

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE SOCIAL CLASS CONCEPT IN
ANTON CHEKHOV'S THE CHERRY ORCHARD AND JOHN OSBORNE'S
LOOK BACK IN ANGER

ANTON CHEKHOV'UN THE CHERRY ORCHARD VE JOHN OSBORNE'UN
LOOK BACK IN ANGER OYUNLARINDA SOSYAL SINIF KAVRAMININ
KARŞILAŞTIRILMASI

СРАВНЕНИЕ КОНЦЕПЦИИ СОЦИАЛЬНЫХ КЛАССОВ В ПЬЕСАХ АНТОН
ЧЕХОВА “ВИШНЁВЫЙ САД” И ДЖОНА ОСБОРНА “ОГЛЯНИСЬ ВО
ГНЕБЕ”

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ABSTRACT

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1904) depicting the lives of lower, middle and upper class Russian people at the very beginning of the twentieth century reflects the clash that takes place between these quite different social communities. About forty years after the emancipation of the serfs, Russian nobility represented by Madame Ranevsky has lost its financial power; so that, the last symbol of the glorious past, in this case the cherry orchard, is to be bought by the newly arising middle class identified with Lopahin. During the harsh struggle between these two classes, the lower class resuming the old values is left behind just as the old man Firs is forgotten at the end of the play. The result is the dawn of a new era with its dramatic changes for everyone.

Turning back to John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956), the theme of struggle within the society focuses on lower and middle classes. Despite his great love for his wife Alison, Jimmy cannot cope with his inner conflicts resulting from the inability to reconcile his lower class background with that upper middle class of his wife. Therefore his anger never seems to calm down. That is also why he wishes Alison's baby to die and has an intercourse with Alison's close friend Helena. While the middle class people are responsible for all evil in this life, Cliff contributes to that with his ignorance and idleness sitting in the room. For Jimmy, all the desirable qualities and values are situated in the working class. Jimmy's anger stemming from his obsession in the past and the responsibility he carries in himself to make up for the mistakes of the previous generations prevent him from looking forward. However, Alison's return at the end of the play and the beginning of the love game between the couple once again shows that there is still hope for the future.

Keywords: Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, John Osborne, *The Cherry Orchard*, *Look Back in Anger*, lower class, middle class, social conflict, change

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ÖZ

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov'un alt, orta ve üst sınıftan kahramanların 20. yüzyıl başındaki hayatlarını anlattığı *The Cherry Orchard* adlı oyunu, birbirinden oldukça farklı bu toplumsal gruplar arasında yaşanan çatışmayı yansıtır. Köleliğin kaldırılmasından yaklaşık kırk yıl sonra, Madam Ranevsky ile temsil edilen Rus soylu sınıfı ekonomik gücünü kaybetmişti; böylece görkemli geçmişin son sembolü olan vişne bahçesi de sınıf bakımından yükselişe geçen ve Lopahin ile özdeşleştirilen orta sınıf tarafından satın alınma durumuna gelmişti. Bu iki sınıf arasında devam eden çatışma esnasında, eski değerleri yaşatan alt sınıf, tıpkı yaşlı Firs'in oyun sonunda unutulması gibi geride bırakılır. Sonuçta herkes için kökten değişiklikler getiren yeni bir dönem başlamaktadır.

John Osborne'un *Look Back in Anger* oyununa baktığımızda ise toplum içindeki çatışmanın alt ve orta sınıflar üzerine yoğunlaştığı görülür. Eşi Alison'a duyduğu büyük aşka rağmen Jimmy, alt sınıftan gelen geçmişini, eşinin orta sınıf geçmişiyle bir türlü barıştıramamaktan kaynaklanan kendi iç karmaşalarıyla baş edemez. Bu yüzden öfkesi bir türlü yatışmaz. Alison'un bebeğinin ölmesini istemesi ve yakın arkadaşı Helena ile ilişki yaşaması da bu yüzdendir. Bu hayattaki bütün kötülüklerin sorumlusu orta sınıftan insanlarken, Cliff bu duruma umursamazlığı ve odanın içinde tembel tembel oturmasıyla destek olur. Jimmy'e göre bütün iyi özellikler ve değer yargıları işçi sınıfında mevcuttur. Geçmişine duyduğu saplantı yanında geçmiş nesillerin hatalarını telafi etme konusunda taşıdığı sorumluluk Jimmy'nin geleceğe bakmasına engeldir. Her şeye rağmen oyunun sonunda Alison'un geri dönüşü ve çiftin arasındaki aşk oyununun yeniden başlaması gelecek için halen umut olduğuna işaret eder.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, John Osborne, *The Cherry Orchard*, *Look Back in Anger*, alt sınıf, orta sınıf, sosyal çatışma, değişim

