The Politics of Britain's Angry Young Men

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Professor Kroll asserts that the protest in the novels and plays of a number of young British writers in the 1950's is more a plea for the reduction of class barriers and inequities than outright rejection of the social and political system. Their concern is for greater upward mobility among the social classes and, barring this, for detachment and dissociation from what they regard as the inanities of modern life.

I

THE origins of the term *Angry Young Men* are diffuse, though the consensus seems to have it as established around 1952.[1] At any rate, through a combination of circumstances, largely commercial, the term has caught fire, sold books and articles, and has served to implant a common label on a group of people whose writing runs across the political spectrum, whose forms range from picaresque and comic novels to the grotesque and tragic, and whose output includes attempts at literary criticism (Colin Wilson), motion pictures, and plays. Their anger is highly variable, their youth is relative, and they include among their most prominent members at least one well-known female writer. Yet there is an attribute which binds them together: this may be summed up as a marked and intense dissatisfaction with many current values and institutions in British society. They do not like very much of the world in which they live; they find it difficult, if not impossible, to adjust or adapt to it. The bases and nature of their critiques vary. The common ground is the dissent itself and, after a consideration of the specific approaches of a selection of writers, I shall try to identify the elements of this common ground.

The writers selected for this analysis include Kingsley Amis, John Braine, John Wain, and the playwright, John Osborne. The focus is entirely on their early fiction and Mr. Osborne's play, *Look Back in Anger*. I shall not include the criticism of Mr. Wilson (inventor, as one wag put it, of the "categorical aperitif");[2] nor shall I say anything in this essay about the Nietzschean novel of Bill Hopkins, *The Divine and the Decay,* or the motion pictures of Lindsay Anderson.

Politically, the writers under discussion could be called British left and center or, in Mr. Osborne's case, out in left field. Such a designation, although it distorts the different views held by each of these writers, nonetheless reflects a leaning toward liberalism and social democracy, however tepid and devoid of a specific political orientation.[3]

Kingsley Amis and John Wain were born in 1922 and 1925, respectively, both were educated at St. John's College, Oxford, and Wain went on to a brief academic career at Reading before turning to writing full time. Amis

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lectures and resides in Swansea.[4] Their family background was middle class, Wain's being prosperous and Amis's penurious. John Braine, born in 1922, left St. Bede's Grammar School, Bradford, where he had been a scholarship student. He has had no other formal education. He held a number of jobs before becoming a librarian, which profession he finally abandoned for his career as a writer. Osborne, the youngest of the group (born 1930), had the least orthodox upbringings; his father, a commercial artist, died when he was eleven and his mother tended bar most of her life. He was expelled from a boarding college at sixteen for returning the corporal punishment meted out to him by the headmaster. After a very brief sojourn in journalism, he turned to the provincial theater, and his play, *Look Back in Anger,* written in his twenty-eighth year, brought him immediate and rousing success.

None of these writers faced the world as an adult until the postwar period. World War II intervened for the older men, and some of Braine's wartime memories are vividly etched in *Room at the Top,* though this is not by any means a war novel. Osborne was a boy of ten in 1940 and an adolescent through the war, emerging in the 1950's theatrically successful with his ranting despondency. All of the novels were published in the 1950's and are concerned with the lives of young men in the Britain of the late forties and early fifties. They are, to be sure, not about the lives of all young men, but rather about the hero type that emerges from them and Mr. Osborne's play. The heroes confront an England in which social change is neither rapid nor pervasive enough, and in which they cannot exercise the liberty (essentially, an upper class liberty) necessary for their self-fulfilment. Almost to a man, they are displaced intellectuals struggling for an orientation to an unsatisfactory world, a world to which they do not feel they owe anything but resentment.

Perhaps it is understandable that these novels should erupt at a time when the British social setting is peculiarly unsettled. The teetering, yet persistent organization of a society which developed hand in glove with the now irrelevant imperial goals disturbs them. Internally, the Labour government did carry a wartime effort to broaden the educational base to near fruition; it inaugurated and spread the benefits of many social services; and it equalized access, as never before, to a minimal standard of living and to economic opportunities hitherto unrealizable by most lower middle and working class Britons.

