
UNIT 2 THE CHARACTERS

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to offer one possible point of entry into *Look Back in Anger* through the study of its characters, both in terms of the various methods for such an analysis offered by literary criticism and theory and in terms of the issues of class and gender that are raised in (and by) the play.

2.1 CHARACTER IN LITERATURE AND DRAMA

Do we speak of a character in a play or story as we would of one in life or does such a character require special treatment and if so, of what kind? While considering such characters, should lifelikeness or 'credibility' be a criterion of judgement or not? Here are some of the models for looking at literary and dramatic character, that different critics and theorists have provided at different times.

2.2 DIFFERENT MODELS FOR CHARACTER STUDY

2.2.1 The Aristotelian Model

Aristotle's view of man as a social animal informs his idea of the types of literary character, each of which he saw as having a definite function in the story or play in which it appeared. Since the dramatic genre he was concerned with was tragedy he focused on characters suitable for tragedy, whom he felt ought to be kings, rulers or other 'great' men whose fortune in some way affected that of society at large. Also, since Aristotle held plot or what he calls 'action' to be the main factor in tragedy, character was given a secondary place, though he does say that action is important mainly because it reveals character.

Clearly, modern drama is much more interested in the individual who does not change the course of society but instead seems trapped in it, as Jimmy does. Neither does action have much place in this drama where 'nothing happens' as in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The importance Aristotle gives to the response of the audience by identifying it as a crucial factor in determining the characteristics of tragedy, does however have implications for modern theorists of literature and drama, who often locate 'meaning' in the reader's or spectator's perception.

2.2.2 The Theory of Humours

A popular physiological theory in medieval and Renaissance times, this greatly influenced the contemporary idea of character both in life and on the stage. Four humours of the body were identified, based on four bodily fluids: blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. The varying combinations or mixtures of these fluids present in each person were seen as determining individual characteristics, temperament, mind and behaviour, and the way in which the humours worked was to release spirits or vapours which affected the brain. A person was sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric or melancholy depending on which humour with its distinctive colour was predominant.

This theory is interesting today largely as the source of some of the most common expressions in English – ‘good-humoured’, ‘black with rage’, ‘green with envy’ – and because it was behind an idea of personality that in turn caused dramatists (Ben Jonson the best known among them) to create characters who were dominated by a particular mood or temperament. Nor need such characters be as typical or one-sided as would at first appear to result from the application of the theory – Hamlet is among the most complex of characters and has been convincingly shown to be, if not melancholic, then at least deeply influenced by the idea of melancholy. The association of the word ‘humour’ with laughter and wit did not take place until the eighteenth century and has in fact been traced to the common use of ‘humoured’ characters in comedy.

All this might appear quite irrelevant to the play under consideration and indeed it is extremely debatable whether Osborne had any thought of it in mind when creating his characters in *Look Back in Anger*. But the theory has been important perhaps less for the instances of its overt use than for the way in which it shapes our thought about all character, not just dramatic character. Being influenced by humanism, it is based on the idea of the human being as the most worthy subject of study. Even more important, it **essentializes**, that is to say, sees character as inborn and therefore beyond a point both inexplicable and unalterable. While taking no account—as the play does at some length—of the role of upbringing, experience and background in forming temperament, this theory makes it possible to see Jimmy’s anger as just such an inherent trait, one that neither the play nor the reader manages to account for in a fully satisfactory way.

2.2.3 Character in Romanticism

One of the defining traits of Romanticism is its interest in the individual and its tendency to exalt individual experience and expression over the collective or the social. In literature this means a strong – sometimes extreme—stress on subjectivity and on the internalising of all experience as well as perhaps leads to the ignoring of realities like race, gender and class in favour of personal sensibility. Boundaries between the inner (mind) and the outer (world) or between subjective and objective reality then become blurred and interpreting any of these calls for taking the others into account. Along with this interdependence goes an emphasis on the importance of spontaneous expression, whether in word or action. The Romantic hero/protagonist, however inexplicably cruel or wrong his behaviour, is always presented as driven or compelled by a nature too extreme and forceful for those around him to understand, and consequently is seen as always isolated from his world. Very much of this is true of Jimmy, at least in his own eyes –

“Was I really wrong to believe that there’s a—a kind of – burning virility of mind and spirit that looks for something as powerful as itself? The heaviest, strongest creatures in this world seem to be the loneliest.” (*LBA*, III.ii)

