocal terms . Martin Luther's exposition of Papal bull in *Luther* is a glaring illustration to prove this point :

LUTHER . I have been served with a piece of paper. Let me tell you about it. It has come to me from a latrine called Rome, that capital of the devil's own sweet empire. It is called the papal bull and claims to

excommunicate me , Dr. Martin Luther. These lies they rise up from paper like fumes from the bog of Europe; because papal decretals ... (*Luther*, 79)

In *The Right Prospectus* the self concern of hero Heffer is quite revealing in his long speech on the meaning of the House against the backdrop of his loneliness. Indeed the language is a gleaming example of Osborne's own abrasive standard :

HEFFER You will come to me here-or wherever-I-happen-to-be-and you'll find me-every morning after Chapel until I'll tell you not to-and report. It's a daft system, the whole thing but so is the Divine bloody Office and the democratic process, one man one vote, the technological revolution where even the tin-openers don't work let alone the money system(*The Right Prospectus*, 25)

If one has to enjoy the satiric invective of Osborne, one must look at his language when he derides the press in the following words. The dedication to *The World of Paul Slickey* is quite extraordinary :

No one has ever dedicated a string quartet to a donkey although books have been dedicated to critics. I dedicate this play to the liars and self-deceivers; to those who daily deal out treachery ; to those who handle their professions as instruments of debasement ; to those who, for a salary cheque and less, successfully betray my country and those who will do it for no inducement at all.

(*The World of Paul Slickey*, 45)

This is one of the most violent commentaries against the morality of the press. The " Newspaper scenes " of *The World of Paul Slickey* are intended to echo the sentiment of this " dedication", and to illustrate the passionate bankruptcy of the Press in their drive for organised triviality. If critics involve themselves solely in money earning and ignore their prime moral responsibility towards society, they do deserve such treatment. So, Osborne's treatment appears to be legitimate and necessary and should not be labeled as a personal revenge of the playwright. Osborne's *West of Suez* reveals the frailty of critics more emphatically that attracts a through introspection :

WYATT . Critics are sacrosanct. You must make it clear to your readers that they are simply and obviously more important than poets or writers. That's why you should always get in with them. You see, what we chaps do may be all right in its little way but what really counts is the fact that if it weren't for the existence of critics,...(73)

It may be noted that *A Subject of Scandal and Concern*, is not, in fact just an entertainment, but one of the most intellectually – oriented of Osborne’s plays. The play is remarkable for its “ Epilogue ”, a speech recited by the Narrator condemning the infamous “ let us have an answer ” brigade :

...you must start collecting for yourself. And what would you say is the moral then ? If you are waiting for the commercial, it is probably this : you cannot live by bread alone. You must have jam- even if it is mixed with another man’s blood. That’s all. You may retire now. And if a mini-car is your particular mini-dream, then dream it. When your turn comes you will be called. Good night. (47)

In these lines Osborne is appealing the masses to feel the present existential conditions of modern man. The ‘ mini-car ’ is symbolic of our helplessness to alter the ‘ conditions ’ of society and the religious experience. When Holyoake was asked about his attitude towards God, his following answer constituted his blasphemy :

Our national debt is a millstone around the poor man’s neck, and our church and general religious institutions cost about twenty million pounds annually. Worship is expensive, and so I appeal to your heads and your pockets: are we not too poor to have God ? If poor men cost the state as much, they would be put, like officers, on half pay. And while our present distress remains, it is wisest to do the same thing with Diety.... (16)

While making Holyoake an authorial mouth piece Osborne is revealing through the powerful dialogues, his conviction that a “ magic circle of orthodoxy ” effectively constricts those freedoms which have perhaps been granted theoretically, yet whose exercise still stamps a man as “ exceptional ”.

It is hoped that the present study which tries to bring out the significance of the strategy of Osborne to execute ‘anger’ and ‘detachment’ as the chief instruments in his playwriting will add new dimension to his scholarship . It is also expected that the study of all the Osborne’s plays in the light of ‘anger’ and ‘detachment’ has brought into the light the true significance of his playwriting and this will assign the rightful plays to John Osborne in the modern British Drama .

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