The Labour government's program was more a prodded evolution than revolution. Piled on to the trauma of war and the exigencies of recovery, the social impact of the Labour government's policies, despite its enormous material contributions, was to tear at the seams of British society without providing any wholly new raiment. The succeeding Conservative governments slowed but did not alter the basic shifts, nor could they. For the intellectually oriented middle class and proletarian youth, the old order, the old stratification, and the old way of life were still too much in evidence. Social change rarely follows an even pattern, but the unevenness of Britain's transition was disturbing for the problems it presented to its displaced members. Among the most articulate of the displaced are the young men of economically and socially impoverished background who received—some under scholarship auspices—upper class training. The Angry Young Men, particularly their heroes, are expanding psyches in a shrinking and changing environment. The values of the particular group under consideration here

represent an amalgam of liberalism and democratic socialism.

II

Let me review briefly the theme and substance of these novels and Mr. Osborne's play.

In John Wain's *Born in Captivity,* Charles Lumley, on leaving the university (he was a mediocre student), attempts to find some meaning for his life by trying a number of vocations, a number of ways of life that will give him the status he desires. In rejecting the university, which, he felt, had made him peculiarly unfitted for anything he found desirable, he experiences the need for a niche which would detach him from his environment:

> He must form no roots in his new stratum of society, but remain independent of class, forming roots only with impersonal things such as places and seasons, or, in the other end of the scale, genuinely personal attachments that could be gently prized loose from all considerations involving more than two people.[5]

After a monumental rejection of an impending middle class marriage, in picaresque fashion, he goes through a skein of adventures, each representing a look-see into the alternatives that Lumley finds open to him, as well as a segment of life he feels he must accept or reject: manual labor, crime, working in a hospital, working as a chauffeur for a wealthy man in a life that is physically imprisoning and leisurely at the same time. He makes a short foray into panhandling on the London streets, he acts as a bouncer in a night club of questionable character, and concludes his career in cozy detachment as a gag writer for a radio show. Through all these adventures, he has rejected as well the kind of intellectual impressionism that characterized the writers of the 1920's and 1930's and proponents of the "great" causes of the same era.

> At least, Charles thought with a sense of self-congratulation, he had always been right about *them,* right to despise them for their idiotic attempt to look through two telescopes at the same time: one fashioned of German psychology and pointed at themselves, the other of Russian economics and directed at the working class. A fundamental sense of what life really consisted of had saved him at any rate from such fatuities.[6]

Disillusioned with romantic love, scornful of conventional, middle class marriage, summarily rejecting a number of societal malpractices, Lumley settles into a vocation that pays him well and permits him to remain outside the class pale. Ideally, he will have the disassociation he craves, along with the comfortable external trappings and accouterments of the upper middle class.

John Braine's *Room at the Top* centers about Joe Lampton, a young R.A.F. veteran who leaves his proletarian background in a depressing and oppressive mill community to take a position as a local government official in a town which, in physical appearance, is a prosperous, almost a model community. He votes Labour and craves expensive women, automobiles, and clothes. Physical ugliness repels him; despite moral pangs, he is drawn only by physical beauty and satisfaction. The author seems bent on proving, if only to himself, that All That Glitters Is Not Gold, that Beauty Flourishes in Squalor, and Joe Lampton's quest for material success and sensual satisfaction leads ineluctably to tragedy. Joe rejects his "older" mistress, thus far the only honest love relationship of his life, in favor of the young daughter of a wealthy and prominent local manufacturer. The cast off mistress commits suicide; thus, the one object of his love is destroyed by his drive for material success. Joe Lampton is aware of the negativeness and destructiveness of his drive, since he remembers that his parents were "decent" folk, that his father lived a life of near poverty to maintain his socialist convictions

("Mind what Ah say, Joe. There's some things that can be bought too dear.").[7] Joe has numerous sources of guilt. But the memory of his materially sordid past, the war, and the taste of upper middle class comfort, aided by circumstances and virility, bring him to marriage with the younger girl and the opportunity provided by the girl's father to enter into a business that will provide him with the money and status he craves. Joe is a helpless egocentric, driven by a combination of his manly drives and environmentally created circumstance to a pattern of behavior he cannot control.

