Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 166

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Volume 166

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works of Various Topics in Twentieth-Century Literature, including Literary, and Critical Movements, Prominent Themes and Genres, Anniversary Celebrations, and Surveys of National Literatures

Thomas J. Schoenberg
Lawrence J. Trudeau
Project Editors

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Preface

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Contents

Angry Young Men

INTRODUCTION

The term Angry Young Men applies to a group of young dramatists, novelists, and poets—including Kingsley Amis, Colin Wilson, John Osborne, John Wain, John Braine, Alan Sillitoe, and Philip Larkin, among others—who began writing in the post-World War II period in Britain. Never a cohesive school or movement, the Angry Young Men were characterized by shared attitudes, such as irreverence toward the older generation, cynicism, aggression, anti-intellectualism, and anti-romanticism.

The Angry Young Men emerged during the postwar period, when changes to British society, including the National Health System and the institutionalization of corporate-owned housing, were moving the nation in a socialist direction. Among these changes was the emergence of the state scholarship in 1944, which, for the first time in British history, gave large numbers of students from the middle and lower classes access to higher education. Many of the Angry Young Men, themselves university-educated "scholarship boys," nevertheless found themselves alienated from British society. Having grown up working-class, they reacted strongly to class hierarchies and the entrenched educational system. In addition, the sense of purpose that had characterized their parents' generation throughout World War II was missing for them, and was replaced by self-doubt, nihilism, and biting humor.

Though not the first work by a member of the group to feature a disaffected youth (Wain's novel *Hurry on Down* was published in 1953 and Amis's novel *Lucky Jim* was published in 1954), Osborne's 1956 play *Look Back in Anger* gave rise to the widespread use of the term Angry Young Man, and its protagonist, Jimmy Porter, established the character type and became a well-known symbol of the postwar generation's dissatisfaction. Other significant works of this period include Wilson's 1956 study of alienated literary and intellectual figures, *The Outsider,* Braine's novel *Room at the Top* (1957), and Sillitoe's novel *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958). Amis's *Lucky Jim,* the most successful novel among the group, embodies many of the themes of the Angry Young Men. Its protagonist, Jim Dixon, is a working-class university graduate who ridicules the stuffy academic world as he relates his adventures in it. This comic campaign against the world of privilege and pretense elevated the protagonist to the status of a cult figure.

From the outset of the movement to the present day, many critics have debated whether the Angry Young Men should be considered a specific school of writers, or simply a group of authors writing about similar themes in a particular time period. Reviewers have tended to grant that the group has enough in common to constitute a movement, but they have also pointed out that most of the movement's principal figures explored diverse themes and styles later in their careers. In any event, the Angry Young Men period in English literature was short-lived: as Leslie Paul has observed, "the name guaranteed the ephemerality of the movement. No one stays young or angry forever." While some scholars have censured the insularity of the movement, others have praised the Angry Young Men's popularization of provincial settings and the comic spirit of many of their works. Modern commentators have also devoted attention to the treatment of class and gender in works by the Angry Young Men, their focus on self-knowledge, and their borrowing from the picaresque tradition in literature. Critics have also focused on the Angry Young Men's rejection of literary modernism and intellectualism. According to Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, the Angry Young Men "self-consciously rejected the values and assumptions of modernism, ridiculed its great exponents such as Joyce and Virginia Woolf, and in its stead celebrated the cause of simple, straightforward, and essentially premodern writing."

REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

Kingsley Amis
A Frame of Mind: Eighteen Poems (poetry) 1953
Lucky Jim (novel) 1954
That Uncertain Feeling (novel) 1955
I Like It Here (novel) 1958
Take a Girl Like You (novel) 1960

John Braine
Room at the Top (novel) 1957
Life at the Top (novel) 1962

Thom Gunn
Fighting Terms (poetry) 1954

Michael Hastings
Don't Hurt Me (play) 1956

Thomas Hinde [pseudonym of Thomas Willes Chitty]
Mr. Nicholas (novel) 1956

Richard Hoggart
The Uses of Literacy: Changing Patterns in English Mass Culture (nonfiction) 1951

Philip Larkin
XX Poems (poetry) 1951
Philip Larkin (Fantasy Poets, no. 21) (poetry) 1954
The Less Deceived (poetry) 1955

Iris Murdoch
Under the Net (novel) 1954

John Osborne
Look Back in Anger (play) 1956
The Entertainer (play) 1957
Déjà Vu (play) 1991

Alan Sillitoe
Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (novel) 1958
The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner (short stories) 1959
The Second Chance, and Other Stories (short stories) 1981

John Wain
Mixed Feelings: Nineteen Poems (poetry) 1951
Hurry on Down (novel) 1953
The Contenders (novel) 1958

Colin Wilson
The Outsider (nonfiction) 1956

OVERVIEWS

Kenneth Allsop (essay date 1958)

SOURCE: Allsop, Kenneth. "The Dissentient Mood." In *The Angry Decade: A Survey of the Cultural Revolt of the Nineteen-Fifties,* pp. 15-50. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1964.

[*In the following excerpt, orignally published in 1958, Allsop examines the cultural, intellectual, and historical context from which the Angry Young Men emerged.*]

Before Seymour Glass, a character in J. D. Salinger's short story *A Perfect Day for Bananafish,* goes up to his hotel room to shoot himself, thereby eluding the new wife he has nicknamed Miss Spiritual Tramp of 1948 and life altogether, he has been on the beach with a friend. The friend is a little girl named Sybil whom he escorts into the sea.

To Sybil he says: "You just keep your eyes open for any bananafish. This is a *perfect* day for bananafish."

"I don't see any," Sybil says.

"That's understandable," replies Seymour. "Their habits are very peculiar."

There is an interesting similarity between bananafish and the generation of new writers who in the Nineteen-Fifties have been named the Angry Young Men. It seems that this is a *perfect* day for them, but it is difficult actually to see any. In fact I have come to that phrase Angry Young Men with some circumlocution and reluctance. The gloss has gone from its pile from being chased too hard and too long through the headlines. It has been classified as vermin and I hope that we shall be able to riddle it with buckshot and, after this first section, leave it lying in the hedge-bottom for most of the time during the rest of the book.

Yet it would be tortuous to attempt a survey of the British intellectual landscape of the Nineteen-Fifties and deliberately to avoid the phrase Angry Young Men. It would also be wrong, because although its validity in a collective sense may be dubious, although whatever meaning it originally had has been smudged over by promiscuous use, it does signify. For a variety of oddly mixed reasons which I want to investigate, the Fifties are of consequence because it has been in this decade that a new chorus of voices has broken through the mumble of the stale, worked-out cultural tradition lingering on from the Forties. Although chorus is hardly accurate because it implies a concord that is not present. Clamour may be better, for the opinions, philosophies, arguments, complaints, accusations, exhortations, tomfoolery, laments and bickering (backed, one can hardly overlook, by rhythmic reverberations of chest-beating and rolling logs) is full of all the dissonance to be expected in a modern concert. The generic title for the protagonists of all these divergent and often conflicting attitudes is, in the mind of the general public, like it or not, Angry Young Men. That starting point must be accepted and questions asked on that basis.

Is the Angry Young Man label wildly off the mark? Certainly all who have been herded together under the banner, while perhaps finding the advertisement not without value and the accompanying fame not unpleasant, individually hotly denies that that has any connection with *him.* But it does ring a response in most people today. The names Kingsley Amis, Colin Wilson and John Osborne peal out like a treble bob, cracked with discord to those with more sophisticated ears, but there

they are, the Three Musketeers of the revolutionary army, all for none and none for all. They do not conceal their mutual distrust, dislike and disagreements.

Amis: "I don't like these glum chums."