АННОТАЦИЯ

В пьесе Антон Павловича Чехова “Вишневый сад”, отражается конфликт социальных групп 20-го века которые довольно сильно отличающихся друг от друга. После отмены крепостного права, приблизительно через 40 лет, мадам Раневская как представитель русского дворянства утратив экономическую мощь и Лопехин как представитель среднего класса заимев возможность старается выкупить, последний символ славного прошлого, вишневый сад. Во время продолжающегося конфликта между этими двумя классами, низший класс живший старыми ценностями остается позади, точно так же как и Фирс в конце игры. В итоге начинается новая эпоха, которая несет в себе для всех коренные изменения.

Если обратимся к пьесе Джона Осборна “Оглянись во гневе”, то увидим что писатель сосредоточил внимание на конфликте средних и низших слоев общества. Не смотря на то, что Джимм питает большую любовь к своей супруге Элисон, он ни как не может смириться с происхождением жены среднего класса и со своим происхождением из низшего класса. По этой причине его гнев ни как не спадает.

Поэтому он желает смерти ребёнку Элисон и заводит близкие отношения с Еленой, подругой Элисон. Равнодушное, ленивое и безответственное отношение Клиффа, у которого все пороки этой жизни присущи людям среднего класса, является поддержкой этой ситуации. По мнению Джимма же, все хорошие и лучшие черты присутствуют в среднем классе. Ответственность за ошибки прошлых поколений и своего прошлого препятствуют Джимму взглянуть в будущее. Не смотря на все это, в конце пьесы возвращение Элисон и возобновление любовных чувств пары указывает на надежду в будущее.

Ключевые слова: Антон Павловича Чехов, Джон Осборн, Вишневый сад, Оглянись во гневе, нижний класс, средний класс, социальный конфликт, изменение.

INTRODUCTION

As a means of representation, literature has always been used in order to reflect the social, historical, cultural, political and moral characteristics of a community in line with the changing dynamics of a period. Since cultural studies as a particular field of research depends on various aspects in analysing literary works, it is usually possible to have a critical point of view towards a literary work with different attitudes. Social class, the values associated with a particular group of people and sometimes discrimination against that particular group occupies a great place in literary history. Particularly social turmoil, instability and drastic changes in the social structure following the political and economic incidents draw attention to these topics related to the social class. In this respect, Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1904) in the early twentieth-century Russia and John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956) in post-war British drama may be considered as two examples sharing common characteristics in terms of the societies represented on the stage.

On the one hand, there is one of the masterpieces of Russian drama reflecting the very beginning of the twentieth century. This period is quite important in that as a result of the political events such as the emancipation of the serfs in the second half of the nineteenth century, the whole established social structure in Russia is challenged by the new world order. This new order in turn will lead to the revolutionary movements later in the twentieth century Russia. Hence, there is a continuous process of change deeply affecting not only entire social classes but also the individuals. On the other hand, there is the post-war British society in Osborne's play. Because of the destructive influences of the World War II, the generation in the 1950s experienced loss of faith towards all social norms, adopted a questioning attitude to their environment and protested many problems as groups and individuals. That is why the play reflects the attitude of an entire generation in a single character. This work thus aims at comparing these two plays in terms of the social classes in conflict with each other, focusing particularly on the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the upper class in Chekhov's work and between the middle class and the working class in Osborne's work together with the social discrimination observed in both societies.

