

## The Angry Young Men Movement of the 1950s

The "angry young men" were a group of mostly working and middle class British playwrights and novelists who became prominent in the 1950s. The group's leading members included John Osborne and Kingsley Amis. The phrase was originally created by the Royal Court Theatre's press officer to promote John Osborne's 1956 play *Look Back in Anger*. Following the success of the Osborne play, the label was later applied by British media to describe young British writers who were characterized by disillusionment with traditional English society. Their impatience and resentment were especially aroused by what they perceived as the hypocrisy and mediocrity of the upper and middle classes. They shared an outspoken irreverence for the British class system, its traditional network of pedigreed families, and the elitist Oxford and Cambridge universities. They showed an equally uninhibited disdain for the drabness of the postwar welfare state, and their writings frequently expressed raw anger and frustration as the postwar reforms failed to meet exalted aspirations for genuine change.

The trend that was evident in John Wain's novel *Hurry on Down* (1953) and in *Lucky Jim* (1954) by Kingsley Amis was crystallized in 1956 in the play *Look Back in Anger*, which became the representative work of the movement. By the time Sir Laurence Olivier played the leading role in Osborne's second play, *The Entertainer* (1957), the Angry Young Men were acknowledged as the dominant literary force of the decade.

Their novels and plays typically feature a rootless, lower-middle or working-class male protagonist who views society with scorn and sardonic humour and may have conflicts with authority but who is nevertheless preoccupied with the quest for upward mobility. A major concern in Angry Young Men Movement writings is the dissatisfaction of the lower-class towards the established socio-political system which inequitably valued the middle and the upper classes and fiercely criticized their hypocrisy. Another frequent subject in this age is the depiction of abject position of the youth in society. The writers often portrayed the central hero being disillusioned with the life and dissatisfied with their job and a society where he is unfit and deprived of normal rights. Angry Young Men literature strongly revolted against all the accepted norms and ideals. Typically the hero is a rootless, lower-middle or working-class male psyche with a university degree. He expresses his dissatisfaction towards social ills with excessive anger and sardonic humour. He often indulges into adultery and inebriation to escape from complexities of life. In fine, he is the very epitome of a frustrated post-World War II generation.

John Osborne (1929–1994), is an English playwright and motion picture screenwriter, whose plays enact sharp criticism of post-World War II British life through outbursts of abusive language. It was Osborn's debut play *Look Back in Anger* (1957) that made the Angry Young Men Movement authoritatively established. In this sense, John Osborne was the most fortunate literary artist to have an age started on the basis of a single literary work.

Other playwrights are Bernard Kops (*The Hamlet of Stepney Green*, 1956) and Arnold Wesker (*Chicken Soup with Barley*, 1958). This literary Movement brought a fresh concept which was totally complied with the socio-political context. Though lasted only for a short span of time, it exerted a profound impact in the field of British literature. Like the Beat movement in the United States, the impetus of the movement was exhausted in the early 1960s