

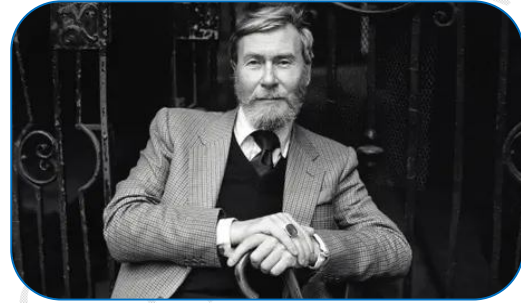


"THE REVIVAL OF LANGUAGE IN THE PLAYS OF JOHN OSBORNE"

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ABSTRACT :

Though drama is prominent literary form, it does depend on non-literary accessories like stage, actors and spectators, for its survival and success. Like any other form of art, drama attempts to present the emotional content of life, but as it does this function with the help of non-art paraphernalia, many times drama also is described as a 'composite art'. This is an indication to suggest or even to assert that drama is inseparably linked with stage, actors and spectators. It is true this organic and vital connection with the stage, actors and spectators is essential at least at the time of its composition. The playwright must be aware of the social ethos and the pulse of the people, and to make his presentation of life appropriate and lively, he expresses it through the popular idiom i. e. dialogue. Actually the part played by dialogue in drama need not be over-emphasised. A proper dialogue is needed not only to establish the necessary relationship between the actors and the audience, but also to justify that the vision of life presented on the stage is a lively image. To achieve this a playwright wants to grasp the contemporary idiom and to transform it into an affective means of creation and communication. A cursory review of the successful ages of drama would reveal that, whenever the popular idiom could be transformed and transported by the dramatist on to the stage the popular taste welcomed it. It is repeatedly proved that the form of drama as a real depiction of contemporary life, as an authentic voice of contemporary ethos, and also as an aesthetic form blending art with popular taste, draws its vitality from dialogue.



KEYWORDS : *emotional content of life , stage, actors and spectators.*

INTRODUCTION

During the Middle Ages the 'Miracle' plays and 'Mystery' plays appealed to the popular imagination when they employed secular dialogue with religious undertones. The thematic import of the dialogues impressed the spectators when they were mixed with the quotations from the Latin Bible. Similarly the Morality plays like "Every Man" have appealed to the audience because of the secular and everyday idiom used by the Church-going public. During the Elizabethan era till Christopher Marlowe established blank verse as the perfect medium of the Renaissance aspirations and the popular appeal, drama remained only as an imitation of the Italian romances and French tragedies. Similarly, the Restoration Drama became the mouthpiece of the follies and foibles of the Royal Court, when Congreve and Sheridan caught the idiom of the French influenced Royal courtiers, in the brilliant and repier-like sharp witty dialogues of Mirable and Millament. Even in the modern age the revival of poetic drama could be successfully achieved by T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden when they could capture the contemporary ethos in the tone, rhythm and intonation of daily speeches. All these examples from the past sufficiently prove that the soul of every successful drama is

its dialogue which must necessarily capture the contemporary ethos in tone, intonation idiom and speech form prevalent and used by people.

On this background John Osborne's plays justify once more that drama can be revived not only by catching the contemporary ethos but by expressing the same in the daily speech forms, and current idiom. In this context we can recall the words of Katharine J. Worth who stated that Osborne's great achievement as a dramatist was his ability to express the mood of his generation in a voice, in a dialogue which was properly belonging to his generation.(1) Milton Shulman of "Evening Standard" also writes about the significance of Osborne's dialogues:".... Mr. Osborne has a dazzling aptitude for provoking and stimulation dialogue, and he draws character with firm convincing strokes"(2).

So any assessment of Osborne as a dramatist cannot be complete without considering his dialogues. Osborne is termed as an angry young man. The age in which he lived was enveloped by despair and disillusion. His generation of 50's felt deceived by the false promises of the State and also felt deserted by empty and vacant spiritual obligations of the Church. The accumulated anger of his generation found its proper voice in the dialogues of Jimmy:

Jimmy:He's a big chap. Well, you have never heard so many well-bred commonplaces come from beneath the same bowler hat. The Platitude form outer Space — that's brother Nigel. He'll end up in the Cabinet one day, make no mistake.:3)

Osborne's indignation of his generation is also coupled with attacking and piercing impact. His dialogues are lasting in their effect. In "Inadmissible Evidence" Bill Maitland's hatred against the symptoms of admass civilization - its nourishment upon noise, its worship of the internal combustion engine and its computerized thinking are powerfully revealed in the speech:

Bill : They are the people who go up every year like it was holy communion to have a look at the Christmas decorations in Regent Street.(4)

The same anger also comes out in a sardonic and satiric fashion. In "Epitaph for George Dillon", George attacks the Elliots in a speech that has about it many of the same quality of cruel wit and rhetorical power that find in Jimmy Porter:

Osborne's anger does not appear to be short-lived because the quantum of indignation is poured out till it is exhausted in long and continuous harangues. The dramatist found that society was decaying with the emotional disease called 'apathy'. The only way to save it from this deadening inertia was to 'wake it up'. Hence Osborne deliberately gives long monologues to his protagonists which are delivered with tremendous emotional force.