As hilarious as Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* is—and it is for the most part a very funny book—it is a veritable catalog of social dissent. Jim Dixon is a sensible, fundamentally honest young man who has had too much of a world riddled with phoniness, superficiality, and dishonesty. He, too, is a poor boy who had received his education at something of a sacrifice, who is interested in surviving in an environment which has some possibilities for pleasantness. He teaches history in a provincial, red brick university. His future depends on the pompous chairman of the department. Jim Dixon feels that the worth of the research on "The Economic Influence of the Development in Shipbuilding Techniques, 1450-1485" could be expressed "in one short hyphenated indecency; from another [point of view] it was worth the amount of frenzied fact-grubbing . . . that had gone into it. . . ."[8] The theme of the book centers about Jim's private battle, which emerges into a public battle, against social and personal sham. Dixon's problem is one of extricating himself from public hypocrisy to an honest and decent life. His organizational involvement with the history department, his groveling dependency upon the chairman whom he abhors, his emotional ties with a neurotic female colleague, Margaret, to whom he is attached out of a sense of combined guilt and decency, inevitably have to be overthrown.

Initially, Jim Dixon's war is limited to a wild collection of faces and movements he makes to react to what he does not like. The climax is reached when he presents the evening lecture before the community at large during the College Open Week. Terribly drunk, Dixon finds himself unable to speak except in a voice imitating, first, the chairman of the department, then, the principal of the college, moving on to "infuse his tones with a sarcastic, wounding bitterness. Nobody outside a madhouse, he tried to imply, could take seriously a single phase of this conjectural, nugatory, deluded, tedious rubbish."[9] Before he passes out completely, he has told his audience what he really thought of the topic. He is opposed to the facade of culture, be it academic or artistic, to false bohemianism, and to intellectualism for the sake of intellectualism. Jim Dixon's joy in reading and his pleasure in music or art are all inhibited by the force of his struggle to implant himself into a comfortable niche in society. His uncertain, inferior status, which depends upon the decision of a man he despises, and his involvement in all sorts of despicable circumstances wholly for survival produce ultimately a break which can best be called disengagement, though of a very limited sort. For fortune is kind to Jim Dixon; he gets a position as secretary to "a rich devotee of the arts," he gets the girl who, he felt, was out of his class, and he detaches himself from the draining responsibility with his former female colleague. He also leaves the university.

Jim Dixon appears in another guise in *That Uncertain Feeling*. John Lewis, who works at a library in a

small city in Wales, is well educated, middle class, married, with two children, and struggling financially on meager earnings. He falls in with a *nouveau riche,* upper bohemian crowd that is influential in the community. There is an opening for the position of assistant director of library in which Lewis works and he contests for it. The chairman of library's trustees is the husband of one of the women of this upper class group. She and Lewis enjoy an occasional flirtation which finally bursts into a session of frenetic love making. Unknown to Lewis, his mistress intercedes to get him the assistant director's post. When he realizes that his candidacy has been engineered, Lewis rebels, resigns from his library post, and goes to live with his wife in his Welch home town.

That Uncertain Feeling is a moralistic tale with overtones of economic and class criticism. Amis is condemning a corrupt upper class, though he is evidently attacking a specific group within that class. He is also critical of the species of a public governing board —the library board in this instance— which unquestioningly accepts a manipulated *fait accompli* from the most powerful figure on that body. He objects to the kind of milquetoast, noncommittal attitude taken by the hero in his interview with the board. In reflecting on a reply made to one of the questions posed by a board member, Lewis tells himself: "It would take a Central or South American president (of a republic, I mean, not a British Legion Branch) to object to that."[10] For Lewis, the central problem is to resist the seduction inherent, not only in the person of his mistress, but in the corruption of her class. Once again Amis jibes at phoniness in the arts, in Welch provincialism—John Lewis swims in a pool of hypocrisy that is at once oppressive and seductive.

The hero of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* is Jimmy Porter, a young proletarian intellectual who runs a sweet stall which the kindly mother of a friend bought for him. He is married to a middle class girl whom he has taken as much for a kind of revenge on the middle classes as for love. The action of the play takes place in the Porter menage, occupied by Jimmy Porter, his wife, and a friend named Cliff. The play concerns Jimmy Porter's relationship with his wife, his friend Cliff, his wife's friend Helena, who becomes his mistress, and what is left in the postwar world.