Wilson: "Jimmy Porter [the hero of Osborne's play *Look Back In Anger*] is a pseudo-Outsider. He doesn't possess the strength of mind to create anything."

Osborne: "I must read *The Outsider* [Wilson's first publication]. I'm told it is a very good reference book—such a wealth of bibliography."

There is not, it can be seen, any grand design of amity and purpose here. They have widely disparate outlooks on modern problems and modern solutions: Amis, flippant and facetious, the grin on the face of the garrotter, but whose political purpose has dwindled with disillusionment; Osborne, whirling words like a meat cleaver; and Wilson, a sort of philosophical steeplejack scaling sickening heights with untested equipment.

However, they and their supporters do share a quality which has been misread and misnamed anger. I think the more accurate word for this new spirit that has surged in during the Fifties is dissentience. They are all, in differing degrees and for different reasons, dissentients. I use that word in preference to dissenter, because that implies an organised bloc separation from the Establishment, whereas dissentient has a more modulated meaning—more to disagree with majority sentiments and opinions.

That is what has happened in the Fifties—a generation suddenly made up its mind. Not so much to rebel against the old order of authority and standards, but to refuse to vote for it. Some of the dissentients are in fact working for the overthrow of the exhausted but tenacious ideas, a little band of spiritual bomb-throwers led by that guerrilla philosopher Colin Wilson who campaigns against the present high priests of Western civilization.

Some, who are the emotional actionists, are all for reform and revolution, for whipping up fervour for political causes and such dashing melodramatic measures as, say, disbanding the monarchy forthwith, and these are represented by—he would, I suspect, refuse to lead anything—John Osborne.

Then there are the others, by far the biggest group who share with Kingsley Amis a cynical, mocking, derisive disgust with authority and the "shiny barbarism" (as Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy* called our present mass culture) but who, out of either laziness or despair, opt for an inert neutrality—or even conform enough to loot some of the good things still left in the "residential" middle-class bondbox.

The new dissentient writers seem to me to fall quite clearly and naturally into those three groups, and I want later to discuss in detail their outlook, methods, intentions and differences. But first let us review some of the characteristics that all the groups share and which immediately distinguish this new generation from their literary progenitors. The predominant characteristic is a tough, ruthless, hell-with-it approach to their particular undertakings that is utterly uninhibited by the blood-thinning refinements of the old upper-class *rentier* overlord they are trying to evict, the tentativeness, the subtle qualifications, the tolerant reservations, and perhaps, the final deliquescence into ambiguous mist.

The phrase Angry Young Man carries multiple overtones which might be listed as irreverence, stridency, impatience with tradition, vigour, vulgarity, sulky resentment against the cultivated and a hard-boiled muscling-in on culture, adventurousness, self-pity, deliberate disengagement from politics, fascist ambitions, schizophrenia, rude dislike of anything phoney or fey, a broad sense of humour but low on wit, a general intellectual nihilism, honesty, a neurotic discontent and a defeated, reconciled acquiescence that is the last flimsy shelter against complete despondency—a wildly ill-assorted agglomeration of credos which, although without any overall coherence, do belong to this incoherent period of social upheaval.

A perceptive comment was made about this situation by Professor Leslie A. Fiedler, of the University of Montana, in an article "The Un-Angry Young Men", an examination of the current state of mind of the U.S. college student, in the January 1958 *Encounter.* Remarking that although two of the literary redoubts—the journals *Encounter* and *London Magazine*—are "presided over by two of the chief surviving representatives of the Thirties, Stephen Spender and John Lehmann", the change in Britain is deep and violent. Later in the article he says: "The young British writer has the inestimable advantage [comparing him with the young American writer] of representing a new class on its way into a controlling position in the culture of his country. He is able to define himself against the class he replaces: against a blend of homosexual sensibility, upper-class aloofness, liberal politics, and avant-garde literary devices. When he is boorish rather than well-behaved, rudely angry rather than ironically amused, when he is philistine rather than arty—even when he merely writes badly, he can feel he is performing a service for literature, liberating it from the tyranny of a taste based on a world of wealth and leisure which has become quite unreal."