CHEKHOV'S *THE CHERRY ORCHARD*

For this reason, Chekhov's play needs to be closely studied. *The Cherry Orchard* provides a perspective that shows us the social conditions, realities and changes observed in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. As it is the case in his other plays like *Uncle Vanya*, Chekhov introduces the Russian lifestyle in a very refined and simplistic way. The characters do not come up with any tendency to become heroes, nor does the plot look for becoming a legendary myth. Typically Chekhovian in its structure and

characterization, the play resembles life as itself in terms of the realist movement that intended to remain loyal to the real life incidents. That is why the action is reduced to a minimum to depict the rural lifestyle. French actor and director Jean-Louis Barrault sums up the action in an interview: “In Act One, the cherry orchard is in danger of being sold, in Act Two it is on the verge of being sold, in Act Three it is sold and in Act Four it has been sold” (qtd. in Evdokimova 2000: 623). From the beginning lines of the play till the very end, action is very limited as a result of the Russian rural life, which moves backwards rapidly in the social scale as opposed to the modern lifestyle represented by the technological and scientific developments in addition to the changes in the status of upper and middle classes. Actually, Chekhov depicts the social chaos that emerged as a result of these changes, some of which had close connections with his own life and while doing so, he employs a plain and unpretentious style peculiar to himself.

A general look into the nineteenth century Russia shows the decline of the landed gentry as a crucial problem. By the year 1859, “one third of the estates and two-thirds of the serfs belonging to landowners were mortgaged to the state or to private banks” (Braun 2003: 112). The economic situation of the upper and lower classes were terrible to sustain the established order. Hence, the Emancipation Act of 1861 tried to solve this crisis through “the redemption payments that the peasants were to make for the land that their former masters chose to transfer to them” (Braun 2003: 112). So the landowners could no longer make use of the service and goods of the serfs. In other words, the lower class gained their freedom in line with the economic circumstances. Still, towards the end of the nineteenth century the gentry was quite powerful. “In the 1870s they [the gentry] owned one-third of all arable land” (Braun 2003: 112). In the early twentieth century, however, this ratio declined to 22 percent; moreover, one third of this arable land was rented to the peasantry (Braun 2003: 112). Since many landowners were prone to spending most of their time abroad just like Madame Ranevsky, their business affairs in agriculture and accounting were left over to incompetent managers such as the adopted daughter Varya and the clerk Epikhodov.

The immediate result of all these incidents was the growing amount of debts. In fact, Russian Tsar Alexander III (1845-1894) had taken some fiscal measures to “halt the erosion of this [upper] class on whom the entire economic and social stability of the empire depended” (Braun 2003: 112). This attempt means that the rulers were aware of the approaching disaster that would affect not only a certain class in Russia, but also the whole society. With the death of Alexander III, his twenty six-year-old son Nicholas II inherited the crown and as expected at such a young age, his inexperience in state, economic and social matters led to a new social order (Braun 2003: 113). Beginning with 1894, “the vast semi-feudal empire struggled to catch up with Europe through headlong industrialization, massive foreign investment and a drive for exporters, cholera epidemics, rocketing land prices and a massive increase in population” (Braun 2003: 113). So, the lands were purchased by a small minority of newly rising middle class merchants, many of whom were emancipated serfs or their descendants just like Lopahin. When all these facts are considered as the background out of which Chekhov came to produce his play, with regard to *The Cherry Orchard*, Braun argues that “in essence it is a novel, an engrossing novel that embraces the whole period from 1861 to 1905 and describes the life of people in Russia just before Tsarism began to collapse” (2003: 113). Since Chekhov himself was also the grandson of a serf and furthermore for some time lived as a landowner in Russia, he was knowledgeable about different classes to evaluate the social turmoil (Hahn 1979: 17). It may be claimed that while reading this play, the reader should be aware of the fact that the

incidents are depicted with a first hand experience of all levels of the Russian society. Furthermore, Chekhov's realist attitude brings the play almost into a chronicle-like status. The cherry orchard, the main theme and in fact the name of the play at the same time, is a representative of the upper class based on land ownership. Due to the new economic values, the land is losing its significance for providing the wealth that upper class people were accustomed to living with and this situation results in the social turmoil that Chekhov inspects individually in the lives of his characters of both upper and middle classes who are connected to each other through this orchard.

