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**“ A STUDY OF THE NEUROTIC PHENOMINON  
IN THE MODERN TRAGIC VISION WITH REFERENCE TO JOHN OSBORNE’S LATER  
GROUP OF TRAGEDIES “**

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**ABSTRACT:**

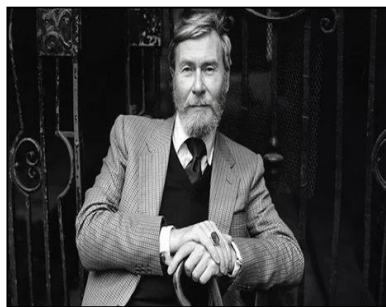
*In a very significant article "Sex and failure", Osborne has made revealing comments on characterization and its relationship to neurosis with a special reference to his second group of plays like "Inadmissible Evidence", "Time Present", "A Patriot for Me" and "Hedda Gabler". Here he attacks the 'adjustment' school of critics, who distinguish characters as normal and neurotic. This school of criticism tries to brand some characters as not 'normal'. As a reply Osborne stated as follows:*

**KEYWORDS:** *Neurotic Phenominon , Modern Tragic Vision ,characterization.*

**INTRODUCTION**

In fact, they are, yes-neurotics. Now this attitude is, I believe, built on a complete misconception of what theatre - or, indeed, art - is about. Adler said somewhere that the neurotic is like the normal individual only more so. A neurotic is not less adequate than an auditorium, full of 'normals'. Every character trait is neurosis writ small. I like my plays writ large and that is how these are written(1).

Osborne's interest as a dramatist has always been in the sort of "neurotic" people to whose problems and personalities the school's simplified solutions are irrelevant. In the above lines Osborne not only defends his neurotic heroes like Bill Maitland, Pamela and Col. Redl, but the playwright also generalizes the present conditions. He means to say that the madness or neurosis lies in the existence itself, wherein modern man is undergoing the unresolvable inner conflicts.



Well, this is not to say that man did not encounter these 'inner conflicts' in earlier times. The fact is that, the kind, scope, and intensity of such conflicts are largely determined by the civilization in which we live. If the civilization is stable and tradition-bound, the variety for choices presenting themselves are limited and the range of possible

individual conflicts narrow. But if the civilization is in a rapid transition as it is going on now, for instance modern culture is economically based on the principle of individual competition: the isolated individual has to fight with other individuals of the same group, has to surpass them, and frequently, thrust them aside. The advantage of the one is frequently the disadvantage of the other. Thus the psychic result of this situation is a diffuse hostile tension between individuals. And as Horney said it - "...that competitiveness, and the potential hostility that accompanies it pervades all human relationships"(2). Further the potential hostile tension between individuals result in a constant generation of fear- fear of the potential hostility of other, reinforced by a fear of retaliation for hostilities of one's own. Another source of fear in the normal individual is the prospect of failure. This means not only economic insecurity, but also loss of prestige and all kinds of emotional frustrations. All these factors together competitiveness and its potential hostilities between fellow-beings, and fears - result psychologically in the individual a feeling of isolation. In spite of having contact with others, he is emotionally isolated. How this emotional isolation becomes calamity, and how an individual is provoked and his need for affection is intensified is remarkably revealed in the character of Bill Maitland.

For instance at the University of Chicago, whose home city provided a great natural laboratory for the pursuit of such investigation the guiding idea and connecting thread in these studies was the conviction that deviation from the accepted social norms were not a product of mental deficiency of neurosis, or other forms of personal and psychic aberration, but rather had social roots and were caused by social conditions(3). However, it must suffice for us here to indicate some of the main contradictory tendencies.

The first contradiction to be mentioned is that between competition and success on the one hand, and brotherly love and humility on the other. On the one hand everything is done to spur us towards success, which means that we must be not only assertive but aggressive, able to push others out of the way. On the other hand again we are imbued with Christian ideals which declare that it is selfish to want anything for ourselves, that we should be humble, turn the other cheek, yielding. The second contradiction is between the stimulation of our needs and our factual frustration in satisfying them. For economic, needs are constantly stimulated in our culture by such means as advertisement, "conspicuous consumption", the ideal of "Keeping up with the Joneses". For the great majority, however, the actual fulfilment of these needs is closely restricted. The psychic consequences for the individual is a constant discrepancy between his desires and their fulfilment. Another contradiction exists between the alleged freedom of the individual and all his factual limitations. As we have studied the character of Redl in "A Patriot for Me", the individual is told by society that he is free, independent, can decide his life according to his own free will; "The great game of life" is open to him, and he can get what he wants if he is efficient and energetic. But in actuality, for the majority of people all these possibilities are limited, whether it is choosing and succeeding in an occupation, choosing a way of recreation, or choosing a mate. The result for the individual is a wavering between a feeling of boundless power in determining his own fate and a feeling of entire helplessness.