When and where did the phrase Angry Young Man originate? Leslie Allen Paul, the religious philosopher, contributed a letter to one magazine's correspondence columns in which was proceeding a ding-dong exchange

of flippancies about the phrase, rather plaintively reminding everyone that in 1951 he published a book with Faber entitled just that, *Angry Young Man*: it was an autobiography, the story of a Marxist's personal class-warfare during the Twenties and Thirties, and his eventual conversion to Christianity. Indeed it would be surprising if such an obvious grouping of ordinary words had *not* been used before May 8, 1956. However it was then, when *Look Back in Anger* by Osborne (who up to that time had been a hard-up repertory actor with long 'rests') was put on at the Royal Court Theatre, Sloane Square, that it suddenly came to have specific significance and wide use. I shall be discussing this later, but the point to be made here is that the hero of *Look Back In Anger,* Jimmy Porter, quickly became a character genus. Articles in the weekly reviews began talking about "the Jimmy Porters and the Lucky Jims" including the hero of Amis's novel *Lucky Jim* (which had then been out just over two years) as another contemporary prototype.

On May 26 *The Times* carried one of its facetious "sarky schoolmaster" leaders, which now seems generally accepted as the source of the phrase. In fact, although the subject was the anger of today's young men, the word anger wasn't used. It said:

> People who like to leave the theatre in an argumentative mood will go to the Royal Court Theatre to see Mr. John Osborne's play *Look Back In Anger.* They will not necessarily argue about the merits of the piece, but they will remember those reviews in which it has been put forward as an expression of opinion valid for the generation of those in their late twenties. They will see a thoroughly cross young man, caught into an emotional situation where crossness avails nothing. And they may well wonder whether the young men of today are really as embittered, as prompt to offence, as the hero of the play.
>
> Most young men, in every age, are probably much alike. They turn the world, as far as they can, to their own account, in order to become old men as painlessly as possible. Mr Osborne, however, is dealing with that inconvenient phenomenon, the clever young man. It is he who sets his stamp upon a generation, he who sets the level at which the men of his own age will be remembered by posterity. Are we, then, to think that those who are now in their late twenties are likely to be known above all for their touchiness and their rages? . . . A Cinderella spirit, quite alien to the pre-war generation, is abroad, and a closing-time admitted before ever the revels begin.
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> Indeed, the young sometimes put on almost too serious a face. There is about the young men a suspicion of a whisker, about the girls a common-sensical forthrightness. Where the prodigies celebrated by Mr Evelyn Waugh in 1930 or thereabouts organized parties in balloons and swimming baths, the youth of today visits prisons and reads Kierkegaard. Exceptionally, perhaps, the young people of Mr Osborne's play can be found, just as the heroes of Mr Kingsley Amis ring true in a limited setting. But it is likelier that the real tone of our age will be found much closer to that of a century ago. Already our didactic writers are getting back to Samuel Smiles; it is only a matter of time before the evil old men of the day flinch uneasily from the start of some youthful Thomas Arnold.

Jimmy Porter does not visit prisons or read Kierkegaard. He is a tough dead-end kid intellectual hunched like a killer spider in the middle of his emotional web. He is certainly cross, with an hysterical, nagging, hyperbolic bitchiness about pretty well everything. Examined objectively, there is little that is constructive or organically developed in Jimmy Porter's invective, but the dialogue Osborne laces through the play like a spluttering gunpowder trail is authentic modern talk, and aroused excitement in critics and audiences. Whacked all around the head, they came away dazed and in a masochistic ecstasy from the sheer *anger* of it and after wading through years of theatrical cold rice pudding it's easy to understand this.

