

The Fiction of the Non-Fictional: Plurality, Alienation and the Uncanny as visible in John Osborne's Work

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Abstract

*The discussion would view the works of John Osborne (mainly the drama *The Hotel in Amsterdam* along with a little reference to the non-fictions) in the light of the notion of alienation and the Freudian Uncanny. This play depicts the materially successful lot. The cream of the society. People with lot of money and little conscience. A group of men and women, belonging to different genres of art and aesthetics, escaping the grudging grip of their dictatorial director K.L., is caught at a hotel in Amsterdam. The audience as the eavesdroppers can experience their existential truth peeling the elite veils of decency skin by skin in the claustrophobic atmosphere. The present paper consists of an in-depth analysis of the play: how the fragmentation trespasses through the iron gate of collective bond; how that relates to the theme of the "uncanny". We would also give some references from the non-fictions of Osborne, including one correspondence, "A Letter to My Fellow Countrymen" in order to compare the fiction with the corpus of the non-fiction, to show how these two fuse.*

Key Words: alienation, conscience, director, Uncanny, fragmentation, claustrophobic, correspondence.

The present paper would focus on the issue of fragmentation of the unitary being, and the consequent bafflement specifically centering on the protagonists of Osborne. It would explore the brooding sense of anxiety of the individual in a meaningless, unfamiliar, unfathomable world. The present play, chosen for discussion, is slightly different in nature, namely, *The Hotel in Amsterdam* (1968). This play, compared with the other plays of Osborne –that basically portray failed-in-life, howling and accusing men –depicts the materially successful lot. A group of men and women, belonging to different genres of art and aesthetics, escaping the grudging grip of their dictatorial director K.L., is caught at a hotel in Amsterdam. The audience as the eavesdroppers can experience their existential truth peeling the elite veils of decency skin by skin in the claustrophobic atmosphere. The present paper consists of an in-depth analysis of the play: how the fragmentation trespasses through the iron gate of collective bond; how that relates to the theme of the "uncanny". We would also give some references from the non-fictions of Osborne,

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including one correspondence, “A Letter to My Fellow Countrymen” in order to compare the fiction with the corpus of the non-fiction, to show how these two fuse.

In his *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women*, George MacDonald, influenced by the German *Märchen*-folk, discusses the dream-like or trance-like stories, and their incorrigibly psychic, stream-of-consciousness potential: “One can imagine stories which have no coherence, but only association of events like dreams;...”¹ We have seen the traumatic Luther delivering dream-like passages, pouring his inner-self out. What the Dream Plays of Strindberg emulate, or what MacDonald is suggesting, points to the anxiety of “a bad conscience”², to quote Martin Swale’s phrase concerning the initiation of German novels. It is interesting to note that it was E.T.A Hoffmann – whose story is influential in Freud’s concept of the “uncanny” – who was, as it is said, equally important for MacDonald’s *Phantastes*. The hint of the uncanny lies in the very essence of dreamy sequences: incoherence, illogicality that negates any positivity as well as any known affirmation. It points to an impending doom that the characters are all afraid of and from which pre-conceived trauma, they all suffer from. The Victorian England of big men and bigger motifs had vanished at the very onset of modernism; ultra-assurance of cash-nexus was still materially substantial yet morally and spiritually hollow and singularly unable to provide any secured creed or sanctity; everything was fluid in this make-believe world of superficial pomp and peripheral grandeur. The lost unitary being, the forgotten utopian land of promises and expectations cast its long ghostly shadow on the otherwise contented people. The present play concerns these particular sections that are established, but are always escaping, as it were, from some malignant force.

Six people –Laurie, Gus, Dan, Margaret, Annie, Gillian –are captured revealing their particular selves in a matchbox-like confinement. This play is an epitome of the ‘plural’ existence that we are discussing throughout. The polyvocality here leads to the essential revelation of a fear factor which is common to the writings of Kafka, Camus or Pinter. Harold Hobson criticizing this play thus opined in *The Sunday Times*:

John Osborne’s *The Hotel in Amsterdam* directed by Anthony Page, is the best contemporary play in London:... It is about fear, the fear sometimes well-founded but more often not, that seizes on people on middle life, when the future no longer seems bright and certain before them. It is about friendship. It is about goodness....³

The play is fundamentally divided into two worlds: the male group consists of Laurie, the writer; Gus, the film editor; and Dan, an artist; all of whom work for a person called K.L., who is said to be a film producer and is basically an anarchist by nature. The female group includes Margaret, Laurie’s wife; Amy, Dan’s wife and also K.L.’s secretary; Annie, Gus’ wife; and Gillian, Laurie’s sister-in-law. The two worlds meet in the hotel room, revealing the irony of mutual closeness. K.L. is an absentee who takes all the time of his employees without mercy. He is the very source of the livelihood of all these people; but again, he is the imposing authority who impels them to be in an unwilling imprisonment within their without. As the persecutor he is present even in the relaxing repartees, in the private talk of these people, in the Holland-holiday (!) in spite of being physically absent. His absence, thus, is more eloquent than the collective presence of all the other characters.