Sometimes the harangues of Osborne are systematically developed like the argument of lawyer. The long and powerful speech of Luther can be quoted as the finest example. Martin Luther consistently invites his opponents to speak back at him, and to explain their attitudes. In a conversation when summoned before Cajetan, the papal legate in Germany, Luther asks, "Where have I erred ?" but receives no answer from the Church that he can accept as any reply at all.

When Osborne aims at recreating the contemporary social situation along with their emotional crises, he does not hesitate to place the actual dialogues of people on the streets, of the lower middle class persons. In his 'attic room' in the presence of Alison and Cliff, Osborne doesn't hesitate to make his dialogue obscene, uncouth and discourteous. This aspect of his language is very well reflected in the angry outburst of Jimmy which is uttered soon after Alison's departure along with her father:

Jimmy : That old bastard nearly ran me down in his car ! Now, if he'd killed me, that really would have been ironical.(5)

Well, this does not mean that Osborne is a master of lengthy dialogues and harangues. He ably and effectively employs crisp and short dialogues also. The conversation in "Luther" between Martin and Cardinal Cajetan testifies to this fact:

Martin: A withered arm is best amputated,
an infected place is best scoured out,
and so you pray for healthy tissue...⁽⁶⁾

In the present world the original meaning of Christianity itself is lost, and replaced by selfish ideals by which it is rotted. Hence Martin answers to Cajetan that it is better to smash the hypocritical Christendom even though he does not have an alternative. Hence such sharp and crisp dialogues also are characteristic of the volcanic outburst of Osborne's anger.

Osborne's plays revealed the despair of a frustrated idealism. They did so in a language which was radically strange to the theatre-plain everyday language. Osborne's heroes are saint-like witnesses to right values in a world gone wrong. They are mouthpieces of protest for a dissatisfied generation. But what really makes them 'appealing' is the burning rhetoric of their great tirades.

A play cannot be effective unless the speeches convey emotions and feelings. And the state of feeling from which the words stem will determine the voice with which they are uttered. Osborne's voice was that of a man who rages with anger being miserably trapped in the vicious web of society from which he cannot escape. In the trial scene of "Inadmissible Evidence" when the indictment of Maitland's life is read to him, the hero protests. His spluttered answers are a serious protest — against those parts of modern society which deny the individual, thwart his emotions and destroy his feeling. We are compelled to sympathize with the fumbling, solitary hero:

Bill : I never hoped or wished for anything
more than to have the good fortune of
friendship.... But I can't escape it, I can't forget it. And I can't
begin again. You see ?⁽⁷⁾

Thus it is the strength of the protagonist's feeling which create powerful impact on the audience. Similarly Jimmy's incredulity at Alison's departure' Maitland's panic when legal contacts refuse to speak to him, Pamela's avoidance of an emotional scene with Murray and Constance, in each of the scenes, the private fear becomes at the same time a public warning, through the dialogues.

A signal feature of Osborne's language is that when he wants to show something evil, he makes it sound evil. Martin Luther ruthlessly condemns the Church and its influence upon the people in "rough German" and Osborne gives fluency and strength to the language to rebel against established authority:

Martin : We are living in a dangerous time. You
may not think so, but it could be that
this is most dangerous time since the
light first broke upon the earth...⁽⁸⁾

Imagery is one of the elements that makes Osborne's language highly appealing. When the dramatist wishes to gain our sympathy for character, he invariably uses imagery which refers to animals.

Osborne also uses a similar device in order to heighten the sense of insecurity and isolation of his leading characters. Martin Luther pleads with God to instill in him the faith and knowledge he so desperately needs:

Martin : Breathe into me like a lion into the
mouth of a stillborn cub.(9)

Osborne has rejuvenated the English drama from a sick and decaying condition. When his "Look Back in Anger" was performed first, it is unanimously declared that he caught the spirit of his generation exclusively by his proper and powerful dialogue. No student of Osborne is a major dramatist of artistic and intellectual stature. But at the same time it becomes inevitable to accept the point that dialogue is the most important instrument with which he grasped the pulse of his generation and also expressed the ethos, towards the delight and satisfaction of his spectators.

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