It should in fairness be stated here that Osborne, with the upset loathing you might expect in a dowager waking up from a champagne night in bed with her butler, has vehemently denounced the Angry Young Man vogue. While admitting that he wrote a play with a title and a character that has stimulated the idea, he blames the press entirely (and not quite honestly when you see how often he has gratuitously used the phrase himself) for falsification of the phrase.

It is fascinating to look back over these past two or three years at the way the old literary Establishment has been hopping from one foot to another in a nervous tizzy about the inrush of the new denomination. Of course *Lucky Jim* when it first came out in January 1954 was welcomed with delight. So were a few other what then appeared to be isolated novels in the new genre, such as Thomas Hinde's *Mr. Nicholas* and John Wain's first novel *Hurry On Down,* and no wonder, because for some time before that *The Times Literary Supplement* and other literary organs had been deploring the deadness of the cultural scene. There had been a long correspondence in the *Literary Supplement* about "the death of the novel" and desultory discussion had been bombinated about in the letter columns of *The Times* and *The Observer* on the economic plight of the writer, the general implication being that no-one nowadays was going to slave away at a novel when he could get £25 a week at the coalface or £10 for driving a bus. There was, in fact, a growing atmosphere of concern about the literary wasteland, a growing agreement that, somehow, it must be irrigated with new talent. Even the more mandarin prose-producers, who had never previously displayed anything but benign contentment at their long and happy reign, began to glance over their shoulders at the empty horizon (and I almost gave that horizon a capital H). After all everyone likes to have an heir.

So every work of promise, containing a mere hint of originality, was received with generous warmth, culminating in the hosannas of praise for *Look Back In Anger* and the even more delirious enthusiasm for Colin Wilson's *The Outsider* when it appeared in May 1956.

It was after this that the enthusiasm began to ice over a little. Misgivings began to spread beneath the floppy bow ties and the rumpled cardigans. A note of chiding reproof began to infiltrate the ninepenny weeklies and the serious Sundays. In broadcast critic circles and on television discussion programmes elderly jowls began to droop with disapproval, and through the pipe smoke came the first gruff words of criticism. The new note was one of reproach and admonition—these youngsters weren't kissing the hand that had patted them; easy success; bit big for their boots; also big heads. The sweeping statements began to sweep. In *Books and Bookmen* Malcolm Elwin asked: "Surely this insistence on youth as a condition necessarily interesting suggests a symptom of an insecure society's pursuit of novelty?" In *The Spectator* Iain Hamilton remarked: "Your average New Hero is egocentric, of course . . . He gorges his way through life like a worm, instinctively contracting and relaxing his muscles . . . He is also, of course, for a large part of the time an Angry Young Man—without knowing, naturally, what he is angry about." In *The New Statesman* Colm Brogan wrote: "Lucky Jim is a loafer, a sycophant, a vulgarian who has taken advantage of State bounty to secure a university post when he is mentally and morally unfit to be a school janitor." "The danger that confronts the contemporary English novelist", lectured *The Times Literary Supplement* leader-writer, "is not that of biting off more than he can chew. It is that of relaxing into the small humours of a grumbling, self-enclosed cosiness." J. B. Priestley referred to "a somewhat loutish style of sullen acquiescence, found in some younger novelists," and then really tore loose on Wilson's book: "If the Outsider is poisoned by an embittered egoism, if he wants to hurt and not to heal, if there is more hate than love in him, can he bring us nearer to a solution?" he demanded, and concluded obscurely: "We are waiting for God, not for Godot." There was the dramatic mass recantation when Colin Wilson's *Religion and the Rebel* appeared last October, and the emotional scenes of reformed Wilson fans publicly repenting were reminiscent of the confessional orgy at a Soviet treason trial. In *Punch* A. P. Herbert contributed a 58-line poem entitled "Angry Young Men," which trumpeted to its end:

> No British young, since British young were new,
> Have had such boons and benefits as you.
> The talk of war "unsettles" you, I see:
> I've served in two, my lads, and suffered three.
> We did not whine and whimper at our doom:
> We did not cry "Frustration!" in the womb.
> We saw, and shared, some grandeur in the grime.
> Cheer up, my lads—you'll understand in time.