The play begins in the nursery with the conversation between Dunyasha and Lopahin, who wait for the arrival of the protagonist Madame Ranevsky from Paris with whose experiences the play will mostly deal. Madame Ranevsky represents different personalities such as a mother, an ex-wife, a lover, a friend, a sister and a member of the old upper class coping with her debts due to the mortgages. Most of all, she is the owner of the cherry orchard, which puts her to the center of the play. Nevertheless, her identity is not as stable as her social roles. Due to the disastrous experiences she had about her husband and son, she just fled from her native land in order not to face her grieves over and over again. However that attempt was not enough to get rid of bad experiences; she added some more with her lover for whom she wasted all her money in order to heal his illness and who left her for the sake of another woman after all the things she did. The overall result in all these different experiences is the unhappiness in Madame Ranevsky's attitude towards life. Besides, upon her arrival she begins to deal with the auction matter about the orchard, which will take place very soon. So, there is almost no hope in her present and future life. That is why the orchard becomes a kind of refuge, in which she sees the happiness of her childhood and her memories with her parents as the daughter of an upper class family.

Madame Ranevsky: My nursery, dear delightful room... I used to sleep here when I was little... [*Cries*] And here I am, like a little child. (Chekhov 1964: 208)

Here we see two symbols of the play; the orchard and the past. The cherry orchard is important in that it is the unifying element for all the characters. Everyone in the play has something to do with it. For Madame Ranevsky, the orchard is the symbol of childhood happiness in line with feeling of security her upper class origin provides. She could never attain this happiness in her life again. Deer states that "nearly everyone envisages it [the orchard] as a Utopia where he can achieve the unified, purposeful life he so desperately wants" (1958: 33). However, it is clear that Utopia is the land that does not exist. In a realistic approach, it is destroyed at the end of the play as a symbol of the old lifestyle and as suggested by Anya and Trofimov a new period awaits them from that moment on.

Anya: Good bye, home! Good bye to the old life!

Trofimov: Welcome to the new life! (Chekhov 1964: 226)

Still, when Madame Ranevsky came back at the beginning of the play, she wanted to save herself from the burden of adult life. In this regard, nursery is especially significant since it was Madame Ranevsky's room and she used to see the orchard every morning in that room. Her present mood is the same as a little child as she also states.

Madame Ranevsky: Oh, my childhood, my innocence! It was in this nursery I used to sleep, from here I looked out into the orchard, happiness waked with me every morning and in those days the orchard was just the same, nothing has changed. (Chekhov 1964: 212)

In the case of Madame Ranevsky childhood and the orchard exist together, since both of them refer to cheerful incidents. However, there is also a negative aspect in terms of her childhood. Although she left her country to start a new life, she has to come back because she believes in the value of her past and she cannot become an adult in every sense. Gorky says that “here they are, the weepy Ranevskaia and the other former masters of the Cherry Orchard, as egotistical as children and as flabby as senile old men” (qtd. in Evdokimova 2000: 628). Thus, she cannot start a completely new life due to the restricting effect her past creates on her.

This inability to conform as a characteristic feature in her entire life is quite important in signifying the inability of the upper class to the shifting circumstances. Deer believes that “all of the main characters are torn by contradictory desires and impulses” (1958: 33). Imagining her mother and the happy days in her childhood, Madame Ranevsky looks as if she will solve all the problems. However, she does not do anything literally such as applying Lopahin’s suggestion to avoid the sale of the orchard. Deer thinks that “they desire to keep the orchard intact as a symbol of the past bliss” (1958: 33). These dreamlike references to the past will prevent all the characters from acting for a concrete solution. “And since they allow their thoughts and words to take the place of any direct action which might help them achieve what they want, they must fall” (Deer 1958: 34). Madame Ranevsky’s problem is with her obsession. Although she is kind and warmhearted towards everyone and in fact perhaps the only character understanding the real meaning of love, her generosity in spending money even when she needs it most urgently or her indifference to everything her lover did when he calls her back to Paris presents her like an unreasonable and unstable woman. She cannot move for the future due to her strong connections with the past. Maybe she will be able to do so after losing the estate and the orchard being cut down by Lopahin. With regard to her case, Valency claims that “it is not at all that she suffers a paralysis of the will, nor is she too flighty to understand, nor too absent-minded to make a sensible decision. [...] The psychic impotence and the economic bankruptcy of her class at this period of history are aspects of the same illness. The nobility is at the end of life” (1966: 270). So the question is “to die [or not to die] nobly, if that is possible” (Valency 1966: 270). With another interpretation, her attitude may also be considered as “the pride in the gentry” which prevents any compromise with other classes and paves the way for the utter loss (Valency 1966: 271). Taking the real incidents into consideration, this old class cannot survive in the new age without conforming to the new norms and adopting a compromising attitude. It may also be argued that the landowners are also not to be blamed since the economic order in favour of them has decayed and in this new order they will have no function (Valency 1966: 280). Since the whole country is reconstructed in terms of the economic and social aspects, the old order and its representatives should be cleared away like the cherry orchard which is not fertile as it was in the past. In this respect, “like the gentry themselves, the orchard is a touching relic of the past: glorious in blossom, an image of a gracious and leisurely age, but essentially of no use” (Hahn 1979: 15). Valency believes that the beautiful and useless orchard may be likened to the well-intentioned and useless upper class (1966: 282). That is why these two representatives of the past share the same destiny.