This has, to my mind, more than a touch of self-conscious posturing since surely one of the conditions of such a nature is that it does not see the need to explain itself, and Jimmy spends a large part of the play doing just that. Helena's words about him, "I feel he thinks he's still in the middle of the French Revolution" confirm the sense of Jimmy's perception of himself as a Romantic hero. The effect this has on the reader (or spectator) works in two ways. First it serves to provide, in a fairly straightforward way, the picture of a man who cannot help himself and is to be looked at with admiration, less for his nature than for the courage with which he faces up to the truth about it. Then it goes on to demolish to a large extent this very picture and we are made to see with Alison that he is "slightly comic – in a way". Though this double view certainly is effective in adding to the complexity of the character, I am not sure that it works to the advantage of the play as a whole. What do you think?

2.2.4 Modernism and the Influence of Freud

Modernism extends the Romantic idea of solitariness by seeing it as a condition of all human existence, not just that of the hero or genius or artist. This means, along with a continuation of the move away from the social (as far as the character of the hero goes) a questioning of the very concept of the hero. One result in literature was the 'anti-hero' who is a protagonist lacking the conventional heroic virtues of strength and courage (though he may possess, as Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses* does, the more commonplace ones of thoughtfulness and kindness) and who rarely does much more than speak and think, that is, does not provide physical 'action' of the kind demanded of earlier heroes.

Another result, which became a feature of modernism, was an interrogation of the difficulty of forming human relationships under the condition of solitariness. The modernist hero is also usually confined within his—and, in rare cases, her—own experience in the sense that his concerns are hardly ever social ones, as are those of the protagonist in most earlier, realist literature, say Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch*, or David in *David Copperfield*.

A third way in which the modernist concept of character differs from the nineteenth-century one is that it no more looks for consistency in character but accepts and even celebrates the fact of human changeability, illogicality and resistance to any system of classification. Selfhood is no more seen as a fixed or complete state of being since it changes and fluctuates almost every moment. As you can see, this is a very different way of considering character from the others described above, all of which believe in human nature as fixed and immutable.

Modernism also moved away from the idea, prevalent since the Enlightenment, that reason and emotion are strictly separate and mutually opposed categories. One factor behind this move was the enormous influence on literature of contemporary work in psychoanalysis, especially of the work of Freud, whose concept of 'ambivalence' blurred the distinction between another pair of hitherto totally contrary ideas – love and hate. Relationships in literature, whether between parent and child (as in *Sons and Lovers*) or between husband and wife (as in *LBA*) were now not examined in terms of either of these emotions alone. The other contribution psychoanalysis made to literature was the idea that we live on two levels, the conscious and the unconscious or subconscious and that the apparent incoherence of dreams is the mind's way of putting across the latter. Criticism can then begin to read a text looking for its latent (i.e. undeclared, or not made evident) meanings and to appreciate their ambiguity. Such an emphasis on inner psychological conditions has already been mentioned (in 1.3.3) as a feature of expressionistic drama. Try and apply it now to *Look Back in Anger* by asking whether, for instance it could help in providing a valid reading of the relationship between Jimmy and Helena.

2.2.5 Flat and round characters

The terms 'flat' and 'round' were used by E. M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* to describe two different kinds of literary character and two methods of characterization. A flat character is one who does not change in the course of the fiction where he or she is found and is a 'type' with a few (often only one) prominent features and characteristics. Such characters are usually – though not exclusively – used in caricature where comic effects are desired. A round character is one who changes and develops as the story or play progresses. Two examples Forster gives are Mrs. Micawber (in *David Copperfield*) as a flat character and Becky Sharp (in *Vanity Fair*) as a round one.

One of the advantages of a classification such as this, is the way in which it forces us to keep in sight the created nature of literary characters and to give some thought to the reasons behind their being made to be either round or flat. A flat character isn't necessarily a failure in development, it is more often the result of the desire to focus on a particular quality or state of mind, such as affectedness (in the example cited above) and results, when pushed to its extreme use, in the personification of vices and virtues in allegory. The use of a round character, on the other hand could indicate an effort to trace personal growth – as is done in the *bildungsroman* – or show a commitment to realism. The disadvantage of this grouping is that it reduces almost all characters in literature or drama to one category or the other and may involve a one-sided reading in order to make them fit in. Forster's consideration was of course the novel, which is one reason for the reader to be wary while applying the terms to characters in a play or in narrative poetry. It isn't possible for me to say, for example, whether the Host in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is a flat character or a round one.