Porter rebels against a youth that has been dulled into insensitivity, that is hardly alive in fact and is "pusillanimous." He rants for honest emotion, which, he feels, is primarily the province of the proletariat. The middle class is a badly educated, outdated sham specializing in vagueness and ignorant of reality. Jimmy Porter's primary targets are all middle class: his wife, the self-righteous girl friend who becomes his mistress, his wife's parents, the church, the Sunday papers, and anything that would tend to "remove people from the ugly problems of the twentieth century. . . ."[11] In essence, he is drawn as a heroic image without a positive cause as a helpless man in a hopeless world. The nature of Jimmy Porter's suffering is such, however, that nothing remains, but an animal-like relationship between himself and his wife, and she enters full-fledged into his kingdom only after having suffered the torture of losing their unborn child. The play ends with an ironic duet in which man and wife give credence to all that is left: their animal love. Mr. Osborne's stage directions for these lines are: "with a kind of mocking, tender irony."[12] And "There are cruel steel traps lying about everywhere, just waiting for rather mad, slightly satanic, and very timid little animals. Right?"[13]

III

The hero is the core of each of these works; through his perceptive, sensitive personality the Angry Young Men present their reaction to society. They write, as earlier stated, primarily of Britain in the late 1940's and early 1950's, of the young man living in this world, trying to develop a position for himself in a society not made for him. In some instances the world is rejected; in others the hero is victimized by it.

The hero, like his author, is in his twenties, not long out of college. For John Braine's Joe Lampton the memory of the war, in which both of his parents were killed by a bomb, in which he experienced much terror, is a part of the environing experience which drives him toward his idea of physical, material beauty.[14] For Osborne's Jimmy Porter the memory of his wounded father, come home from the Spanish Civil War to die, shapes much of his life.[15] Wain's and Amis's heroes barely mention the Second World War—for them the important experience of life is here and now.

The hero is usually an educated man. Amis's Jim Dixon teaches history at a provincial university; his John Lewis is a well-read librarian. Wain's Charles Lumley has been through college, where his work was mediocre, though he is quick to cast at least some of the blame on his university, which had, "by its three years' random and shapeless cramming, unfitted his mind for serious thinking. . . ."[16] Jimmy Porter in *Look Back in Anger* has left a college that is one step lower even than a "red brick university"—his wife says he calls it "white tile."[17] Braine's Joe Lampton is not a university man, but clearly identifies himself as an intellectual.

There is an animalistic virility about the young heroes. They are charged with an energy that is as sexual as it is intellectual. At times, one gains the impression of sheer, youthful, undifferentiated energy. The young men act and react in all directions at once. They are busy searching and grabbing; if they are rejecting, one wonders what it is that inhibits them from engaging in a more positive set of activities. The answer is invariably: society won't let us. The attraction for women and conquests is prevalent, and in every one of these works sex is used to give the lie to the class stratification pattern. As in a dream, the hero gets the woman above his misplaced station. Jimmy Porter, in *Look Back in Anger,* has been accused of sexual ambidextrousness; certainly his affection for his friend Cliff is in part a misogynous reaction, though Jimmy Porter specifically denies any affiliation with homosexuals, and his relations with Cliff could more probably illustrate a kind of devotion to what Toots Shor would call "palship" than the causes of "old Gide and the Greek Chorus boys."[18]

The hero is always in a class which he rejects, and he resents the stratified society that put him there. Within the existing order, of course, he desires the freedom of the upper middle and upper classes. Repeatedly, almost relentlessly, exposed to the "next best" class, he feels his dependency and resents his station. Wain makes a point of having Charles Lumley try to relate himself by turns to the whole gamut of English classes. Jim Dixon in *Lucky Jim* is transplanted to middle class university academic life, against whose corruption he declares his personal civil war. If any one aspect is uniformly and mercilessly attacked by all these writers, it is the class system. If it is a characteristic of British society that this system is falling apart, then it is not falling apart soon enough for these young men.