This emphasis on the process of change brings another character, Firs, to the foreground as another representative of the old order. Hahn states that “Firs’s voice is from the past, when the orchard was abundant with life and work, beautiful but also productive” (1979: 15). Although there are other servants in the household, Firs is special. He is eighty-seven years old and reminds the audience of the old ways of Russian life together with the

splendid days of nobility. In addition to the cherry orchard, he acts like a bridge to the past and through his remarks, provides the audience with a concrete proof to distinguish between the past and the present. The clear distinction between these two periods is identified in him. Since he is a man from the past and has no place in this new lifestyle, he feels ready to die when he sees Madame Ranevsky at the beginning of the play. Similarly, he has no place to go other than the one his master shows if the estate is sold. He represents the old serfdom, which was left back in the history. Russia changes and the old ways lose their validity. Similarly, Firs is also losing his validity. Thus, his death at the end is significant for the old lifestyle. Besides, when he comes across with the stationmaster and the post office clerk in the third act of the play during the entertainment, he draws an explicit picture of the difference that he witnessed in his lifetime.

Firs: I don't feel well. In the old days we used to have generals, barons and admirals dancing at our balls, now we send for the post-office clerk and the station master and even they are not overanxious to come. (Chekhov 1964: 220)

Although the loss of the orchard brings forth significant consequences for all the characters, the consequence is fatal for Firs. Fergusson asserts that passing of the old estate marks a clear end for Firs who has no place in the new order which is in the process of establishment while the orchard is cut down (1967: 152). As the Russian society sets sail for a new future, his death is not recognised by anyone at the very end of the play. The process of social change does not pay attention to those who lose their validity and Chekhov represents this attitude. The individual Firs also stands for a whole generation that disappears in Russia. Like the orchard and nobility, he fades away in the old house that Madame Ranevsky had come at the beginning with futile hopes. The ending hence is not optimistic for the old lifestyle.

Finally, there is the newly arising bourgeoisie represented in Lopahin who began as a serf in the estate and with the gradual change in Russian society came to the point of purchasing the estate as a rich merchant. This shift experienced by Lopahin might be regarded as a proof for the long period the play covers. Stretching out to the times before the Emancipation Act, this character depicts the reality in Russian society. Therefore, Lopahin is the character that represents modernity and new economic conditions that change lifestyle and social values in all Russia. At the beginning of the play, he declares his own past in the serfdom.

Lopahin: [A *pause*] Little peasant...My father was a peasant, it's true, but here am I in a white waistcoat and brown shoes, like a pig in a bun shop. Yes, I'm a rich man, but for all money, come to think, a peasant I was, and a peasant I am. (Chekhov 1964: 207)

He is a member of the newly appearing and rapidly rising middle class. However, Lopahin is unique in that he is fully aware of and compatible with his past and at the same time he knows his present situation. Although Madame Ranevsky is a member of the upper class family that ruled over Lopahin's ancestors, he is on good terms with her as well, reminding the audience about her kind treatment when he was beaten by his father.