And, of course, Somerset Maugham intervened with his famous succinct pronouncement on the Lucky Jim type of hero: "They are scum."

Eyeing gossip column items about Osborne's £20,000 a year, about Wilson's vast treble-chance reward, about John Braine's £15,000 profit from his first novel *Room At The Top,* the old guard seemed increasingly regretful that they had opened their arms so impulsively in the beginning. Now that the newcomers had been admitted to the inner circle they were treacherously making rude and frightening threats to take over control.

There are two major reasons why they so promptly made contact with a big, attentive public. First, they filled the vacuum in that great echoing museum where the arts used to be kept in Britain—and their very presence, even before the quality of their offerings had been examined, seemed a heartening thing. Second, some of them, and Wilson especially, immediately displayed an acute appreciation of the publicity techniques of this modern age, and systematically and ruthlessly employed them to blazon their names in headlines. Stopping short of Wilson's lurid vaudeville acts as the centre of a horse-whipping attack and as vilifier of Shakespeare, some of his contemporaries' methods have been more subtle but have achieved strikingly effective results.

They have deliberately sought the advantages that there are in being known to the enormous public served by the *Sunday Pictorial,* commercial television, and the monster women's magazines. (*Good Housekeeping* of January this year presented "A short directory to Angry Young Men". Clearly it had been decided at an editorial conference that by now the Angry Young Men had reached the *Housewives' Choice* public and that a sink-side guide should be provided. The page was topped with a fresco of thumbnail pictures of Osborne, Wilson, Amis, Bill Hopkins, Stuart Holroyd and Wain. With that stern detachment that popular journalism assumes when being censorious about popular journalism, and which fills me with warm affection, the writer, James Gordon, began: "The popular newspapers, for lack of better copy, have invented a new legend, the Angry Young Men. . . . Forget all this nonsense invented by the newspapers and exploited for its sensationalism," and he settled the whole matter with: "After all, the Angry Young Man movement is a passing post-war phenomenon—the result of delayed shock.") They have also offered themselves for collective consideration in such symposiums as *Declaration.* So it ill becomes them to be churlish about being grouped together.

Osborne, and some others, understandably embarrassed and irritated by the custard pie usage of the phrase Angry Young Man, are at liberty to deny affiliation. Yet a

news story usually evolves from a certain chemical process: the desire of the journalist to make a news story and the desire of the other party concerned to be made into one.

It may well be that the general public have two rather hazy and limited impressions—that the Angry Young Man lashes out and the Angry Young Man cashes in. The important thing is that, with justification, the phrase illuminated for large numbers of people a new state of mind in Britain of the Nineteen-Fifties. *Look Back In Anger,* arriving at that particular moment, caught and crystallised a floating mood. It was as if the pin-table ball that many young people feel themselves to be today, ricocheting in lunatic movement, had hit the right peg. Lights flashed. Bells rang. Overnight "angry" became the code word.

But can all of the new arrivals, the novelists, critics, philosophers and playwrights, and those who just give television interviews, be said to be angry? Certainly they feel strongly enough about the situation they find themselves in—articulate citizens of Britain in the Nineteen-Fifties.

In the Forties, apart from the wounded resentment of the white-collar class against the rapine of Labour Government and the daily Nineteen Eighty-Four style hate programme conducted by the Conservative Press against the Enemies of the People (Laski, Strachey, etc.) there was little genuine strong emotion abroad. Battered by the war and ten years of filthy food, worn-out clothes and austerity, with grime and drabness rubbed into the pores, the British public was in what GPs call a "run-down condition." It hadn't the energy to support or the appetite for new intellectual brainwaves or banner-wagging movements. Also there was a conscientious but laborious social revolution in progress. The attempt was being made, with clapped-out industrial machinery, no money to spend and little enthusiasm for it, to redistribute the national income. It was a low voltage revolution in which the Labour Party, always quick on the draw with a compromise, bent backwards to be respectable and constitutionally correct. I suspect that we should be thankful for timidity and the slurred movement in politicians. Nevertheless it was not a period that lit the populace with a white fire. Most people, while grateful (noisily or furtively for the National Health and the new security of life, seemed to find a drab self-righteousness in the system and existence under it like living in a giant Welsh tin chapel. Consequently in 1951 the voting was for self-interest and faster living. Meanwhile Britain was producing, as well as the Welfare State, Jimmy Porter.