The hero is really not much interested in the specific issues, political and social, confronting his society. Jimmy Porter is accused by his mistress of talking about nothing but politics and religion; yet he does not address himself to any of the particular political problems confronting his nation or society today; he does not even allude to them. Remarks tend to be leveled against institutions and systems, against the plight of the individual in an organizational and societal context. The critique is invariably personalized. If a lesson is intended at all, it is the lesson gained from being aware of human beings as human beings who know and want better, but who are caught in a societal vise.

The angry young hero is a surprisingly autonomous personality; his tone is defiant, but his voice is self-reliant. Even John Braine's central character, whose values are distorted by his environment, gains strength in his awareness and conscious knowledge of his problem. The hero is aware of the stream of individualism in English history; he is trying desperately to broaden its social base. Certainly the protagonists of Amis and Wain are optimistic about their capacity to cope with their basic social situations.

On the other hand, the female in these works emerges as a symbolic stereotype of the problems confronting the hero. Jim Dixon's Margaret is a neurotic, perhaps even psychotic, colleague with whom he is involved out of a combined feeling of human warmth, responsibility, and guilt for his fellow man, and who is dropped at the end of the book as Dixon tells himself that "it was no use trying to save those who fundamentally would rather not be saved."[19] Christine is the unattainable, a girl from the other upper class world, whom Jim Dixon triumphantly attains. In *That Uncertain Feeling,* we see the angry, domestically imprisoned, yet pretty and, above all, good wife; the other woman is upper class, seductive, and corrupt, a member, indeed, of a seductive and corrupt social group. Charles Lumley's women in Wain's *Born in Captivity* are symbols of the middle class, working class, and a kind of upper class classlessness. Veronica Roderick, the romantic image of his love, is at first "out of his class." With a singleness of purpose that turns him into a criminal, Charles does get his girl. Then, however, he finds she is the mistress of the man posing as her guardian, and in a final ironic scene he feels he has literally bought her, and she corroborates this conclusion. Alice in *Room at the Top* personifies a commitment to love which Joe Lampton regards as selfless. She is destroyed by his quest for success. Lampton marries an insipid symbol of middle class womanhood who attains meaning to him only when she bears him a child. Alison, in Osborne's *Look Back in Anger,* is the middle class girl who marries Jimmy Porter because to her he represents a challenge. Made strong to the point of insensibility in her social system, she is the foil of Jimmy Porter's hostility to the middle class. Helena, Alison's friend who becomes Porter's mistress, is more superfically hidebound, in Jimmy Porter's terms; hence, she plots and wins him only to leave, hounded by a feeling that she had done something, "if not somebody wrong.

The women portrayed are by no means equal of their males. The female as an individual has evidently not yet reached the consciousness of these writers. In the middle and upper classes, they are, it seems, second class human beings. The emancipated Englishwoman is not here depicted. Her powers to control her own destiny as an individual or a human being are

limited to what she can accomplish by indirection, innuendo, or her sexual attractiveness (and willingness).

IV

The novel of protest and rejection is by no means a new phenomenon; its authors are distinguished for basing their dissidence on a positive value. In the first place, society is viewed from an intensely individualist focus. This is essentially a part of the liberal temperament—I use the term *temperament* rather than theory to avoid suggesting any doctrinal development. They see man as an individual who must not be oppressed by society, by the state, or by other men. These writers are not existentialists in that the identity and meaning of the individual in relation to normative values is at least tacitly given acceptance. Wain's Lumley and Amis's Dixon and Lewis know what is wrong, and know from what is wrong pretty much what they want out of life. Their process of discovery is not for any deep essence of being, but rather for a workable adaptation to this not very best of all possible worlds.

