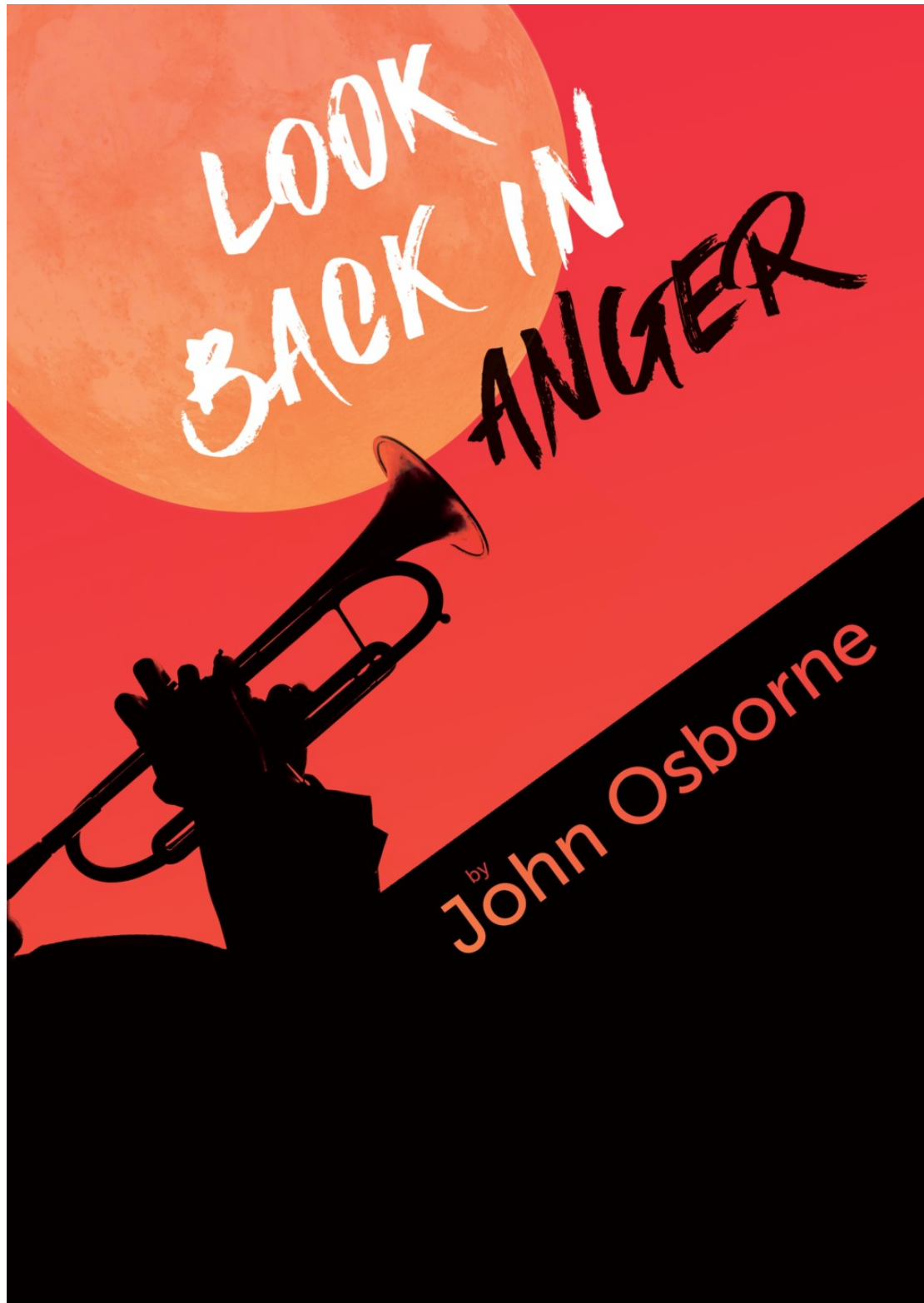


EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL FOR THAT THEATRE COMPANY'S  
PRODUCTION OF  
LOOK BACK IN ANGER by JOHN OSBORNE

OCT 23 - NOV 23, 2019



KRUDTTØNDEN, SERRIDSLEVVEJ 2, 2100 KBH Ø

With:

**IAN BURNS, SØREN HØYEN, PETER VINDING, HELLE KRISTIANSEN  
and ALEX JESPERSEN**

**DIRECTOR: HELEN PARRY**

**Tickets: teaterbilletter.dk / 7020 2096**

**<https://www.teaterbilletter.dk/forestillinger/look-back-in-anger/>**

Dear English Teachers and students in Denmark,

Here we are again this time with a classic piece of British theatre. It sent out shock waves back in the day. It wasn't a safe piece of middle class theatre that audiences could just sit back, enjoy and then almost immediately forget as they went home. The seminal British drama of the 20th century, Look Back in Anger, exploded onto London's post-war theatrical landscape in the midst of silly comedies and splashy musicals. It took no prisoners and gave no quarter, mercilessly skewering the leftover relics of the Edwardian class system while blazing a trail for every British dramatist who followed. Look Back in Anger focuses on language and emotional intensity of real pleasures and real pains of young love tearing the life out of each other. Osborne saw theatre as a weapon with which ordinary people could break down class barriers and that he had a "beholden duty to kick against the pricks".

There is a wealth of articles, reviews and educational material on-line, but here's some to whet your appetites:

NB:

I can send you a copy of the script if you contact me: Ian Burns: [pr@that-theatre.com](mailto:pr@that-theatre.com)  
We can offer matinees on these dates: (Nov 7, 17 and 19.) The time can be arranged.  
Maybe we can play matinees on other dates too, feel welcome to ask.  
We are also willing to meet you and your students for an informal question and answer session after each performance.

That Theatre Company aims to present work by hard-hitting, uncompromising writers whose plays are stimulating, provocative and exciting. John Osborne's 1956 play Look Back in Anger is now seen as the decisive starting point of modern British theatre. He inspired Arnold Wesker, Harold Pinter, Ann Jellicoe, Caryl Churchill and Edward Bond to name but a few. We are delighted to bring this classic piece of theatre to Copenhagen.

I hope that you'll find this material of use.

**Task: Discuss:**

**Is Look Back in Anger just a classic period piece of theatre that is stuck back in its time, or does it still reflect a modern day reality?**

The play's themes are fairly wide but the most obvious question is what does the title of the play mean? ***“Look Back in Anger”***.

Look at the list below. Which ones stand out as being the most important themes in this play?

20<sup>th</sup> century theatre, identity, social status, gender, sexuality, post-imperialism, truth, politics, angry young man, kitchen sink drama, social rebellion, disillusioned youth, education, fantasy versus reality.

Add other themes if you want and *Discuss*.

***Read the following short passage: Discuss.***

**Brexit-Britain** is on the verge of losing its identity and becoming the 51<sup>st</sup> US State. However, the United States Empire is also on its last legs, so maybe this is not such a stable nation to ally and compare itself with? England dying then in 1956 as it is now – hanging on to memories of being comfortable, secure, ordered and predictable. Post-Brexit Britain is trying to relive old triumphs. Is Brexit a massive self-inflicted National disaster or an act of massive catharsis?

***Question:***

Does the past have any definite consequences for the present?

***Task: Is it time to get angry.***

Brexit-Britain is descending into coarse, open brutality regarding political debate. It is a divided nation.

Mediocrity infuses all things; cheap slogans and sound bites opposed to real ideas solutions.

*“All in this together”*

*“America First”*

*“Strong and Stable”*

*Gambling syndicates seem to be multiplying daily.*

England has never been the country many people imagine it to be, as it might have been in some distant past. The English conspire to exploit others and always have done. When the ruling classes bugger things up so obviously as they are doing so now we romanticize about our history and our heritage. In fact, by looking back in anger..

**Task: Discuss or write an essay on:**

***Is the art of conversation is dead or dying?***

Do we just repeat 3<sup>rd</sup> hand opinions at one another now on Facebook?

Take a quick look around you on the bus, train or even as you're walking. How many of us are fixated on our i-phones?

***Look Back in Anger*** is a play about England and being English.

Could it also be a play about Denmark and being Danish?

What sort of a world will English youth grow up in post-Brexit?

Cow-towing to the Americans? Privatizing the NHS? (National Health Service)

Right wing nationalists would like us to believe that immigration & Europe is the cause of all our problems. Sadly this phenomenon is spreading across the Globe. In Denmark we now have the likes of Rasmus Paludan spouting his version of his truth. He needs physical police protection to do so, but who pays that bill?

Task:

***Would Jimmy Porter be a “Brexitteer” or a “Remainer?”***

England has precious little left to sell. It has become Bargain Basement Britain.

**Thought:**

In the UK we used to think that we thought of others,  
Now, we only think of ourselves,  
Kindness and empathy is being suffocated...