Lopahin: She [Madame Ranevsky] is a splendid woman. A good-natured, kindhearted woman. When I was a lad of fifteen, my poor father [...] he gave me a punch in the face with his fist and made my nose bleed. We were in the yard here. Lyubov Andreyevna – I can see her now – she was a slim young girl then – took me to wash my face and then brought me into this very room, into the nursery. “Don't cry, little peasant,” says she, “it will be well in time for your wedding day”. (Chekhov 1964: 207)

With regard to these remarks, Deer states that “he still remembers the time when the honor of being in the nursery could compensate for his father's beatings” (1958: 32). He does not forget that incident, maybe to remind himself about the class difference and for a later payback. Lopahin also scolds himself for desiring to rise above the class he belonged to and calls himself “a pig in a bun shop” (Chekhov 1964: 207). He is obsessed with working all the time and enlarging his business. He knows that everything he owns is associated with working harder. The capitalist economy of the time encourages individuals to look for more profit as a fundamental feature. Although he is in love or rather seems to be in love with Varya, he cannot spare some time for her and propose contrary to all expectations.

Varya: Mamma. I can't make him an offer myself. [...] Everyone talks; but he says nothing or else makes jokes. I see what it means. He's growing rich, he's absorbed in business, he has no thoughts of me. (Chekhov 1964: 219)

His unsatisfied desire to be higher in the social scale shows itself after he has succeeded in buying the orchard as well. In a psychoanalytic approach, all the repressed feelings in the subconscious become apparent with the greatest success in his life. It is a sort of taking revenge on the loathsome past.

Lopahin: [*Stamps with his feet*] Don't laugh at me! If my father and my grandfather could rise from their graves and see all that has happened! How their Yermolay, ignorant, beaten Yermolay, who used to run about barefoot in winter, how that very Yermolay has bought the finest estate in the world! I have bought the estate where my father and grandfather were slaves, where they weren't even admitted into the kitchen. [...] Hey musicians! Play! I want to hear you. Come all of you, and look how Yermolay Lopahin will take the ax to the cherry orchard, how the trees will fall to the ground! (Chekhov 1964: 222)

Just as in Madame Ranevsky's case, childhood plays an important role in Lopahin, but in a completely different way. He has no tendency to go back to the past since it is full of miseries and unhappiness. Beckerman claims that Lopahin's insensitivity towards Madame Ranevsky upon becoming the owner of the estate and his “deliberate struggle to postpone the marriage proposal,” which actually means to become a relative of the family that ruled his ancestors, are not random behaviours (1971: 395). He seems to be on good terms with the old nobility though he is just looking for his benefit. He is a symbol of “the new life cutting down the old life” at the end of the play (Baehr 1999: 107). Lopahin's purpose is to move forward to the future. The middle class he represents moreover is in search of modernity that entails development and a close relationship with the future. As the middle class becomes centre of the society, the attributions of modernity become much more important. In that sense with his practical and materialistic understanding of life, Lopahin appears as a kind of contradiction to the entire land based, feudal system of the past and its representatives.

When all these representations are taken into account, Fergusson believes that “Chekhov shows us a moment of change in society and he shows us a ‘pathos’; but the elements of his composition are always taken as objectively real. He offers us various rationalizations, various images and various feelings, which cannot be reduced either to one emotion or to one idea” (1967: 155). Following this manner, Chekhov presents the reality of his time as it is. The characters and the incidents are chosen in such a way that the audience in the theatre hall feel Madame Ranevsky's pain upon losing her state or Lopahin's happiness upon avenging all his lifelong troubles. In comparing these two