In course of the conversation of the male and the female groups, the unbearable reality comes to the fore as broken 'realities'. The togetherness does not bring forth any notion of a collective community, but what are left to rot is shattered and fragmented selves who fight and struggle with one another under the warm blanket of ephemeral conjugality. This chapter would thus reveal such micro issues of fear and the consequent separation from one another, citing some of Osborne's non-fictional writings too, locating the uncanny in its most disguised self.

W.S. Gilbert used the notion of torture showing ironically that even the torture can be "a source of merriment"⁴ in *The Mikado* (1885). The theme of being tortured mentally or physically is central to the neo-corporate world of which one can have a 'proleptic' glimpse in the present play by John Osborne; Osborne reveals the 'ironic merriment' of the age in his characteristic manner. The inter-personal loneliness, the sense of losing security begins from the very beginning. It is an incarceration that is imposed on a person by himself as well as the without around him. The sense of the 'uncanny' is evoked by the very comment made by the restless Laurie on motherhood, a representative of the genre of 'successful' and independent modern man, who dares everything: "I think my mother would have put me off women for life. I mean just to think of swimming about inside that repulsive thing for nine months."⁵ The factor of parentage is always crucial in Osborne's plays. Maternity, paternity, or any other grand narrative is shown to be at stake every now and then. In the present context, the very grand narrative – mother (motherhood) –through which the baby first comes to terms with the world –is shown as an object of coarse mockery. A mother's womb is materially and figuratively the first, primal and primordial space of security: the known place of solace which seems to have least importance to the 'babies' of this wretched time. The concept of the labourer in a capitalistic society is, ironically, of more importance to them. The mother is judged by how she would have performed as a worker; thus we can discern a violent paradigm shift in the moral-spiritual world; a world in which men or women are machines of wish-fulfilment. Replying to Dan's comment that his mother would have made a good air hostess, the fidgety Laurie retorts: "Your mother! Listen, my mother should have been Chief Stewardess on Monster's airlines. She would have kept you waiting in every bus, withheld information and liquor, snapped at you, and smirked at you meaninglessly or simply just ignored you."⁶ Notable is the fact that the image of a mother first comes in association with a good corporate figure, then, a money-maker, next, a fortune-builder and finally as a persecutor, who would snap and destroy and penalize, once in power!

The claustrophobic stage setting discovers the individuals more bleakly. There is hardly any landscape scene in the plays of Osborne. However, claustrophobia in this playspecifically, is used as an interesting motif: the unseen boss K.L.'s menacing 'presence', the uncouth without and its pressure, waiting outside the hotel door are all catalysts and reactants that deeply influences the alchemy between each two characters and couple. The very fact of the entrance in a 'room' automatically shuts the 'outside' out and we are instantly reminded of the Baconian wisdom that we actually shape our dwellings and then our dwellings begin to shape us. Because they are in a small congested confinement, their respective spaces are overlapped letting the audience experience the bitter truth of their 'within' as they have got no 'exit' in both literal and imagistic sense. Outside the room in an almost Pinteresque manner, the "earth is extinguished"⁷. The characters are unravelled at a more personal level in the cloistered set up; fear of the unknown danger evoking the sense of the 'uncanny' from a crude cold unfamiliar without, sets

the key tone of the play; the characters even at their subconscious carry this obsessive fear psychosis which, in course of conversation, emerges unwittingly: "I've a feeling we are getting back to K.L. You said, let's leave him behind. But you won't"⁸. Samuel Beckett's answer to the queries of his actors of *Endgame* defines the notion most aptly:

There are so many things. The eye is unable to grasp them as the intelligence is to understand them –Therefore one creates one's own world, *un univers a part*, in order to withdraw... to escape from chaos into an ever simpler world . Even Clov has this need for order –I have progressively simplified situations and people, *toujours plus simples*.⁹

Side by side with this Kafkaesque world, on a different plane the individuals even within a familiar atmosphere feels a strange non-familiarity; the individuals are not only imprisoned within the 'sophisticated jail' of K.L. but they are caged within. Now, these six people consider themselves as a group, a coterie, which is controlled and characterized by one single and singular individual's authoritative presence in absentia, Mr. K.L.! What is significant is that, they are unwilling to let any other enter within their sphere; thus they are also actively participating in the process of a complete compartmentalization: Gillian's –"a girl of about thirty"¹⁰ – sudden entry in the second act with a note of emotionalism is not welcome by the rest of the lot. Reluctant to listen to her, uncaring Laurie thus shoulders the issue off:

Oh, either her lover's married and can't or won't get a divorce or he isn't married and she can't bring herself to offer herself up to something total. Variations on some crap like that. But I tell you, she is not going to blight our weekend. We've had ourselves something we want to have and we made it work and she is not going to walk in here on the last night and turn it all into a Golden Sanitary Towel Award Presentation.¹¹(II)

The relationships are as if have got a Chinese-box structure: Laurie and the lot have come to enjoy a sort of relief; they are together for the common factor, namely K.L.; the empathy lies in the fact of suffering; they are all suffering from the sense of a brutal nothingness, a 'lessness' within them which leads them to weave a cocoon around themselves; they try to live within it, as if by this they would be able to save themselves from the Immanent without. They only acknowledge those people who belong to their kind of suffering, those who are under K.L.; so there is compartmentalization within compartmentalization; now Gillian is an outsider to them who does not fall within the criterion mandatory for anybody who wants an entry pass! And they are not going to put up with this stranger, this intruder, this outsider. Thus the blood-relations or even the conjugal commitments are of no importance to them; the play shows a total fragmentation of the relations, friendship, any mutual bonding; only the apparently available one is that of a curious medley of a few frightened people; it is a closed and cocooned society indirectly built by K.L. which they are maintaining. Now the circle of interest confines itself more and more and the apparent notion of the collective peels its mask off. Their mutual differences come to the fore. The concepts of togetherness, the known bonds are destroyed gradually, as the audience/reader walks along with the characters. The plurality is not only in the

‘collective’ sense on which they try to stress a lot, but to tell the truth, they are also ‘plurally’ plural. Again Beckett’s comment is revelatory:

...the link between the individual and things no longer exists –One must create a private world for oneself, in order to satisfy... one’s need for order. That for me is the value of theatre. One can set up a small world with its own rules, order the game as if on a chess-board –indeed, even the game of chess is still too complicated.¹²

The complications in the characters are propelled by self-hatred and casual mockery without an inkling of compassion. The ‘phantasm’ or rather ‘phantasmagoria’ originated and lies in their inability to recognize themselves as proper human beings. They are as if in a jungle without mercy, full of predators. Each and everyone has got a different characteristic and are self-concerned. The following conversation reveals their type of ‘bonding’!

Laurie: You can’t be loving friends with a dinosaur.

Annie: What are you then?

Laurie: A mouse –what else?

Annie: Some mouse. With the soul of a tiger.

Laurie: A mouse. With the soul of a toothless bear.

Annie: What’s Gus?

Laurie: Gus? He’s a walking, talking, living dolphin.

Annie: Amy?

Laurie: An un-neurotic follow-deer.

Annie: And Dan?

Laurie: Dan, he’s a bit difficult. Rather cool, absent-minded but observant. Orang-utan.

Annie: You’re a rather sophisticated mole who keeps pushing up the earth to contract all her chums in the right place at the right time.

Amy: And Margaret – what she?

Laurie: Don’t know. That’s a difficult one.¹³(I)

In his dedication (*Zueignung*) of *Faust*, Goethe questions the real existence of the fictional characters, and how far they are relatable to the lived experience of an individual: Goethe talks of the “Schwankende Gestalten”, the “waving phantoms”. The indescribable eeriness, hovering over the confine of the hotel, contains the phantoms of blasted desire, no doubt. The husband is ‘unaware’ of his pregnant wife; the friends are alienated from each other; the women are stripped of all decency and delicacy; nobody is sure of anybody, no familiarity, no humane behaviour; the relationships are exposed as volatile and evaporative, phantasmal. The grand narrative of humanity does no longer exist; all the familiar notions are ravished. The metaphorical presence of the patriarch K.L. in the recurring conversations, points to his influence over the group. He is the absolute Doppelgänger who is ever present as a phantom, a threat, an unknown danger from which one cannot escape. The sense of *unheimliche* is not only in the without of the group but even within; in their mutual sharing they are alien to each other, related only to themselves and nobody else. The most important fact is that even at this critical juncture, the plural alienation, they are clinging on to the figure of the dominating K.L.; a Kafkaesque figure of initials only (!), who could provide them at least with a sense of an institution, something organic and solid however malign. The desperate but futile urge to cling on to a known solidarity is the real truth of existence of the modern individuals who are chased by their own ghosts. The evil uncanny is thus in both within and without: in their “fanfuckingtastick”¹⁴ week it encroaches slowly and silently. And the audience suddenly comes to know that K.L. has committed suicide by taking “Sleeping pills, sleeping pills and aspirin”¹⁵