**Question:**

Do our past actions as *nations* resonate with us in 2019?  
For example can we be proud to be Danish, British, American, Russian etc. or are there some dark skeletons to be ashamed of?

**Who are the characters in this play?**

Jimmy Porter, Alison Porter, Cliff Lewis, Helena Charles & Colonel Redfern.

<https://www.litcharts.com/lit/look-back-in-anger/characters>

**Link to reviews:**

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/mar/30/how-look-back-in-anger-john-osborne>

<https://www.parkcircus.com/latest/P2041-Look-Back-in-Anger>

<https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/an-introduction-to-look-back-in-anger>

**Task:**

***Read the following paragraphs and make a note of any words that you do not understand:***

Jimmy is the “angry young man” of the play, usually found spouting tirades against the complacency of the British upper classes, and especially against his wife Alison and then his lover Helena. Born working class but highly educated, like his friend and roommate Cliff, but has an ambivalent relationship with his educated status, seeing himself mostly as a working class man and yet frustrated that his education can do nothing to affect his class status.

He is a disconcerting mixture of sincerity and cheerful malice, of tenderness and freebooting cruelty. Jimmy alienates the sensitive and insensitive alike and his blistering honesty, or apparent honesty...makes few friends. Jimmy is a frustrated

character, railing against his feelings of alienation and uselessness in post-war England.

**Identity crisis:**

Jimmy rages because he doesn't know who he is. Proud to be English, yet he doesn't really know what it means to be English. It's a voice of non-existence, a voice that shouts but is not heard. Yet what also comes across is a very problematic voice, a very misogynist voice, and sometimes what feels like an anti-gay or racist voice. He goes and puts blame on so many others that are not the cause.

**Task:**

***Do the characters represent types of what constitutes British society, then and now? Discuss.***

**Task:**

***Read the following passage and look at the similarities of Britain in 1956 and in 2019.***

"Hankering back for the "good-old-days" and trying to turn the clock back in our bewildering and increasingly nationalistic times is impossible as the Britain is beginning to realise. Jimmy Porter feels inadequate and takes his frustrations out on those closest to him as opposed to getting politically involved. For example there were events that he could have chosen to get involved in 1956".

The Suez Crisis,  
The invasion of Hungary by Russia.  
Nuclear Disarmament.

**Task:**

***Do some research into how the world looked in 1956.***

***Task: Read the following and discuss:***

Is Jimmy's anger a form of self-preservation? He has achieved the enviable task of receiving a decent education in the hope of enhancing his employment opportunities and life-chances but we find him running a sweet shop.

***In 2019 is an education a guarantee of fulfilment?***

If not, maybe any bitterness and anger could be similar?

**Task:**

***Can modern day 18-25 year olds share these feelings of frustration and point, then as now to:***

- The pointlessness of existence?
- Climate change?
- Nuclear war?
- Bringing children into this dangerous world?
- Lack of opportunities to be heroic and idealistic?
- Triviality of life?
- The power of the modern day employer?

- Zero hours and short-term contracts?
- Facebook friendships?
- InterNet?
- I-phone addicts?

*Task: Is Jimmy Porter an absurd hero or a social rebel?*

*Would you like to know anyone like him?*

**Discuss.**

**Here is a glossary of some of the terms you'll find in Look Back in Anger:**

**Anglican:** The Anglican Church is the largest Protestant denomination in Britain.

**Chivalry:** Chivalry is the medieval term related to the institution of knighthood. It is often related to virtues such as bravery and self-sacrifice

**Cockerel:** a young rooster.

**Dark Ages:** a term for medieval European society.

**Edwardian Age:** corresponds to the height of the British Empire and colonial expansion at the beginning of the twentieth century.

**Genuflect:** A term to denote one that bends or bows at the knees.

**H-bomb:** a short hand term for hydrogen bomb.

**Half-crown:** a denomination of British currency. Pre-1973 when one pound sterling was worth 20 shillings. A half-crown was worth 2 and half shillings.

**India rubber:** This term alludes to one of Britain's most important exports from their Indian colonies - rubber.

**Liberal:** A Liberal is a member of the Liberal British political party. This party is in opposition to the more conservative Tory party.

**Misogynist:** A person who shows a hatred towards women. Jimmy Porter's character has been criticized for his misogynistic attitudes.