If these terms were to be used with regard to any of the characters in *Look Back in Anger*, I would suggest looking at the way Colonel Redfern is spoken of (by Jimmy) as if he were a flat character irrespective of whether or not he appears thus to the reader or the audience – his self-confessed nostalgia is seen as his defining trait and he is the type of the old English army officer committed to empire. When he does make an appearance, many things about him surprise us by not being true to the picture, and I think this surprise is both expected and intended by the play. Not only has Colonel Redfern changed, as he himself admits, but our perception has also been questioned.

2.2.6 Souriau's Model

Two theorists of narrative, Vladimir Propp and Etienne Souriau suggest models where the actor is seen to be an agent in a narrative that performs actions (drama) and since the function of the agent is only to cause or to experience an event, the word 'actor' when used in this special sense need not be restricted to individuals (or characters) but could be any role, element, idea or principle that performs this function. Propp, in an influential study that he made of Russian folk tales, identified seven such roles or 'dramatis personae' which he called 'actantial roles' – hero, false hero, villain, donor, helper, sought-for person (usually female) and father/protector.

Souriau identified six actants similar but not identical to Propp's and claimed that they were valid for drama of all periods and genres. These were the 'lion' or the hero/protagonist in whom is embodied all the dramatic force of the play; the 'sun' or representative of the good which is sought by the lion (could be a person, or a principle like liberty); the 'earth' the actual receiver (person, community or country) on whose behalf the hero seeks the good; Mars or the antagonist who is the hero's rival; the 'scale' or the distributor of justice (one or more gods, or the human ruler); and the 'moon' or the hero's helper, usually his friend. It should be interesting to try and see whether this model works with regard to Osborne's play, though I think its usefulness as a critical tool does not extend beyond showing that universal dramatic

types do inform the formation of character in what might appear at first to be a play concerned with the specifics of particular personalities.

The 'lion' in *Look Back in Anger* doesn't need any identification – remember that this figure is not required to be virtuous, but only forceful. If indeed there is a 'good' or 'sun' that Jimmy seeks and suffers due to the lack of, it is something to believe in that could give meaning and direction to his life and in his view his country (the 'earth') needs this as much as he does. It is possible to set up Alison's absent mother (the 'Mummy' whom Jimmy abuses) as the hero's rival or at least one who has tried to upset his plans and also to extend this role to the entire upper class whom Jimmy clearly sees as the enemy. I would end the classification here, not because it is impossible to go on but because it would be a futile exercise to identify Cliff as the hero's helper when he is actually characterised by his ineffectiveness. As for the 'scale', one of the most important themes of the play is, I feel, the absence of any principle or scheme of justice that could ensure a change in the situation. Neither God—who is not believed in anymore—nor the attempts of religion and society at setting things right can work here because the problem is not one of circumstance. Nevertheless, a system like this one offers an alternative—not a substitute—to our thinking of the characters simply as 'people'. They are also agents in the structure of the play and if they are effective as agents perhaps one reason why is that they perform these roles which are, very broadly, basic to all drama.

2.2.7 Character and Critical Theory

The notion of character as a stable and coherent entity was, as I said earlier, disputed by modernism (see 2.2.3). Recent critical theory goes further by disputing the notion of character as an entity at all or even as a tenable concept. Some of this follows from models like Souriau's described above—the term 'cancelled character' was coined by Brian McHale to describe a *technique* (notice that it is not the character who is described) where a literary character is exposed as a 'textual function' and ceases to be seen as having self-identity. McHale says that this demonstrates 'the absorption of character by text.' One reason for such a distrust of character as a category is the anti-humanism of most recent literary theory. It prefers not to see the human being as subject or human nature as an essence which is what humanism does (see 2.2.2) and offers instead the idea of the human being as a *site*. Lyotard explains the use of this term --

A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations...one is always located at a post through which various kinds of message pass.

(*The Postmodern Condition*, p15)

Another phrase, 'character zone' is provided by Mikhail Bakhtin to convey his sense of the character's identity being built up by the reader or audience, both from direct descriptions of action and 'transcriptions' of speech i.e from the character's voice overlapping with the author's voice. How much of this is relevant to *Look Back in Anger*? For one, it leads to the possibility that language might prove a more important, or at least a more useful, area of critical study than the concept of character is. (I shall go into this in detail in the next unit.) Then it is both possible and useful to see all the characters in the play as sites where the vexed realities of class and gender play themselves out. (see 2.4)

2.3 THE ANGRY YOUNG MAN

This term, coined to describe the condition of unfocussed, but all-pervasive resentment and frustration that many saw as the defining characteristic of post-war youth, soon became a catch-phrase in its application not just to Jimmy but to all other subsequent characters like him in literature, drama and cinema and was not restricted to Britain – witness its being used of Amitabh Bachhan in his film roles of the 1970s.