When Osborne was asked by Tynan, whether he was a patriot or not, he replied that his patriotism lies in the “sense that my life only has meaning here, not somewhere else.”¹⁶ England is *his* ‘place’. Osborne’s sense of reliance on the known facade of a ‘motherland’ is re-stressed in his following plays; search for existential meaning is reflected in his works in different ways through the male protagonists, who are most of the time Osborne’s alter ego: and what the works project is an endless series of suffering, a wailing for the broken grand narrative, by which, England, Osborne’s unfamiliar ‘motherland’, is characterized. In the present play, as we have already pointed out, the theme of motherhood is repeatedly mocked at: the nun’s story, iterated by Laurie, corroborates to the mockery of general motherhood, the religious credo, crossing the individual’s periphery. Michael Anderson points out how the England, as the notion of mother is gradually alienated and through a total dismissal of that, how the child’s craving becomes insistent for that of an a-historical “once upon a time” fairy land, leaving the ‘time-present’: “One consistent feature in Osborne’s plays is ... that contemporary society is suffering from a degeneration of feeling... and the hero’s isolation becomes increasingly an impatient and wholesale rejection of modern times.”¹⁷

Osborne’s non-fictional writing reflects the same urge for a known grand narrative. Now we would see how one of his off-beat essays emphasizes his dramatic motif. Showing an uncommon enthusiasm, he proposes drama to be his ‘weapon’ to express the suffering and the consequent anger for being in an unfamiliar world. And it is in the following passage and probably nowhere else, where he comes out of the shell of self-pity and talks vigorously with hope. The view centering on theatre, is expressed in his 1957 essay in now obsolete *International Theatre Annual*:

I love the theatre more than ever because I know that it is what I always dreamed it might be: a weapon. I am sure that it can be one of the decisive weapons of our time. We, who work in the theatre, have power, and we should never underestimate –as we do – the extent of that power.¹⁸

The self-lacerating hatred and fear is not only the focus of *The Hotel in Amsterdam* but it is also the main motif of yet another play whose title, we have used a little allusively in the previous page: *Time Present*. Here Osborne's 'weapon' is used to *point* the suffering with an inherent desire to shed the present time and re-tune to the 'old chord'. The 'past', which is now blurred, must be present somewhere, now unidentifiable and what the 'present' offers is complexly vague; moreover, it is shadowed by the 'Doppelgänger' of the old times; the age is a miserably unwilling 'bi-walker'. It is a grey time, an ironically gay time, where the binaries are merged. Men are completely clueless as to the whereabouts of their craved personal and institutional 'Godot' and are most pitifully unable to understand how to recognize him. In the introduction of both the plays (1968) Osborne quotes these very lines from the *Ecclesiastes*: "A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to get and a time to lose: a time to keep, and a time to cast away."¹⁹ What else can be more appropriate to expose the confusing self of a modern individual problematized by his gradual loss of the 'knownness'!!

In *The Trial* (1925) Kafka let Joseph K hang "Like a dog"²⁰, to quote the protagonist's own narration, the last one, without any proper accusation. The waiting for an ultimate sympathetic face, as Joseph K did, and was frustrated thereby, leads unalterably to an utter bewilderment. The references to the biblical concepts as he made here are not regular in Osborne; but one can assume that he is craving here for some Messianic moment to appear, to be in that magic land; since he wants to be 'human' again in this subhuman, mechanistic world of his, and understands, in his heart of hearts, "*Homo non proprie humanus sed superhumanus est*", which means that, "to be properly human, you must go beyond the merely human."²¹, as E.F.Schumacher had elucidated in his seminal work, *A Guide for the Perplexed*. All the anger, hatred, chastisement are for this reason only. In this context one may remember what the apocalyptic *Book of Revelation* says. Written about 90 AD by John the Divine, the book can be re-read as a crucial work of resistance against an anarchist 'unhomely' world.²² *Book of Revelation* carries a narration of the struggle between the Messiah, Jesus and the evil, namely Satan and regaining of the promised land, "a new heaven and a new earth".²³ The present moment of the historical time is the "Profane" one (as we have discussed in the previous chapter, centering on Eliade's concept of the 'sacred' and the 'profane') the "chronos" which would lead to a "kairos", the new universe, an orderly cosmos, a "Sacred" time through an absolutely decisive war, between the good and the evil. It is the inner-belief of the modernist, that the age-old concepts of good-bad, ethical-unethical, black-white are built on the 'binaristic' division; because these are the known and traditionally accepted notions. But the present world lacks those notions; instead it is in a ruptured state of dismissal without the proper designation and definition of the good and the bad. The profane time is that of "chaos" which is waiting for "kairos". Thus, we can unite the two strands of the 'story', that of Eliade's and John the Divine.