**Port Said:** An Egyptian shipping port on the Suez Canal. The Canal was an integral British shipping territory in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

**Posh:** A British term for "upper class" or "rich" "wealthy".

**Pusillanimous:** A negative connotation for a mean spirited or cowardly person.

**Sweet Stall:** A sweet stall is a small shop that sells candy and other confectionaries.

**Sycophantic:** - A servile self-seeker who attempts to gain advantage by flattering important people.

**Victorian:** - A period in British history in the late nineteenth century of great British expansion and cultural influence.

**Welsh:** - A person from the country of Wales.

## **TASK:**

### *Short questions and answers*

#### ***1. Who is the Angry Young Man in the play?***

Jimmy porter is the Angry Young Man in the play who expresses his frustration for the lack of feelings in his placid domestic life.

#### ***2. What are the major themes in Look Back in Anger?***

There are many themes in this play like loss of childhood, living a "real" life and "laziness" in British culture.

#### ***3. How Look Back in Anger becomes autobiographical?***

Look Back in Anger is autobiographical and portrays the playwright's relationship with his first wife, as well as the subsequent end of their marriage.

#### ***4. What does Colonel Redfern represent in the play?***

Colonel Redfern is Alison's father. He represents Britain's great Edwardian past. He was a military leader in India for many years before returning with his family to England.

#### ***5. Who is the moral compass in the play?***

Helena Charles is the play's moral compass. Helena's strong sense of right and wrong allows her to make a final judgment in the play's last act that her relationship with Jimmy is an illusion of love.

#### ***6. What imagery does Osborne use to explore the ideas of modern chivalry?***

Osborne uses imagery of knights, a medieval British institution of soldiers, to explore themes of modern chivalry.

### **7. What are the differences between Alison and Helena?**

Both Alison and Helena come from upper class families yet live in working class England. They differ in their situations. Helena is not attached to a working class man. Where Alison, for much of the story, is at the mercy of her husband Jimmy, Helena attempts to gently convince Alison to leave.

- Helena is not weighed down with the baggage that her friend Alison has yet she chooses to be together with Jimmy.
- What does she hope to achieve?
- Does she imagine that she can change him for the better?
- Is Alison's passive aggression is the only way for her to deal with the constant criticism she is on the receiving end of?

### **8. Why could Jimmy be called a hero of his time?**

Jimmy is not a hero in the classical sense. He's a modern day anti-hero. He's the angry, young man fighting against society and challenges the limitations of his own life and place in the world. His anger is destructive, his actions would often be considered pure violence, and he is not to be blamed for it. It is society who evokes the destructive nature in Jimmy. He is the mouthpiece of the frustrated and dissatisfied young people, affected by the 2nd world war.

### **9. Explain the role of "angry young man" movement.**

After his play 'Look Back in Anger' burst onto the stage in London in 1956, John Osborne was described in the press as an "angry young man." The label came to be associated with the dominant British literary movement of the decade, which was characterized by disdain for the establishment and its class distinctions and mannerisms.

### **10. Who is Nigel and what comment does Jimmy make on him?**

Nigel is Alison's brother. He was a soldier in the British army and is moving up in the world. Jimmy thinks that he'll be in Parliament one day, though he also believes that Nigel "seeks sanctuary in his own stupidity."

### **11. What does the word "pusillanimous" mean, according to Jimmy?**

Jimmy tells Alison that "pusillanimous" means "Wanting of firmness of mind, of small courage, having a little mind, mean spirited, cowardly, and timid of mind."

**Task:**

**Research: Notes associated with this play:**



### **1. Consider *Look Back in Anger* as a “kitchen sink drama”.**

Kitchen Sink drama is a term used to denote plays that rely on realism to explore domestic social relations. Realism, in British theatre, was first experimented with in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by such playwrights as George Bernard Shaw. This genre attempted to capture the lives of the British upper class in a way that realistically reflected the ordinary drama of ruling class British society.

*Look Back in Anger* is considered to be a “*Kitchen Sink drama*.” This means that it is a play that delves into the deep meanings and psychology of ordinary British characters and their everyday working class lives. According to many critics, by the mid-twentieth century the genre of realism had become tired and unimaginative. Osborne's play returned imagination to the Realist genre by capturing the anger and immediacy of post-war youth culture and the alienation that resulted in the British working classes. *Look Back in Anger* was able to comment on a range of domestic social dilemmas in this time period. Most importantly, it was able to capture, through the character of Jimmy Porter, the anger of this generation that festered just below the surface of elite British culture.

