Drama

Fourth year- the second semester

The 9th lecture: د.ليلى باطوق

The second playwright is **John Osborne**. What is the main difference between John Osborne in the second play and Arthur Miller in the first play? What is the most obvious difference between both playwrights? I am talking about the playwright themselves. Since you are talking about the difference, it means that this person is something and this person is something. You have to give me two different things about them. If I ask about the common, it means you will give me one feature.

A student: Miller’s play talks about the issues of his society and Osborne talks about his unhappy marriage indirectly.

The doctor: Arthur Miller is American and John Osborne is British. This is the main difference. Why I am concentrating on their nationality?

I am talking about two playwrights and what their differences and common aspects are. If you are answering me in this way, you are concentrating on their plays and the ideas and the themes that they are representing in their plays. It means that most of your answer is going to be irrelevant to a certain extent. It is relevant but it should not be presented in this way. You have to know what the question is and you have to answer according to the question because if you understand the question, you will focus on the main idea of the question. So, now I am asking you about the two playwrights/ the two men but you are answering me about their plays. The main difference is their nationality. One is British and one id American. What is it important to focus on their background/ their identity?

A student: To understand their works/ to understand the society to which they belong because they are reflected in the plays.

The doctor: what you have mentioned is correct but the defect in that answer that you are concentrating on one play which made your answer incorrect in a way because you said that in ‘The Crucible’, he was not talking about his age as Osborne is doing; he is talking about the past. In this situation although we know that when he chose the setting to be something that belongs to the past he was actually reflecting the political issues at his time. So, we can never say that Miller is unlike Osborne that he seems that he is not reflecting his age. All playwrights/ all figures of literature reflect their age and reflect their societies.

When we study any work of literature, we have to know something about the writer of that work. Understanding the private life of a person plus the political social economical situation that was around that person will give you insight into the play that you are studying because definitely a playwright is talking about something that is happening in his age. Literature is a reflection of age. So, the main difference is that one is British and one is American. By the end of this course, you are supposed to know something about the life in Britain and something about the life in America at that time of the play. So, it is not only that you know something about the play itself as an abstract. You have to know something about the background of that work.

Now all of you know that John Osborne is British. So, you expect to find something about Britain in his plays plus something about his age (Britain during his age).

(Then the doctor asked the students to write on a piece of paper the following question and to answer it in ten minutes: write about John Osborne and his age. If there are certain things in his private life that affect his plays pointing them out but do not go to very detailed personal issues that have no meaning or no relation. I would like to have them in points. Do not write too much, just write in points. )

Let us go back to our lecture. Here we have dates. Who can comment on the dates here?

When you look at the dates her and the two names here, how can you comment? Give us what can you see here.

A student: the date of birth and the date of death of the playwright.

The doctor: usually when you see a name of a person and two dates like this, it means that this is the date of his birth and his death. If you do not know anything about these two playwrights, what are you going to say about these people? This is the birth of Miller and this is his death and this is the birth of Osborne and this is his death. They are sharing the same time, so they are 20th century dramatists. The obvious this is that these two playwrights are contemporaries; they have lives during the same time. What would you expect?

A student: both of them belong to the new generation.

The doctor: How do you know that?

The student: through the date.

The doctor: so, it is modern age. It is the 20th century. You can expect that they belong to the modern generation of the 20th century.

A student: they both witnessed industrial revolution and the two World Wars.

The doctor: Because they are living in the same age, it means that they have witness common events that took place in the world. Although they are from different countries, but there are certain events that happened in the 20th century that the whole world was affected by like the two World Wars. So, both of them witnessed these common events and during any war you can imagine what kind of life’s being lived in any country that had faced war. So, you can expect that. The issues that are tackled in their works in general might have something in common. Sometimes a war that takes place in one country and not in the other country but that country might be affected by that war because the whole world is related to each other. If that country was not physically affected by the war, it would have been affected economically because the whole world is depending on each other.