It was even extended to Osborne himself by those who saw Jimmy as his mouthpiece, though the dramatist tried to shrug it off—

“ It was rather tiresome... like being called the Walls Ice Cream man !”
(Interview in 1961)

There is no doubt however that *Look Back in Anger* was considered a revolutionary play by its first audiences and reviewers, some of whom I quote here to give you some idea of the play's contemporary impact—

Look Back in Anger presents post-war youth as it really is ... to have done it in a first play is a minor miracle ... all the qualities are there, qualities one had despaired of ever seeing on the stage – the drift towards anarchy, the instinctive leftishness ... the casual promiscuity, the sense of lacking a crusade worth fighting for ...

(Kenneth Tynan, *Observer*, 13 May 1956)

“ The only modern, English play”

(Arthur Miller)

Look Back in Anger was the event which marked off 'then' from 'now' decisively although not in itself a startlingly novel event.

(John Russell Taylor, *Anger and After*, 1962)

Even at the time, some critics did think the play's title misleading – Baiwir held that the dominant note was confusion not anger and thought that “Bewildered Young Man” would fit the case better. What exactly was the anger and against whom was it directed? Kenneth Allsop suggests that it is another way of describing ‘dissentience’, preferring that term to ‘dissenter’ because of the latter's connotations of organized protest, and the former's more general applicability. ‘Dissentience’, is I think, useful in that it does away with the positive direction that ‘anger’ might possibly be seen as taking, since dissent, of whatever sort, is a purely negative feeling or action and Jimmy does not take any steps to change or remedy the situations with which he expresses such strong dissatisfaction and which he sees as social, or at least as brought about by social realities — he attributes for example, apathy or the lack of feeling on the personal level, to the bourgeois ideals of reserve and politeness. At the same time, Jimmy's complaints against these situations are emotional and not material ones, which is the reason behind the effect of general and undirected rage that comes through in them. The ‘anger’ is also directed by Jimmy at other people (most evidently at Alison) for failing to live up to his preconceived ideas and expectations of them.

To now concentrate for a moment on the word ‘young’ instead of on ‘angry’, you will notice that all four of the principal characters are in their twenties, so youth is in itself clearly an issue the play is interested in. Yet no easy generalisations can be made about it – if youth can be sullen or rebellious in the person of Jimmy, it can also be introspective and self-analytical, as Alison is. Colonel Redfern, the only older person to appear, is shown to be in no way free of the uncertainties and self-doubt that the others are troubled by, and the two deaths in the play – of Hugh's mother and of Alison's baby – bring out the reality of illness and death as something that nobody can escape facing in one form or another.

I would argue that Jimmy is not just a voice for Osborne's views since right from the beginning of the play, he is presented with irony. This is done through the lengthy and descriptive stage directions which serve as commentary, for example:

“To many, he may seem sensitive to the point of vulgarity. To others, he is simply a loudmouth. To be as vehement as he is is to be ‘most non-committal.’”

(Stage direction to Act I).

This, along with the subsequent stage directions, serves to indicate that a double view of Jimmy – taking into account the discrepancy between his self-image and the comments about him—is required by the play. It is because Jimmy's rhetoric is so powerful that the audience instinctively reacts to it by identifying it as what the dramatist wants to say. This is perhaps even more true of the reader, for whom the play reads almost like a monologue—Jimmy's centrality is reinforced by the way the other characters constantly discuss him even in his absence. Yet in performance, Alison's silent presence is probably very effective in undercutting the force of Jimmy's constant speech by showing it up as not much more than invective. Cliff, too is meant to provide, Osborne says "a soothing, natural counterpoint to Jimmy". 'Natural' is the word I would immediately pick up here. Doesn't it effectively imply that Jimmy's behaviour is, compared to that of the others, a pose or the playing out of a role? This is conscious at some times and not so at others. Turn to the moment where he says "But plenty of them do seem to have a revolutionary fire about them, which is more than you can say for the rest of us." (*LBA*, 1) He is here admitting, with self-awareness and even with self-mockery, that a 'revolutionary fire' is what he would like to have, and his behaviour and long speeches certainly bear out such a wish, as does his deliberate use of long words – 'sycophantic', 'phlegmatic' (see 2.2.2) and 'pusillanimous'.