As in the above reference to Kafka too, the references are significantly made to non-human creatures, not to human beings with which they are associating the lived existence and the incidents. If we consider the passage where the characters are designated with different animal features by the jolly Laurie, we could be able to relate it to the argument. The sense of the uncanny goes deeper in the present context. It is like the allegory *Metamorphosis*, Kafka's novella, where one fine morning Gregor Samsa finds himself as a gigantic insect and the process of alienation is crudely revealed. At the loss of known human existence, the sense of 'uncanny' breaks through. The passage in which Laurie compares all the others to different animals – focuses on how far the sense of alienation can move so that people can feel like a non-human; they are alienated from the sense of being a human: the particular section, therefore, portrays a pure and caustic disintegration, an abortive version of the loss of probably the ultimate grand narrative – humanity. Osborne, through his plays was attempting to first, pinpoint the reality and secondly to get out of it by stirring the hollow mass up through the revelation of a barren Waste Land; but at the end, it is a personal journey with an increasingly inner-motif that comes up leaving all other general as well as public issues behind. It is as if Osborne was now less for the catch-term group, the angry-generation, and more in the quest for the individual; one can sense that the fragmentation has gone deeper into the soul of the Luther or the Jimmy who is engaged within only himself now; who likewise has undergone a metamorphosis that resulted in the deconstruction of the collective source of resistance, the anger into the personal grievance, the angst! The hope of using drama as a weapon, to build something meaningful, endorsing a collective purpose soon vanishes; in its place comes a fragmented loneliness of the individual who is all alone for himself. This is what Osborne precisely opines in *The Twentieth Century*, a theatre journal: "It's not my job as a dramatist to worry about reaching a mass audience if there is one, to make the theatre less of a minority art... Ultimately, after all, the only satisfaction you get out of doing all this is the satisfaction you give yourself."²⁴

The irrational universe around the angry writer, and its ruthless callousness pained him. One can find a parallel in the following words of Pirandello, who in an uncongenial atmosphere turns out to be a self-centric misanthrope: "Mankind does not deserve anything, stubborn as it is in its constantly growing stupidity, in its brutal quarrelsomeness....Mankind adverse."²⁵ The death of the boss, K.L., is symbolic of the ultimate failure of the modern Homo sapiens to gain back any grand narrative. An apparent happiness is there as they are 'free' from the brutal clutches of any superior authority, but at the same time this liberation shatters the last scope for their being within a collective group, a known facade; and this disintegration opens them up to an uncanny, *unheimliche* universe, full of unacknowledged terror where no comfortable niche is available, however superficial. They are within the "chronos" fully devoid of any assertion of when it would be turned into a "kairos". To Freud, this "kairos" has been there in distant past. It is not only a future-occurrence, a time to be in, but also an image of some bygone past, the previously discussed "once upon a time" a vague one probably, thus evoking the Nietzschean myth of the eternal recurrence: "The kairotic event has already happened".²⁶ Osborne's past-fixation thus can have an explanation. At the back of his mind Osborne has a very novel concept of an organic cosmos; the Victorian prosperity, superiority, grandeur larks large; but what he can see is only the compromising part of it. The Phantasmal globe. To him it is a process of regaining, the lost paradise. The Edwardian 'twilight' casting its shadow implies some world of

grand narrative where he could trace the long-awaited utopia to begin the 'bear and squirrel' game *again*.

The uncanny-struck Osborne vomits his hatred not only in the fictions but in the non-fictional writings too. Let us have a look at the correspondence (quite a public one!), which can be treated as an important source to reveal the inner-self of any person. And here we are going to cite certain portions of the famous, "A Letter to My Fellow Countrymen" (1961) which Osborne wrote from Valbonne, France, interestingly in the same year in which *Luther's* was staged:

This is a letter of hate. It is for you, my countrymen. I mean those men of my country who have defiled it. The men with manic fingers leading the sightless, feeble, betrayed body of my country to its death.

...No, this is not the highly paid 'anger' or the rhetoric you like to smile at (you've tried to mangle my language too). You'll not pour pennies into my coffin for this; you are *my* object.

...I fear death. I dread it daily. I cling wretchedly to life, as I have always done. I fear death, but I cannot hate it as I hate you. It is only you I hate, and those who let you live, function and prosper.