We are studying one play from each playwright. We might not expect that in this one play both playwrights are representing the same issues. In their work, in general, they will be representing something common. It is not necessary to be in each work. Look at these dates. This is the date of ‘the Crucible’ (1953) and this is the date of ‘Look Back in Anger’ (1956). The dates are very close. Three year do not make a big change. You might find something in common, not necessary very specific things but general things are in common. And we have the dates of the playwrights themselves. As you are saying they are contemporaries and they are living almost the same time. It is not a big difference. Miller was born in 1915 and Osborne was born in 1929. It is not a big difference of time. Miller died in 2005 and Osborne was died in 1994. Both playwrights have witnessed the main events that took place in the 20th century. This is going to be reflected in their plays. You might be expected to make a comparison between the two plays. When you compare between two things, they must have something in common that emphasizes the difference between the two figures or the two playwrights here.

Let us see what you have prepared on John Osborne. Let us talk about his life, the background of his age that might be reflected in his play ‘Look Back in Anger’.

Osborne loves his father and he has lost his father. He hates his mother. We can imagine the kind of father- son relationship and mother-son relationship. And he has suffered after the death of his father.

A student: Much of Osborne's childhood was spent in near poverty.

The doctor: even before the death of his father, their life was not that good. He suffered. And after the death of his father this suffering increased. So, his childhood suffered from poverty.

A student: He was also a co-founder of a film company that produced excellent films.

Among the professions that he has experienced is a producer of works like films. Before that he worked as an actor and this of course helped him as a producer and maybe as a writer also. He had undergone many professions related to literature.

A student: he used what it is called kitchen sink drama.

The doctor: the dirty kitchen sink drama: it did not start with him. It developed later on in the century. The kind of phrase that he has started is "[angry men](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angry_young_men)" theater. This developed later on in the age into other things. They are related but in different ways. His kind of drama developed by other playwrights in the age. So, his theater is the theater of angry men. Why do you think that this name was given to his theater and to the theaters of his contemporaries? It reflects the age. It reflects the postwar time and how people suffered. Why did not they call it the war theater, for example? Why did they call it the angry men theater? >>>Because they were angry of everything around them. They were frustrated of the situations of the suffering around them. That is why their plays were called the angry men theater. They were mainly angry. They were men. Some of them graduated from colleges and universities and they were promised that they will have good opportunities after study but because of the political and economical situations of the country, they were disappointed, they did not have opportunities that they have dreamt of plus they were really suffering. They thought that they have weapons in their hands that will give them great chances but they could not get those chances and they were frustrated. Frustration with poverty causes rage/ causes anger. So, they were young people who appeared angry/ who attacked everything/ who rejected everything around them to the extent that they could not see the good things around them. They just focused on the desperate aspects of their lives. This is the theater of angry men. They were the young generation of the 20th century who were so much depressed and frustrated from the political and economical situations of their country.

A student: The play spawned the term "[angry young men](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angry_young_men)" to describe Osborne and those of his generation who employed the harshness of [realism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realism_(arts)) in the theatre.

The doctor: the angry young men were the people who have reflected the harshness of the reality and the realism of their age through their works. They presented the suffering/ the desperate situations/ the frustration of the young men in their age.

His plays are dominated by strong protagonists who can represent strong ideas of the age.