I am not here suggesting that Jimmy is a hypocrite or that his feelings are no more than a desire for attention from the other characters and the audience, but rather that an element of posturing is inseparable from the very concept of the 'angry young man'. If nothing else this makes such a character more human and fallible and endears him to the spectators, since an essential condition for the success of the character is that he be easily identified with, an aim that is part of the play's thrust toward 'feeling' as being both more honest and more difficult to attain to, than thought is. Still, I think it would be a mistake to judge this dramatic type as anything other than that – however many young people in Britain in the 1950s felt as Jimmy does about the establishment, he does not, as Tynan implies, speak for all of them. In fact, his is much less a collective voice than even that of Colonel Redfern. This might seem to contradict what I said in Unit 1 about drama giving voice to general, public perceptions, but actually reinforces the point that drama cannot successfully make social statements which are not tempered by a view of what will work on the stage. Here Jimmy's idiosyncracies are precisely what work well.

One of Jimmy's characteristics is, I suggested earlier, a lack of awareness, partly his ignorance of Alison's pregnancy and partly the failure to realize how his own values are subject to the criticism he makes of Colonel Redfern's and how wrong he is to suppose Alison cold and impersonal. Self-pity is another evident trait, as in the scene where he attempts to offer a crudely psychoanalytic explanation for his misogyny, tracing it to his mother's neglect of his dying father. All the same, Jimmy is far from lacking in either sincerity (he feels passionately what he says, or makes himself feel it) or in biting wit. Most of the humour in the play does come from him. And yet, I think, the play's excessive reliance on Jimmy weakens all the other characters by causing them to appear undeveloped, and also, as Taylor points out, reduces the scope of dramatic conflict by making them always subservient to the hero, whose supremacy goes unchallenged. One critic, John Mander, goes so far as to say that the other characters in the play "despite the talk, are not much more than stage-furniture" with the result that the content of the play is reduced to Jimmy's 'views'. Do you agree here? And if so, do you think this a deliberate method of keeping our attention focussed on Jimmy? Try and find instances from the text to substantiate your answer.

2.4 CLASS AND GENDER

To deal with these two areas together is to acknowledge that the play brings into some kind of relation with each other issues such as sexuality, commonly considered an aspect of private life, and public factors like class. Stereotyping, which was not necessarily a negative device in drama before the postwar period, became during this time a failure to address social realities, including the reality of certain constructions and perceptions of women – their identity and experiences—and of their role in the family.

Class and gender serve as neat dividing lines between the characters in the play. Two of the three men in the play are from the working class while both women belong to the upper class. In addition, of the two women who do not make an appearance but are spoken of by the others, Alison's mother and Hugh's mother, one belongs to each class. Marriage between the classes provides an arena for the ongoing conflict. However nobody, with the exception of the Colonel, seems to display traits that might be seen as characteristic of their class. I do not know here whether we are to side with Jimmy in seeing Alison's restraint in the face of attack as typical of upper class apathy and lack of commitment, or simply as her own personal tactic of self defence. Probably a bit of both – Alison is actually anything but unfeeling and her self-control eventually turns out to be as much of a pose as Jimmy's behaviour is, while his own inconsistencies are evident in the way in which he alternates between trying to break her self control and criticizing her for being weak. Both she and her father display a reliance on codes of behaviour which ultimately fail them, but it is unclear whether or not this is a comment on upper class norms in general. The class struggle is conflated with that between the sexes so as to make it impossible to fully separate the two. An interesting perspective on this is provided by Allardyce Nicoll, who locates the main theme with reference not to the character of Jimmy, but to that of Alison, and also identifies this theme as a pre-existing literary one, arising from a social reality:

Basically, *Look Back in Anger* deals with the theme of a gently nurtured girl who is strangely magnetised by a lower-class intellectual... Now all the elements, or ingredients of this theme are exactly similar to those which were largely cultivated between 1900 and 1930... the fact that this play deals with a theme freely exploited during the first decades of this century and only occasionally handled by dramatists of the forties and early fifties deserves to be noted, particularly since *Look Back in Anger* does not in this respect stand alone.

The other area where the class struggle locates itself in the play is that of imperialism. Though not dealt with as a separate issue, the association of the Colonel's class with the maintenance of empire hints that to the other classes, imperialism was not a national, but only an upper class issue. The metaphor of dominance and violence that empire evokes is applicable to both the area of class relations and to that of the relation between the sexes. On the other hand the aristocratic ideal of chivalry has no place here—Jimmy says he has no “public school scruples about hitting girls” and indeed quite a lot of physical violence does go on in the play.