### **2. How does Osborne treat the loss of childhood in *Look Back in Anger*?**

A theme that impacts the characters of Jimmy and Alison Porter is the idea of a lost childhood. Osborne uses specific examples -- the death of Jimmy's father when Jimmy was only ten and how he was forced to watch the physical and mental demise of the man - to demonstrate the way in which Jimmy is forced to deal with suffering from an early age. Alison's loss of childhood is best seen in the way that she was forced to grow up too fast by marrying Jimmy. Her youth is wasted in the anger and abuse that her husband levels upon her.

Osborne suggests that a generation of British youth has experienced this same loss of childhood innocence. Osborne uses the examples of World War, the development of the atomic bomb, and the decline of the British Empire to show how an entire culture has lost the innocence that other generations were able to maintain.

### **3. Osborne's idea of real life in *Look Back in Anger*.**

In the play, Jimmy Porter is consumed with the desire to live a more real and full life. He compares this burning desire to the empty actions and attitudes of others. At first, he generalizes this emptiness by criticizing the lax writing and opinions of those in the newspapers. He then turns his angry gaze to those around him and close to him, Alison, Helena, and Cliff.

Osborne's argument in the play for a real life is one in which men are allowed to feel a full range of emotions. The most real of these emotions is anger and Jimmy believes that this anger is his way of truly living.

This idea was unique in British theatre during the play's original run. Osborne argued in essays and criticisms that, until his play, British theatre had simplified the emotions of working class characters as clichés rendering them less realistic. Jimmy's desire for a real life is an attempt to restore raw emotion to the theatre.

#### ***4. Do you believe that Osborne is misogynistic in the play?***

Task: Read and discuss.

*Osborne has been accused by critics of misogynistic views in his plays.*

Many point to *Look Back in Anger* as the chief example. These critics accuse Osborne of glorifying young male anger and cruelty towards women and homosexuals. This is seen in the play in specific examples in which Jimmy Porter emotionally distresses Alison, his wife, and delivers a grisly monologue in which he wishes for Alison's mother's death.

Osborne, however, asserts that he is attempting to restore a vision of true masculinity into a twentieth century culture that he sees as becoming increasingly feminized. This feminization is seen in the way that British culture shows an "indifference to anything but immediate, personal suffering." This causes a deadness within which Jimmy's visceral anger and his masculine emotion is a retaliation against that.

#### ***5. Comment on the language in Look Back in Anger***

Osborne's use of language is basically in the realistic tradition. The characters' speech and rhythms reflect their class and education. Helena is very proper and conventional and so is her speech. Cliff is humble, Colonel Redfern is calm and reflective, and Alison is proper and non-judgmental and noncommittal. Jimmy Porter, though, broke with tradition. Working class characters were not new to the English stage, but previously they had been comic figures that were usually inarticulate, or even angry figures that were inarticulate and thus held back by their class and lack of language skills and could thus be pitied.

Jimmy is extremely articulate and self-confident. Whatever one thinks of Jimmy, it is not going to be pity. His passion is overwhelming and he has the language to overwhelm others with that passion. His language is not polite, though one suspects it would be a great deal more impolite if theatre censorship had not been in effect when it was written. Jimmy can also be very humorous and even poetic, as when he describes Colonel Redfern as a "*sturdy old plant left over from the Edwardian Wilderness.*" Indeed, the powerful use of

language seems almost to be a second form of structure for the whole play, one that covers various other faults.

The verbal repartee of the music hall was a big influence on Osborne, and it can be heard in much of the dialogue and seen in the interactions between characters. According to theatre critic Michael Billington, *Look Back in Anger*, much like [Samuel Beckett's \*Waiting for Godot\*](#), is a play 'all about waiting and the agony of hope endlessly deferred'.

### ***6. What does Jimmy and Alison's playful game of bear and squirrel represent?***

Alison describes their game of bear and squirrel as the only way the two have found to cope with the anger and viciousness that both direct towards each other. The closing lines of the play are the best representation of this: Alison has returned to show Jimmy that she has suffered greatly after losing their child to miscarriage. Both have now undergone intense suffering in their lives. They find that the real world is harsh and unforgiving and so they create a fantasy world to live in. This is also Osborne's self-referential moment; the playwright engages in this same work of the creation of fantasy worlds. Theatre, no matter how realistic, is also an escape from the real world.

### ***7. Why or why not is Helena Charles the moral compass of the play?***

Helena Charles is the play's moral compass. Though her behaviour might suggest otherwise, Helena's strong sense of right and wrong allows her to make a final judgment in the play's last act that her relationship with Jimmy is an illusion of love. Helena's morality is contrasted with Jimmy's moral subjectivity. Jimmy sees a moral bankruptcy in the modern world and is nostalgic for a time when previous generations were able to make firm judgments on the right and the wrong.