His plays are autobiography. The meaning of the term ‘autobiography’: his plays are reflection of his own life. Many of the events and the characters in some of his plays are his own and people who live with him (for example, his wives). ‘Look Back in Anger’ in itself is said to be an autobiography of Osborne himself. The protagonist of ‘Look Back in Anger’ is **Jimmy Porter**. It is said that it is Osborne himself and people around him. He has married five times. So, he has more than one autobiography. Each one represents his life with a certain wife. ‘Look back in Anger’ is autobiography of Osborne himself. The language of the play is completely different from that of Arthur Miller’s play. It is vulgar. You are saying that even sentences sometimes they are only simple reflecting emotional feeing/ depression. Osborne has a very skillful language. He is very skillful in using the language that really suits his themes and the ideas that he wants to reflect in his play. The kind of language that he is using reflects the theater that he is writing which is the theater of anger. The language is full of anger. Anger is not only in the language/ in the words/ in the verbal expression of words but it is even in the relationship of characters. What kind of character is Jimmy Porter in the play? How is his relationship to his wife? It is very aggressive. Usually when a person is aggressive, what does it reveal about that person? Aggressive people>> it means that they are angry from inside and they are reflecting this anger verbally by being very harsh and violent in choosing the words themselves. He was aggressive verbally speaking and even in his physical treatment of his wife. Even his movements on the stage reveal this idea of anger. The aggressive characters in the play reveal the mood of the theater of anger which reflects the depression that was taken place among the young generation in Britain at that time.

Class distinction is very clear in the play. **Jimmy** the protagonist raises the issue of class distinction. He does not like it. He deals with it again with rage and anger. Class distinction is related to which character in the play?

Because he loved his wife and he was attracted to her as a person but he hates her background because she belongs to a higher class to him. Because of this difference between them, socially speaking, this difference reminds him of his suffering in the past as well as his present suffering because his situation in the play is not well, he was suffering from poverty. This suffering is reflected in his dialogue or in his verbal abuse as well as in his treatment to his wife. He loves her but he loves her family and the class that she belongs to. He loves her but he treats her violently and aggressively because she reminds him of the suffering. Although she has chosen him to her family, yet he could not forget her origins and her class. He feels that the upper class people are taking the opportunities and all chances of life in the country leaving nothing to the poor people. He feels like young people in his age that the upper class people are stealing their lives because they are stealing the chances of living in the age from them. So, he hates her background and he expresses this hatred in his angry mood. This is very clear from the beginning of the play till the end of it.

A student: Osborne’s plays have got as unifying feature the use of language and the one character play. This made kind of weakness in most of his plays which is repetitiveness of characters and idioms.

The doctor: many critics have commented on his plays, especially ‘Look Back in Anger’, as well-made plays. You have studied examples of well-made plays. From the title (well-made), it is something that is well-structured. Some critics say the defect in ‘Look Back in Anger’ is that it is a well-made play. The play consists of three acts; it has an exposition and then the action develops and we have the climax and we have the denouement, but it is not really in the sense of the well-made play because he is doing that in a skillful way that does not make the audience bored from the development of action. Because of the theme of the play which is about the anger and the boredom of the young generation, this feeling of boredom sometimes is reflected on the audience who are watching the play. Critics say that the structure of the plays of Arthur Miller is the well-made play. What is the defect in well-made play? The defect is that they are conventional in the sense that all plays can be defined in the same frame. Some critics say that this play is a well-made play in the sense that act one is the exposition, act two is the climax and act three is the denouement. It is clearly structured in this way. It is right that in act one we will find the exposition and in act two most of the climax is happening and the ending is in act three, but not in the way of the well-made play because the action is developing. There is exposition but exposition is not only in act one. You can have exposition in act two and in act three. The defect of the well-made play is that it can be divided like this. Exposition is only in act one; you do not find exposition in act two. Act two is only the crisis or the climax. Act three is only the denouement. It can be divided like this. It can be completely separated. But in the modern plays, it is different. Exposition is done throughout the play. When we talk about the language of the play/ the kind of dialogue that Osborne is using, through that dialogue he is exposing facts that affect the characters in the play. When you study ‘Look Back in Anger’, definitely you will not come and say that all exposition facts are this, and this and this and they depict in act one only. You cannot say that end (the events that are important for the end) is only in act three or the end of the play. You can see, you can foreshadow and you can anticipate the end from the beginning of the play through certain exposed facts. So, you cannot completely structure and divide the play into act one completely. Act one is related to act two and is related to three. All of them are related to each other through certain skills and certain techniques that the playwright is using in his structure.