Till then, damn you, England. You're rotting now, and quite soon you'll disappear. My hate will outrun you yet, if only for a few seconds.²⁷

So, it ended! The long vitriolic of Osborne who accuses a section of *his* countrymen who for him have become the representative of the "rotten" state, who rather are the harbingers of death, decay and destruction, and whom his hatred would outlive! Osborne's England is a dehumanized, demoralized land. The aforementioned piece divulges a plural Osborne, the person who had so long been thinking in terms of a generational anger now loathes others; it is a journey from the collective to the plural, from the known to the unknown. And now from the great porter of the lost era, it is only "my" and "I" that he is concerned of: just like Laurie and the lot, he is trying frightfully to 'cling on to' a fateful 'K.L.', named hatred! It is this concept of detestation, after all a grand narrative, (!) that would, as it were, let him be alive as he has already declared. He fears death. He needs something to live by and in such an infertile time this is the only emotion that can let Jimmy survive! He takes his countrymen as a total section, and proceeds towards a collective rivalry; to him, at least the fact of, first a collective submitting to a great rotten evil thing and then a tremendous opposition towards the 'wrong things' would make some sense out of the unnamable situation, for he is unable to endure any meaningless mockery of life. In the letter what he ensures is the sense of a great grand episode, however off-putting. Therefore it is bound to sap his sustenance anyway, as he deliberates on a collective 'danger', though question remains whether its nature is at all collective or not. But Osborne's is one which is very serious and earnest, with "sincere and utter hatred"²⁸, which essentially foils the era's character.

The spatial displacement comes as a relief to Osborne: he is in France and poses as if (he is) outside the rancorous grasp of the rotten people. Laurie and company went to Holland in order to elude the rancor of K.L., but the topic; constant references to this person entered almost every single utterance. Likewise, even while sitting in France, the dark shadow of the 'unfamiliar' motherland full of unknown faces pursues Osborne. He is unable to shed it and in the process a violent 'metathought' continues to haunt him: "I write this from another country, with murder in my brain and knife carried in my heart for every one of you. I am not alone. If we had just the ultimate decency and courage, we would strike at you –..."²⁹

He understood the downright futility of his hatred; and repented towards the end of the letter for it was then of no more use; like the dead K.L., even the great stature of evil is broken; since it is a mini-narrative world where neither the good, nor the evil has the big and most importantly 'known' stature. What left is an absolutely impotent angst, the futile fuel for a clueless survival: "My hatred for you is almost the only constant satisfaction you have left me."³⁰ He could make out his own pathetic inability to reach up to the time, to the Father, the secured shelter; he can realize the dark unfamiliarity of this time, the "chronos" which is not left with anything substantial and is incapable of producing any such. His 'weapon' of hatred is useless, and we hear him groaning:

You have instructed me in my hatred for thirty years. You have perfected it, and *made it the blunt, obsolete instrument it is now*. I only hope it will keep me going. I think it will. I think it may sustain me in the last few months.³¹

The hatred is an effect of the severe sense of some unknown malevolence which the person at the receiving end is unable to grasp: this notion was present throughout in literary pieces of Victorian England. Arthur Machen's writings show an uncanny evil resting under an apparently 'innocent' description:

Austin took the manuscript, but never read it. Opening the neat pages at haphazard his eye was caught by a word and a phrase that followed it; and sick at heart with white lips and a cold sweat pouring like water from his temples, he flung the paper down.³²

The "white lip", "cold sweat" characterizes the total existence of a 'compromised' and prosperous individual. The person's suffering from the unknown danger is both moral-spiritual and physical in nature. These people are able to slaughter anything for profit, material benefit. They are capable of the "primal horde". They are incapable of salvation; neo-hominids, dark swarming creatures, they eat their own meat, and blindly submit to their own terminal desire. They symbolically have killed their father, the grand narrative, making it a 'Totem', as a result distanced it. In a roundabout way they 'tabooed', barred it, making the achievement of the grand narrative difficult. Thus we hear the same resonance in Osborne at the very end of his letter: "If you were offered the heart of Jesus Christ, your Lord and your Saviour – though not mine, alas – you'd sniff at it like sour offal. For that is the Kind of Men you are."³³

The non-fictional writings of Osborne corroborate his fictional corpus: the angry porter comes to the fore more vehemently through the 'natural' references! Now we would move on to another piece of writing: "On Critics and Criticism" (1966) where he elucidates some of his loutish experience which is the 'natural phenomena' for the English intellectuals, justifying his sense of disgust:

... Distrust and dislike is general and mutual. Most of the people who are hired to write about the theatre are bored by it, or like the critic of the *Daily Express*, sit longing for salt beef sandwiches and the forgetfulness of Fleet Street after the ball is mercifully over. Intellectuals detest and despise it openly.³⁴

The 'despisement' is 'open' enough. And as one can discern, the argument crosses the specific impounds of the theatre and extends to reciprocate the age's blemishes. But one most important thing disclosed here is that of the eternal predicament of the artist – his inability to get a congenial atmosphere for his production. One could remember Osborne's pain in staging *A Patriot for Me* which, largely dealt with the then taboo topic of homosexuality. He had to 'reconsider' the 'bed-scenes'. On the other hand, the passage gives a glimpse of the sloth critics, and a particular section of the intellectuals, who are insensitive and hence incapable of any creative response. So, this was the time and its 'tides'. Now we can relocate the angst and its paradigms.

