Contemporary British Drama: A Case of
Anger and Protest Against
War and Exploitation

By

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ABSTRACT

Peoples of the world including the British people have suffered from the atrocities of two world wars. They hoped after the Second World War to live in suitable social and economic circumstances, but the motto of "The Welfare State"¹ was not achieved. Thus, voices appeared against war and exploitation in all its forms. The British soldiers have also started to realize that they have been fighting for the sake of a class of capitalists who want to exploit other nations and to tighten their grip on the world markets.

The increasing realization of this fact, in addition to other factors have helped in feeding anti war and anti-exploitation feelings. So, those voices have expressed their conscious and unconscious refusal of war and exploitation through the different branches of literature. Theatre had its impact in revealing the selfishness and the failure of capitalism in building developed human relationships.

The severe protest that exploded in the mid fifties by the young dramatists who are called the "Angry Young Men"² has helped to give the anti war and anti-exploitation phenomenon the opportunity to express itself in a dramatic form shown in the chapters of this thesis. The "Angry Young Men" experienced and suffered the atrocities of war and exploitation so they bitterly felt their bad effect on society in general and on the individual in particular. The Thesis also shows the endless conflict between the forces of the individual's will of protesting against war and exploitation on one hand, and those of the organized society and its men on the other hand, who invariably tend to curb that will. What is more important, the thesis
means to show the sick mentality of the post-war age and the unstable psyche of the lost generation who found themselves sailing desperately and aimlessly in an ocean of chaos and anarchy to the unknown, in a world which had announced "the death of God," "the absence of father," and the destruction of the absolute values. Therefore, this thesis attempts to show the Darwinian and the Nietzschean principles that rule the twentieth century.

Some of these dramatists are John Whiting, Arnold Wesker, Willis Hall, John Osborne and John Arden. All of them have mainly protested against the domination of the upper classes on the state affairs. Army and its generals were part of these classes against which the "Angry Young Men" have revolted. John Arden was one of the voices that concentrated its anger and protest on blaming the greed of capitalism, and to explored the failure of the tendencies of expansion that achieved nothing except death and disaster.

The thesis consists of four chapters, and a conclusion. Chapter one discusses the political, social and economic conditions that paved the way for the rising of "Angry Young Men" in the contemporary British theatre. Chapter two deals with the angry theatre and its new thematic notion and technique that for the first time, the British audience see a play talks to them by this dialect and for the first time also they see a play about ordinary people who speak the dialect of the eastern area of London and who swear oaths. Chapter three talks about John Whiting and Willis Hall. Chapter four talks about John Arden as one of the greatest "Angry Young Men" who revolted against the lords of war and exploitation.