There is no doubt that choices like these have to be made very often by people living in our civilization, and one would, therefore, expect conflicts along these lines to be quite common. But the striking fact is that most people are not aware of them, and consequently do not resolve them by any clear decision. More often than not they drift and let themselves be swayed by accident. They do not know where they stand; they make compromises without being aware of doing so; they are involved in contradiction without knowing it. This is the condition of all those whom we refer to as 'normal' persons. Hence once again Osborne resolves to awaken his audience and, bring their attention to this 'inner chaos'. When conflict centres about primary issues of life, it is all the more difficult to fact them and resolve them. In such case, experts say that a neurotic differs from a normal only in degree but not in kind. There may be people whose lives seem to flow along smoothly without being disturbed by any of the inner turbulences that we have seen above. There may be the strong ones who have established their own hierarchy of values, or who have acquired a measure of serenity because in the course of years, conflicts and the need for decision have lost their uprooting power. But even this outward appearance may be deceptive. More often, due to apathy, conformity, or opportunism, these people are incapable of facing a conflict or of truly trying to resolve it on

the basis of their own conviction, and, consequently, have merely drifted or been swayed by immediate advantage.

Then the only alternative left is to experience the conflict consciously, even though it should be distressing. The more we face our own conflicts and seek out our own solutions, the more inner freedom and strength we will gain. It is only when we are willing to bear the brunt that we can approximate the ideal of our being, and be the captain of our ship. But can we ever be able to gain this 'inner freedom' in our modern world? Can the modern man achieve the 'unity' in his life? Will he be able to resolve the 'conflicting forces' in the present living conditions? This is the burning issue of the day, the real dilemma in our life. And Osborne responds to the spirit of the time as Jung excellently said it in his article "Psychology and Literature" in the following words:

The archetypal image of the wise man, the  
saviour or redeemer, lies buried and dormant  
in man's unconscious the times are out of  
joint and a human society is committed to a  
serious error. When people go astray they feel  
the need of a guide or teacher or even of the  
physician. These primordial images are numerous,  
but do not appear in the dreams of individuals  
or in works of art until they are called into  
being by the waywardness of the general outlook.  
When conscious life is characterized by  
one-sidedness and by false attitude, then they  
are activated - one might say, 'instinctively'-  
and come to light in the dreams of individuals  
and the vision of artists and seers, thus  
restoring the psychic equilibrium of the epoch(4).

It is in this way that the later plays of Osborne come to meet the spiritual need of the contemporary society which has been characterized as neurotic. If we look at the lives of his heroes, we do not fail to observe that all their tragic struggle is directed against their own 'self'. And the only logical ending to such an unresolved conflict is its cessation or the deeply felt insight into it which makes it, undoubtedly worthwhile for the hero. Maitland, Pamela, Redl all these only come to some realization but the price they have to pay for that is their own lives. The conflict in these plays ceases only because all passion is spent as in "Inadmissible Evidence" and "Time Present" or because the hero has given up the fight altogether and sought relief in death as it happens in "A Patriot for Me". They are not redeemed by any cosmic force and its divine revelation as in Aristotle's Tragedy, but by the recognition of their own responsibility which follows only as a logical consequence of their struggle. But the heroes come to such recognition only after the damnation of their precious lives.

In the previous chapter it was observed that while presenting the modern man as a neurotic on the stage, Osborne echoes the findings of the 'Neo-Freudians', like Karen Horney and Erich Fromm. The dramatist never lost his faith and all his struggle and efforts through his heroes are directed towards one thing - to bring back the lost dignity of man. Some psychologists also see man as a free and dignified being capable of creating his own destiny. But Horney realized that 'neurosis' is brought about by cultural factors - which more specifically meant that "Neurosis is generated by disturbance in human relationships"(5). Otherwise, Horney sees man as capable of creating his own destiny. The work of Neo-Freudians, the most effective school of modern psychology, both reflects and illuminates the pattern of human behaviour which Osborne presents from his observation and experience. If Horney's theories seem more convincing than that of Freud, her analysis of the neurotic personality in modern time and her accounting for the condition of

such neurosis also is very much in keeping with the vision of Osborne. Both the artist and the specialist believe in man's progress towards an ever increasing perfection but at the same time they hold the present living conditions responsible for the decline and downfall of our culture. Both of them point out the breakdown of human relationships, loss of faith and even the loss of the meaning of life as the root causes for such condition.

When Osborne carries the same situation into his plays, and the characters are stage against such background, the audience do not fail to observe the same sense of isolation, helplessness, fear and hostility lurking beneath their action. Still, ironically, they seem to have been driven by an irresistible passion to live, a "will to live". This can be witnessed in the tragic fate of Bill of Redl or Pamela. But, unfortunately, what occurs after their tragic struggle is - a waste, incompleteness and frustration.

Thus neurosis becomes the major path on which Osborne sees the modern tragic vision. In this aspect an ancient tragedy differs from the modern tragedy, which also means that the Aristotelian formalistic tragedy is substituted by the exposure of psychological and neurotic phenomenon.

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- 4.C.G. Jung, "Psychology and Literature", in *Twentieth Century Criticism* (London, 1975), ed. David Lodge, p. 187.
- 5.Karen Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts* (London, 1957), p.12.