Jimmy is a self-confessedly working class man (as is Cliff) though perhaps not as low down on the social ladder as he likes to suggest. He is clearly well educated and affecting to despise his education by disparaging the university he went to and by choosing to run a sweet-stall, he achieves the paradoxical effect of arousing curiosity and drawing attention to it. The Colonel at one point says, “Sweet-stall. It does seem an extraordinary thing for an educated young man to be occupying himself with. Why should he want to do that, of all things.” Jimmy is also quite proud of his intelligence and education – notice the way he taunts Cliff with his lack of learning—and his pastimes include concert-going. It is his inability to find a worthwhile cause

that causes him to direct his energy towards picking on Alison, thus focusing social frustration onto a personal relationship. Besides effectively bringing together the social and the personal, this also foregrounds the idea of marriage as an inescapably public relationship. Jimmy's relationship with Helena is different in this respect not only because, unlike Alison, she stands up to him, but because they are not under the expectations or the ties that marriage imposes. Helena has not, like Alison 'burnt her boats' and this is what allows her to leave in the end. She also, despite the clever way she manipulates the situation to get Jimmy to herself, does respect Alison's position as his wife—another instance of her internalization of bourgeois values or simply her excuse for getting out?

A great deal of the play's action is centred around the relationship between Jimmy and Alison, the chief characteristic of which seems to be its ambivalence (see 2.2.3). I would see this as having the function of revealing, or even forming both of them, rather than trying to ascertain the complexities of the power equations involved. The treatment of sex in the play, seems to be (on the whole) one where it is seen as a site for the exploration of the self rather than as indicative of concerns about gender identities and roles. Perhaps this is why, both here and in other Osborne plays, these roles are not only left unexplored and unquestioned, but are even reiterated—for example, the allying of women with marriage, domesticity and a family system, all of which are feared by the men in the plays as threats to their selfhood and independence. This fear is behind the speeches that show hatred of women (and of children) and which do offer scope for a criticism of Osborne's plays, not as misogynist, but as centred in and oriented towards the male character(s) and the male viewers whose fears are being voiced. (This is discussed more fully in 4.2.2)

2.5 LET US SUM UP

Various ways of analysing literary and dramatic character, have been used at different times and by different schools of criticism and theory. These include Aristotle's view of character in terms of the requirements of tragedy; character as formed by the predominance of a particular 'humour'; the Romantic emphasis on individuality and solitariness as part of the character of the hero; modernism's destabilization of earlier views of character as fixed and coherent; Forster's model of 'flat' and 'round' characters; narrative theories which see character as playing out 'actantial roles'; and the disputing of character as an entity or concept, in recent literary theory.

The phrase 'angry young man', needs to be understood in terms of the tremendous impact that Osborne's play, and particularly the character of Jimmy, made on its appearance. Such a category should however be interrogated and used as a critical tool while dealing with the themes of dissent, rebellion and 'feeling' in the play.

Class and gender are categories that could be seen as defining character, or as issues that play themselves out in the 'site' provided by character. At the same time, neither category can be considered independently of the other in *Look Back in Anger*, since each is presented in terms of a struggle, and the two struggles are conflated.

2.6 GLOSSARY

Ambiguity	Double or dubious meaning.
Bildungsroman	Literally, 'novel of education'. A novel tracing the development and growth to maturity of the protagonist.
Caricature	Exaggerated portrait which uses distortion, usually for a comic effect.
Dramatis personae	The characters in a play

Misogyny	Dislike or hatred of women.
Physiological	Belonging to natural science (the study of living things).
Subjectivity	Preoccupation with the self and with personal experience and vision.
Transcription	Reproduction or copy.

2.7 QUESTIONS

- Q 1. Discuss the way in which Romantic and Modernist conceptions of character are combined in the presentation of Jimmy as the play's protagonist.
- Q 2. Do you think of any character(s) in the play as being 'flat'? If so, why?
- Q 3. What is your understanding of the concept of the 'angry young man' and its implications in the context of this play?
- Q 4. How do the characters in *Look Back in Anger* function as 'sites' for a discussion of class and/or gender?

2.8 SUGGESTED READING

- Carter, Alan *John Osborne*, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1969
- Hayman, Ronald *John Osborne*, Great Britain: Heinemann, 1968