To clarify this point more, the following criticism would suffice. Published in the *Sunday Telegraph* (7 July, 1968), contemporary critic Frank Marcus' comments are noteworthy. To this critic, Osborne,

...has stated that it is time for introspection. Quite deliberately, he stands still and catches his breath. He upholds the virtues of friendship, honesty, propriety, and self-knowledge. They are *middle-aged virtues*, but that *does not invalidate them*. Osborne has earned himself a respite, and although his last two plays are far from exhilarating in terms of theatre, they are preferable to silence. I *sympathize* with his views and understand his condition.³⁵(Italicization mine)

The mood is that of compassion: as if for a poor child lost and restricted within some 'fairyland', who is unable to understand the 'fictionality' of the tale and tries to establish that in the realistic world. This piece is an 'authorized' version of the broken grand narratives: the 'fall' is conceded. It is, as it were, un-retainable; therefore, even to mourn for it is fruitless. Osborne's engagement with friendship or honesty is recognized but with a pinch that these are values of "middle-ages", meaning now obsolete; it may not be 'invalidated' as he proclaims courageously, but is not of much use too! It is an age of staid resignation. It is here, where Osborne is completely compartmentalized; he falls under the process of othering; his strong reactions in an age of passivity and dullness are perceived as futile and of little or no value. His emotions and expressions are 'obsolete' in an iron era; he thus gradually is characterized by 'being' the

‘Totem’ of anger. Most shockingly, from a “fellow countryman”, the attitude is that of *sympathy*, and not of empathy.

In this context, references to religious credo, Christianity or Christ (which Osborne occasionally has used, as we can see in *Time Present*, or *Luther*, or in his letter) are like mere parrot-nattering; any grand narrative, age-old value or sublime discourse has lost relevance; whatever are written in seminal texts or sayings of the saints, any maxim or proverb are as *Luther* would show, “excrement of language”,³⁶ mere “diarrheic monologue”³⁷. In this age of void, as Girard comments that the biblical elucidations (or anything of the grand stature), “cannot explain the nature of healing miracles. It can only deal with the *language* used to describe them.”³⁸ what it can allude to, is that of the “scapegoat’s agony”³⁹, a Sisyphean suffering, for the Sartrean ‘nothing’.

Osborne’s crisis is that of an alienated man, a man in an unfamiliar world who begins to think of himself as a different species: “I am not yours. You are my vessel, you are *my* hatred. That is my final identity.”⁴⁰ In spite of saying that he is no “they”, he includes them in his constant thought; the unknown motherland is unfortunately part of his existence, the angst. In a desperate bid to form an identity, he takes up the last weapon of hatred so that some mutual sense could be extracted out of it, however negative; so that it could give a sense of the lost collectivity, instead of the soul-crushing plurality. But the attempts are in vain. He gradually enters the domain of self-incarceration leaving the final Doppelganger to walk on –anger!

The anger began as early as 1896, with Jarry’s *Ubu Roi*, poking fun at the middle-class, the *pere de famille*, where turnip-headed, balloon-belly lusty Pere Ubu stands for “the modesty, virtues, patriotism and ideals of a people who have dined well.”⁴¹ The self-indulgent modern man has made his own version of morality; it is the ‘morality of living singular’, concerning only of oneself, venal and tediously blind at the same time. Even the sense of ‘losing’ thus seems to be alien to them for they are in the blind alley of senseless profit, without knowing that it ultimately leads them to a brutal end where they are not even alone but fragmented totally, waiting for the unwarranted hang-man, searching for a sympathetic face –a full race of Joseph Ks. What they can only feel is the haunting presence of something imposing and fatal: “LAURIE: where does he get the damned energy and duplicity? Where? He tried to split us up but here we are in Amsterdam. He has made himself the endless object of speculation. Useful to him but humiliating for us.”⁴²