He and his generation are those aged between twenty-five and thirty-five—that is, who were born between the early Twenties and the early Thirties. It has been a lifetime incessantly criss-crossed by catastrophe. From all directions, roaring and lurching like tanks over a battleground, the crises have never stopped coming. Being autobiographical for a moment, when I glance back I see down my thirty-seven years the symbols of disruption set close as a picket fence, individual memories starting with a child's view of the General Strike, the cold grey shadow that the Depression threw into even a 'disengaged' suburban household, the fear that was communicated to a disinterested teenager by the flickering menace of Hitler and Mussolini in the newsreels, the first physical encounter with real suffering when, as a junior reporter, I met hunger marchers trudging up from the coalfields, the friends who were killed in Spain, then the major black-out of the war and its epilogue of dreary years, and the dawning of the H-bomb era.

Set all this against the experience of countless thousands of Europeans and Asians, with their horizons of barb-wire, slavecamps, obliteration bombing, DP trains, fragmented families and first-hand knowledge of atom-bombs, and the British citizen's history looks tame as Winnie the Pooh's. Nevertheless the background of anyone under forty is lacking something that those over forty have known.

It is difficult to prove this sort of statement, but I personally have, and I believe a great many men and women in my age group have, an intense nostalgic longing for the security and the innocence that seems to have been present in Britain before the 1914 war. It has become almost a tribal ancestral memory. While being aware that I am romantically glossing it all over into a sunny simplicity, for me that period is a montage of striped blazers and parasols in Henley punts, tea on the lawn with spotted flycatchers hawking from the tennis net, and Ernest A. Shepard London squares with autumn fires glinting on the brass fenders in the drawing rooms. I know that there was grinding poverty, and hideous living conditions too, yet I am sure that the Victorians and Edwardians had an inner confidence that we shall never know. On the other hand, perhaps a more accurate picture of even the pleasanter aspect of pre-1914 was the one George Orwell gave in *Such, Such Were The Joys,* his blood-chilling account of his prep-school which has never been published in Britain because of libel-threats. Recalling the "sheer vulgar fatness" of that period, of champagne parties in rococo houseboats on the Thames, Saki's novels, *Where The Rainbow Ends,* and scrumptious teas at the Troc, he distilled it in this wonderfully and comically evocative sentence: "From the whole decade before 1914 there seems to breathe forth a smell of the more vulgar, ungrown-up kinds of luxury, a smell of brilliantine and crème de menthe and soft-centred chocolates—an atmosphere, as it were, of eating everlasting strawberry ices on green lawns to the tune of the Eton Boating Song."

Still, Jimmy Porter and his older brother have been taught brinkmanship since they were let out of the playpen—the technique of extracting satisfactions in a sort of compensatory spirit while your toes inch back from the crumbling edge.

This is where we come to the paradoxical knot in all their lives. Within this larger sense of futility and doom in Britain since the war there has been a dead centre, the theoretical motionless hollow at the centre of a whirlpool. The new dissentients are mostly working class or lower middle-class clever boys, grammar school or perhaps minor public school, spending most or perhaps just the tail-end of the war in uniform, or at any rate a couple of years of National Service, then university (red brick, or even white tile, most likely) on a scholarship or a Service grant. In a time of calamities they have had the protection of collective security; their course has been convoyed through to the safe harbour of the Welfare State. Gertrude Stein called her contemporaries of the Twenties the Lost Generation. This one might be described as the All Found Generation. And are they grateful, this plebian elite who have been creamed off from the admass for higher education and managerial duties? Not in the least.