If these writers are not consciously doctrinaire, they are, for all of their professed iconoclasm, peculiarly conscious of the hold the past has on them. Jimmy Porter looks back at the past as more desirable than the dull, apathetic, and oppressive present; people in the Victorian and Edwardian eras had causes in which at least *they* could believe. Porter is angrier about the here and now than any past he can conceive. Amis's John Lewis in *That Uncertain Feeling* objects to the vulgar, superficial display of Welch culture and ludicrous nationalism, though that which he regards as truly, perhaps earthy, Welch he admires and almost reveres. There is an overriding consciousness of middle class morality; indeed, Amis's heroes are practically Victorian: Jim Dixon's intentions toward Christine are most honorable; and John Lewis, after his fling, runs off, but with his own wife and two kids, happy in a new job as a salesman in a colliery. Charles Lumley in *Born in Captivity* revives his notion of romantic love—pure, selfless, almost ethereal, if not quite sexless—and it is a traumatic experience to the hero who had embarked upon a life of crime to realize that his dream, the object of his romantic love, is herself the mistress of another man. Even Alison in *Look Back in Anger* returns to Jimmy Porter and is taken back, gently for him, though not without an irony that leads us to believe Jimmy Porter is succumbing, in his way, to both "woman" and the middle class. There is, too, a certain attachment for place; at one end of Charles Lumley's scale of values Wain makes specific reference to the desirability of "forming roots only with impersonal things such as places and seasons. . . ."[20] In *That Uncertain Feeling* Amis's John Lewis voices his affection for Wales.[21]

It is from this loose, perhaps consciously unsystematic set of values, built around a core of humanitarian individualism, that the focus of dissent stems. Irving Howe in his *Politics and the Novel,* in writing about such writers as Malraux, Silone, Orwell, and Koestler, states that the "central event of our century remains the Russian Revolution."[22] For the Angry Young Men, the Russian Revolution might never have existed. There is no discernible effort to relate the plight of the young Englishman to the movements and events which have had a strong impact upon him and his society. The spigot of analysis is turned off and a prettily colored spray of farce is often substituted, especially by Amis and Wain. As one English critic put it: "To see these feelings in our actual world, rather than in this world farcically

transformed at crisis, would be in fact to question the feelings, to go on from them to a very difficult adjustment to reality. Instead of adjustment, what we actually get is a phantasy release. . . ."[23]

In their personalism the Angry Young Men might be termed apolitical. Braine and Amis make fleeting references to their associations with Labour. We know that Amis has written a pamphlet for the Fabian Society entitled *Socialism and the Intellectuals.* Aside from his general antipathy to the idea of social classes and a few barbs at the Tories,[24] Jim Dixon makes a casual pitch for redistributing wealth at a social gathering, and we are given little more by way of expression or behavior addressed to political programs.

The problems of the person just emerging from the chrysalis of youth to confront a variety of environments are the major concern of this group. In composite, we see well-educated, energetic young men, struggling for status and a certain amount of economic security. They are held back by rigidly drawn class lines. They find an absence of social causes with which to identify themselves. Formal institutional and organizational relations are dishonest and oppressive and inhibit the development of individuals. We are given John Lewis's reaction to library government and the tone of local government (it is corrupt); John Braine offers a limited inside picture of life in a local government establishment and we note clearly the relationship between subordinates and superiors, though this relationship is not nearly so important to Braine as it would be, for example, to a writer such as C. P. Snow; almost casually, Braine reveals to us the ties between the senior local government official and the town's social hierarchy.[25]

Their answers to the problems of the young man in Britain today involve a limited disengagement or detachment. The most rewarding relationships are those few that are intensely personal, and Amis and Wain are suspicious even of these. But broader relationships are something these men will have little or none of, except possibly at voting time (at that Osborne's Jimmy Porter probably does not vote). For Wain and Osborne, action as action, or enthusiasm as enthusiasm, is important; some sort of conviction is necessary. If these young men were not so preoccupied in battling rigid class lines, if they could live as individuals, they could cope with their destinies and achieve a certain adaptation, if not happiness. Braine's Joe Lampton has attained his station at the expense of his personal relationships, and he is miserable and guilt-ridden.

Most of these young heroes would conform if they could distill some value from the mess they live in that would merit conformity. In their relations with women, there is a marked conformity to standards of middle class morality; a bit of adultery is tolerated, but the hero either marries the girl or he returns to his wife after his fling. There is in these works none of the examination of the nature and problems of immorality that one finds in Gide, Mann, and Pirandello.[26] Evidently, these writers are not ready to cast aside the society which shaped them. They dissent, but they are far from ready to destroy or even run away; by turning from what they do not like, they claim they can take what they want of their society and live.