Another aspect of the well-made plays is repetition of events. Sometimes you can see that this is exactly the same scene that took place in the first act for example. But it will have different consequences/ it will have different events in the end. So, it is not a mere repetition. It is not because that the playwright forgot that he has written this before but sometimes he is repeating events in purpose to emphasize certain things, either to emphasize a kind of relationship between the characters or to emphasize a feature of the protagonist for example or any other character in the play. So, repetition is used to emphasize. It is used for emphasis here and to expose again certain events that are related to the development of action in the play. So, he had followed the well-made structure in the sense that he has exposition, he had a beginning, he has middle and he has an end. The changes are in how he has been able to relate the plot together. Ibsen for example, is a follower of the well-made plays but again he did certain changes; he did not follow them exactly as they are with all their defects. He has done certain changes. One of them, for example, is the use of flashback/ retrospection; how he has been able to relate events that took place from the beginning until the end through the technique of retrospection. This technique is used with Osborne and Miller and with most of the modern playwrights. They are using these techniques going forward and backward in the events of the action in order to relate things that are taking place in the play.

What important things are related?

You are giving examples of how the play is considered a well-made play by certain critics like the complication of action. He is presenting a complicated event in the play that will lead to the climax of the play. He is using certain events like a phone (aspects of sudden events for example that will reverse the action).

So, it is not completely a well-made play because the structure is circular. It starts in one setting with certain people and it ends with the same. Why was Osborne doing that? He was actually reflecting the boring life of the modern young people in Britain/ the boredom of the modern age thinking that life is useless, it is the same; it is not going to change. They have this feeling that life is a routine; it is not going to change. It starts like this and ends in the same. A year starts like this and ends the same. So, actually even through the structure and the technique of his play, he was reflecting the mood of his age and his generation.

The issue of love and relationship between characters in the play is again treated in a way that sometimes reflects the life of the playwright himself. As we have mentioned before, the play is an autobiography. Some events happened actually in his life. So, the love relationships between the characters in the play reflect certain periods of his own personal life.

Osborne is the playwright, so he is the one who can change the events and the nature of relationships between the characters. He could make Jimmy love his wife so much and be honest to her and love everything that is related to her. But he did not make him that way. Was not he emphasizing something? Was not he focusing on something? He loves her as his wife/ as a character/ as a person but he hates her because she reminds him of something. She is from another class society. Osborne is representing the anger of the young generation who really believe in opportunities that can help them to live/ in materialistic things that they can hold in their hands. This is life for them. This will provide them with food, money and with the standard of life that they would like to live. Love is something they need but it is not enough. He wants to say that love is not enough. He loves her but he cannot forget that she represents the other class that is grasping the opportunities of the lower classes and of the young generation. If he wanted to present an optimistic play saying that love can is an ideal situation, he can present these people as happy although they are suffering economically and financially. But he really wants to say that the young people need love but at the same time they need money/ they need jobs. This is realistic life. He does not want to represent an ideal situation. He is representing the real situation of his age and the feeling of the young people of his age who believe in the need of love but at the same time they are very confident that love in itself is not enough and feelings can change according to circumstances. Circumstances can change the person and Jimmy is an example; although he loves his wife but because of the suffering and the depression and the kind of life that he is suffering from, he could find entertainment or a kind of happiness in another life once his wife left him and went back to her upper class. Maybe unconsciously he was like punishing her. Maybe he was just emphasizing the fact that love is not enough for young generations.

Open your books on the first page of the play. Look at the opening of the play.

**Act I:**

The Porters' one-room flat in a large Midland town.  
Early evening.

Look at the following lines.>> almost two pages before we start with the dialogue. We have detailed stage direction. Is this stage direction similar to the one that was in ‘The Crucible’? Here we do not have description of characters but we have description of something. It is long stage direction.

Read this stage direction and comment on the opening of the play.