### ***8. What imagery does Osborne use to explore the ideas of modern chivalry?***

Osborne uses imagery of knights, a medieval British institution of soldiers, to explore themes of modern chivalry. Alison describes Jimmy in chivalrous terms, but it is not an admiring view. The audience sees that Osborne takes a very pessimistic view of modern chivalrous action. Jimmy is described as a knight in tarnished armour who bluntly swings his weapons of hate and anger, destroying anything and anyone around him. Osborne attributes this loss of chivalry to a feminization of modern culture that steals the ideals of masculinity from the play's male characters.

### ***9. What is the purpose of Cliff's character in the play?***

Cliff represents two sides of the relationship between Jimmy and Alison. For Alison, Cliff provides the masculine affection and tenderness that Jimmy is

incapable of providing for his wife. For Jimmy, Cliff provides masculine friendship and understanding, things that Jimmy cannot find in his relationship with his wife. Cliff's absence at the play's end, and Jimmy and Alison's reversion into a fantasy world, suggest that Cliff was the character that connected Jimmy and Alison to the real world. Without him, these characters have no choice but to escape the hardships and loneliness of real life and descend into a fantasy world.

**10. Why does Jimmy see suffering as a crucial event for living a "real" life?**

Throughout the play, Jimmy is chiefly concerned with living a full and real life. This is a life of emotion and experience. He feels as though he is being kept from living such a life because of his domestic ties to Alison. He believes that she has not been born into the real world because she has not undergone the intense suffering that he has. Therefore, in Jimmy's estimation, she cannot feel real emotion. Jimmy's suffering first occurred when he witnessed the death of his father. Alison is born into Jimmy's world of emotion and suffering after her miscarriage of their child. In a larger sense, Alison represents the feminine domestic life of working class England. Osborne sees this part of society as lacking in energy and emotion.

**11. Discuss Osborne's view of religion in the play?**

In the play, Jimmy sees organized traditional Anglican religion as the antithesis of everything he believes in. The modern world, he believes, is a world of moral subjectivity. The church offers a worldview in which there is clear right and wrong, salvation and damnation, and this is a world that Jimmy simply believes no longer exists. Jimmy's relationship to religion is more complicated, however, because he does allude to African American evangelical religion as an example of pure emotion. It is probable that Jimmy does not value the morality or spirituality of African American religion as much as he values the way in which such religious expression gives voice to real and true emotion.

**12. As Alison prepares to leave, she tells her father that, "You're hurt because you can face it." What does Alison mean by this?**

One of the play's over-arching themes is the relationship between the past and the present. It can be said that Alison's father, Colonel Redfern, and Jimmy represent two sides of the same coin. Both are nostalgic for a past that no longer exists and that was probably not as idealistic as either understands it to be. Jimmy sees the Colonel's generation as both the last great generation of noble characters, but also as a failure because they did not pass on a vibrant culture full of life and meaning. The Colonel is hurt because Jimmy's generation seems to lack objectivity and morality of his age. In both cases, the past and present weave a complicated web of nostalgia, memory, and meaning.

**13. What does Colonel Redfern represent in the play?**

The character of Colonel Redfern, Alison's father, represents the decline of and nostalgia for the British Empire. The Colonel had been stationed for many years in India, a symbol of Britain's imperial reach into the world. The Edwardian age, which corresponded to Britain's height of power, had been the happiest of his life. His nostalgia is representative of the denial that Osborne sees in the psyche of the British people. The world has moved on into an American age, he argues, and the people of the nation cannot understand why they are no longer the world's greatest power. He was a military leader in India for many years before returning with his family to England.

***14. What is the significance of Jimmy's trumpet playing in the play?***

Jimmy's trumpet playing is an allusion to the twentieth century British fascination for the Black American jazz culture. When Jimmy plays the trumpet, it represents his affinity for a culture that he believes is truly alive.

This is a common theme in several works of mid-twentieth century white English culture, from literature to popular music. Osborne here suggests that black jazz culture is an embodiment of a "natural" humanity. Jimmy's anger is a result of not being able to live in such a society and his trumpet playing is a symbol of his attempt to connect with such a life. Moreover, the shrill sound of trumpet playing shows the dominance of Jimmy even in his absence on the stage.

I hope this was of use to you and that you'll come in to see the play.

Best wishes,

Ian Burns

That Theatre Company.

[www.that-theatre.com](http://www.that-theatre.com)