To the chagrin and deep hurt of their fathers who worked doggedly for—or at least voted for in a spasm of nervous idealism in 1945—the moderate Trade Union socialism that has spread education and opportunity, the ingrates do not think a great deal of the new deal. They display neither enthusiasm for their elevation nor comradeship towards the idealists who put them where they are. One point of view seems to be that the education and the opportunity have been spread too thinly, like prole margarine of the bad old days. The larger result is that the new dissentients feel unassimilated. They are a new rootless, faithless, classless class—and consequently, because of a feeling of being misplaced and misprized, also often charmless—who are becalmed in the social sea. They are intelligent and, beneath the cocky Brando cynicism, sensitive, so they cannot wallow in lumpish contentment. They are acutely conscious of lacking the arrogant composure of the ruling-class line: they are strangers to their own sort. They feel a mixture of guilt about renegading from their hereditary background and contempt for the oafish orthodoxy of their families. Success, meaning money, is judged to be the safest measure—and there doesn't seem enough of that to go round.

The outcome of this conditioning is the dissentience that is in the air today—the "anger" which has been gratuitously credited to many who are either only disgusted or coldly critical. For the moment it is those who are angry who concern us. What precisely are they angry about? That would have been an easy question to answer in any other decade. In the Twenties people were angry about the "Land Fit For Heroes" confidence trick, about the slashing of the miners' rates, about the gaudy goings-on of the Bright Young Things. In the Thirties people got angry about the murder of Jarrow, about the air assault on Guernica, about appeasement. In the Forties, even amid the welter of woe brought by the war, an extra bubble of anger could force up to the surface at the Germans' massacre in the Czechoslovakian village of Lidice, as well as blitz-anger and patriotic anger.

But what is there to get angry about in the Fifties?

Plenty, I would have said, ranging across a whole keyboard of cases, from bass notes of gravity to the tinkle of snobbish irritations—from, say, the card-sharp use of nuclear power in diplomatic poker to the march of the concrete lamp-post men who are putting the mutilated carcase of Britain in a chalk-stripe suit. Yet the Jimmy Porters are not even angry about the dominant problem of our time, which soaks invisibly like fall-out into every minor problem and contaminates it—the unresolved struggle between capitalism and communism. Not only are the Jimmy Porters not angry about this: it bores them deeply. In *Look Back In Anger* the original Jimmy, grinding away like a tooth-drill at the nerve ends of all around him during that Sunday limbo in the provincial flat turns briefly away from his class obsessions and shouts: "There aren't any good, brave causes left. If the big bang does come and we all get killed off, it won't be in aid of the old-fashioned grand design. It'll be just for the Brave New Nothing-thank-you-very-much."

The Jimmy Porters are not interested in mankind's political dilemmas such as the ideological and economic contest between East and West, and even their concern with the deeper plight of the pervading loss of spiritual direction is utterly introspective. Their anger is a sort of neurological masturbation, deriving from the very problems they cannot bring themselves to confront. It is a textbook psychotic situation: the emotional deadlock in a person caused by a general conviction that certain major man-made problems that man is facing are beyond the capacity of man to solve. That is part of the spreading sense of loss of liberty and identity that I will return to later. So the Jimmy Porters simmer and lacerate themselves with self-doubt. They are angry at having nothing they dare to be angry about.

The objection raised to this sort of contemporary "anger" is that it is oblique, petty, pyrotechnic with irrelevancies, neurotic and, in the end, dishonestly meretricious. But of course the Osborne-Porter "anger" is not the unique manifestation of dissentience of this period. It was necessary first to define that type of dissentience. There are graver symptoms.

One of these is the delink, an American slang abbreviation for the "delinquency notice" of withdrawal a defaulting student receives from the college dean, and a