The present chapter has thus dealt with two strands of Osborne’s works –fiction and non-fiction. *The Hotel in Amsterdam* –instead of the general angry protagonists – shows a different race; it represents the upper-middle class intelligentsia. There is no one protagonist in this play: six people are in search of, what? Nobody knows. The vagueness of their relations is symptomatic of their opaque existence and desire. Falling prey to the vile disintegration of an infertile time they remain passive like puppets. This lethal insensibility is pointed out by Osborne in his non-fictions too: his scathing attack on to the critics or his abomination towards the fellow men of his own motherland. They did not react to his anger, as they are incapable of conceiving the gravity thereof. Powerlessly, they would rather accept and submit to the situation: “he set off a land-mine called *Look Back in Anger* and blew most of it up. The bits have settled into place, of course, but *it can never be the same again*”.⁴³

It is England that for Osborne becomes the ultimate Doppelganger, a phantasmagoric gothic-land devoid of any sensibility, walking with him all along. The blunt people and their blunter system could not get hold of the 'things' which were destined to 'fall apart'. Predicament of people like Osborne lies in the fact that they realized it but was unable to make their realization comprehensive to others. Osborne lit one candle but no other hand was there to light another; it is like Kafka's modern allegory, sparks were there, but in vain; sympathetic faces were ineffective letting people hang for nothing. We would conclude this chapter with the lines of the epitaph of Artaud, which he wrote himself, as it sums up everything: "In one of my first theatrical roles, I played a man who appeared in the final scene of an act which was insipid, smug, lifeless, dramatic, overloaded; in two clashing tones, he said: 'Can I come in?' And then the curtain fell."⁴⁴

Notes and References

1. Quoted in Stephen Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy* (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2005) p.173.
2. Ibid., p.175.
3. Quoted in Alan Carter, *John Osborne* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1969) p.48.
4. Quoted in Christopher Innes, *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) p.251.
5. John Osborne, *John Osborne: Plays* 3 vols. (London: Faber and Faber, 1998) vol.2, p.93-4.
6. Ibid., p.94.
7. *Modern British Drama*, p.317.
8. *Hotel*, p.111.
9. *Modern British Drama*, p.319.
10. *Hotel*, p.131.
11. Ibid., p.134.
12. *Modern British Drama*, p.319.
13. *Hotel*, pp.111-2.

14. Ibid., p.132.
15. Ibid., p.145.
16. A. P. Hinchliff, *John Osborne* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984) p.125.
17. Ibid.
18. Quoted in Simon Trussler, *The Plays of John Osborne* (London: Victor Gollanez, 1969) p.203.
19. Quoted in Martin Banham, *Osborne* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1969) p.79.
20. Quoted in Laurence Coupe, *Myth* (London: Routledge, 2005) p.135.
21. “User: Hgilbert”, *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, Wikipedia*, n.d., Web, 29 Jan, 2012. <http://www.google.co.in/?source=search_app#hl=en&gs_nf=1&pq=a%20guide%20for%20the%20perplexed&cp=45&gs_id=5&xhr=t&q=Homo+non+proprie+humanus+sed+superhumanus&pf=p&scient=psy-ab&oq=Homo+non+proprie+humanus+sed+superhumanus+est&aq=f&aqi=&aql=&gs_l=&pbx=1&bav=on.2,or.r_gc.r_pw.r_qf.,cf.osb&fp=bc7998ee1acaccef&biw=1024&bih=634>.
22. After Nero (54–68 AD) Domitian ruled the Roman Empire. A savage persecutor of Christians, Domitian was a terror for them. The Christians had to worship the ruler as well as Rome as a goddess (‘Roma’) in order to show their obedience towards the Empire. John the Divine wrote *Book of Revelation* to boost the depressed people. He proclaimed to have a vision on the Patmos Island (now Turkey). The notion of rebellion gives the book its true essence. The notion of anger as resistance in Osborne is well discussed in Samuel A. Weiss’ essay “Osborne’s Angry Young Play”.
23. *Myth*, p.77.
24. *The Plays of John Osborne*, p.205.
25. Quoted in Robert Brustein, *The Theatre of Revolt: An Approach to the Modern Drama* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1964) p.283.
26. Quoted in *Myth*, p.129.
27. Quoted in John Russell Taylor ed., *John Osborne; Look Back in Anger: A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1968) pp.67-9.
28. Ibid., p.69.
29. Ibid., p.68.
30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.
32. *Victorian Fantasy*,p.97.
33. *Casebook*, p.69.
34. Ibid., p.70.
35. *John Osborne*, p.49.
36. Herbert Blau, Preface, *The Eye of Prey: Subversions of the Postmodern*(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) p.xxi.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. *Casebook*, p.67.
41. Quoted in *The Theatre of Revolt*,p.364.
42. Quoted in *John Osborne*, p.133.
43. Quoted in Ibid., p.185.
44. Quoted in *The Theatre of Revolt*,p.376.