Perhaps the most positive contribution of these writers is their identification of one aspect of the relationship of man to his organization, of the individual to the collectivity. They have isolated the problem of the good, gray organizational world, whose major values are adaptation and protection;

they have focused on that part of society which is based more on accommodation, more on a Hegelian identification of individual fulfilment solely within the organization and society. No organization, institution, or group of individuals is for them worth the kind of loyalty and knuckling under that will deprive the individual of his feeling of personal autonomy. As a corollary to this, in their criticism of a class society, they are trying to broaden their liberal, individual base to exclude class stratifications.

The phrase *Angry Young Men* is now a part of contemporary English speech. These writers do not profess to represent their generation, nor do they make claims to be part of a cohesive movement; in essays and articles they can be highly critical of one another. Yet, in an increasing amount of British political writing the term appears as symptomatic of a problem. The portrait of young men and women either destructively apathetic or negatively dissentient is disturbing to those who feel that new and imaginative directions are needed to cope with contemporary issues and crises. In a recent series of articles published in *The Manchester Guardian Weekly,* Anthony Howard claims that, by and large, young people are not being attracted to the Labour Party; that the Conservatives, by providing a purely social club atmosphere, are winning friends for an organization which is internally authoritarian and makes almost a fetich of seniority; and that the Liberals attract the very young who, when they become a little older, leave.[27] There appears to be a widespread inclination to face national issues and leadership with something near revulsion. At the same time, we find in the 1950's in Britain this energetic group of literary dissidents who, though they reject much of what they cannot tolerate in English society, do so on the basis of an acceptance of traditional values. They are engaged in an honest search for some means whereby at least their kind of individual can relate himself to the social order.

Notes

[1] Kenneth Allsop, *The Angry Decade,* New York: British Book Centre, 1958, p. 11; and W. J. Harvey, "Have You Anything to Declare or Angry Young Men: Facts and Fictions," in *International Literary Annual,* London: John Calder, 1958, No. 1, p. 47.

[2] Christopher Johnson, "Nothing to Declare," *Crossbow,* 1 (January 1958), p. 35.

[3] Doris Lessing, whose work is not analyzed here, professes a more doctrinaire thesis than the others. See her essay, "The Small Personal Voice," in Tom Maschler, editor, *Declaration,* New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1958, pp. 187-201; also, the only one of her novels thus far published in this country, *The Grass is Singing,* New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1950.

[4] Many of the biographical data are taken from Allsop, *op. cit.,* pp. 43-68, 78-85, 96-124; also, Maschler, *op. cit.,* pp. 44, 68.

[5] John Wain, *Born in Captivity,* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954, p. 40.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] John Braine, *Room at the Top,* New York: New American Library, 1958, p. 80.

[8] Kingsley Amis, *Lucky Jim,* New York: The Viking Press, 1958, p. 17.

[9] *Ibid.,* p. 230.

[10] *Idem, That Uncertain Feeling,* New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1956, p. 184.

[11] John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger,* New York: Criterion Books, 1957, p. 56.

[12] *Ibid.,* p. 96.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] Braine, *op. cit.,* pp. 76-80.

[15] Osborne, *op. cit.,* pp. 57-58.

[16] Wain, *op. cit.,* p. 8.

[17] Osborne, *op. cit.,* p. 42.

[18] *Ibid.,* pp. 35-36.

[19] Amis, *Lucky Jim, op. cit.,* p. 247.

[20] Wain, *op. cit.,* p. 40.

[21] Amis, *That Uncertain Feeling, op. cit.,* p. 232.

[22] Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel,* New York: Meridian Books and Horizon Press, 1957, p. 203.

[23] Raymond Williams, "Realism and the Contemporary Novel," *Universities and Left Review,* 4 (Summer 1958), p. 24.

[24] John Lewis, in talking about the ailing wife of a friend, notes that she should see a specialist but, "he's got her name down . . . you know how long that'll take, and he hasn't got the cash to jump the queue. Bloody marvelous health service the Tories have. . . ." Amis, *op. cit.,* p. 24.

[25] Braine, *op. cit.,* pp. 120-121.

[26] H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society,* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958, pp. 364-368.

[27] *Manchester Guardian Weekly,* February 5, 1959, p. 5; February 19, 1959, p. 10; February 26, 1959, p. 5; March 12, 1959, p. 4.