characters, Hahn claims that while Madame Ranevsky stands for the present, Lopahin is the real future of Russia (1979: 15). As the symbol of the past, namely the orchard, is replaced by the future, the present is also forced to move forward. The future is actually foreshadowed at the beginning of Act II with the stage directions: “*The open country. An old shrine, long abandoned and fallen out of the perpendicular; near it a well, large stones that have apparently once been tombstones and an old garden seat. [...] In the distance a row of telegraph poles and far, far away on the horizon there is faintly outlined a great town [...]. It is near sunset*” (Chekhov 1964: 213). According to Hahn, the setting sun in this depiction is a sign of “the demise of the landed class” and the abandoned shrine is another element of pessimism for the future (1979: 27). In a similar manner, Barricelli says that “on the optical level, we note that, as the tombstones of Act II counterpoise the chapel, so do the telephone poles the cherry orchard. The industrial and the natural, the city and the meadow, the skeletal and the rounded, termination and hope, face each other in precarious balance” (1981: 119). In fact, the orchard is also going to be replaced by the villas that will be inhabited by the city dwellers who will arrive by train. Thus, the rural, old lifestyle is definitely defeated against the new world order. The sound of the breaking string at the end in this respect is quite meaningful for it notices a pessimistic future. Barricelli argues that “*The Cherry Orchard* is the drama of death, the disappearance of a past with all that it contained that was good and bad, with all the nostalgia it will create, with all the sadness over the passage of time. [...] The snapping string is the surrealistic symbol relating to it, reminiscent of the final snipping” (1981: 115). This sudden end of the play without long farewells symbolizes the abrupt shift between the past and the present, the upper and the middle classes, the old and the young generations. The world is in transition and its impacts are reflected through the individuals and the society as a whole.

OSBORNE’S LOOK BACK IN ANGER

In John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* staged in 1956, there was also a society going through dramatic changes. The English society in the 1950s still felt the deep effects of the World War II and witnessed the reaction of a generation squeezed between what is known as the tradition represented particularly by the 1930s and the new era devoid of norms beginning with the end of the war and resuming throughout the 1950s. In addition to the generation problems, the wartime conditions had also led to a change in the traditional gender roles since the women had to work when the men were fighting at war. As the men turned back from the battlefield, a conflict was inevitable. A general look over the 1950s “illustrates that on the one hand women were willing to enter employment areas and earn their own money, but on the other hand, traditional pre-war patterns and attitudes continued to obstruct their improvement in these areas” (Öztürk 1993: 14). Although the war had ended, most of the women wanted to continue working in the post-war period since “their earnings had given them a feeling of independence” (Öztürk 1993: 15). There was also gradual shift in the traditional husband and wife roles. “The experience of war work meant that they [women] would not return to being quite the same sort of housewives as they had been before” (Öztürk 1993: 15). A similar change was true for the men at the same time. As they returned to have their peacetime lives just like in the pre-war period, they had to conform to a new role as a result of the changing manners in women. Thus the image of the military hero during the war was supported by “the pre-war bread winner and the head of the family with fulfilled sexuality” (Öztürk 1993 17). It may be argued that, in writing this play, Osborne deals with the gender conflict between Jimmy and Alison beside Helena while portraying these characters as members of different and in fact opposing classes of the British society. The protagonist Jimmy’s anger is both a reflection of the attitude

towards the past and the incongruities of the present day. Therefore, the class conflict in line with the gender roles might be analysed since Osborne presents these two aspects next to one another.

The first encounter of the reader with Jimmy takes place with the depiction given in the stage directions: “He [Jimmy] is a disconcerting mixture of sincerity and cheerful malice, of tenderness and freebooting cruelty; restless, importunate, full of pride, a combination which alienates the sensitive and insensitive alike. Blistering honesty, or apparent honesty, like his, makes few friends. To many he may seem sensitive to the point of vulgarity” (Osborne 1966: 9-10). As Osborne puts forward in this initial description, Jimmy is a man of conflicts. Most of these conflicts seem to be identified as his unchanging personal qualities reflected on other people around him as well. Hence by making use of this character with inner conflicts as the mouthpiece of an entire generation, Osborne will give voice to the British society of the 1950s. “Obviously, he [Jimmy] is not an ideal character. He suffers, is frustrated and makes terribly wrong choices – as the last scene makes clear, even for those who imagine that his blasphemy against life when he hopes that Alison ‘will have a baby and that it will die’ is a mere expression of John Osborne’s sense of values” (Dyson 1968: 25). His inhospitable attitude towards life in general will specifically focus on the middle class, which Jimmy takes as the source of all problems he himself and the working class have to encounter.

Although Jimmy looks like having problems in his domestic arena with his wife Alison based on the typical husband and wife conflicts, the real cause of the conflicts is related to the difference between the couple in terms of their social class and social background. Alison comes from a middle class family with all due features creating anger in her husband, whereas Jimmy has a working class background. For him the working class is associated with all the ideal qualities to live like humans. Dyson claims that “in Jimmy Porter, one is confronted with a man whose anger undoubtedly starts in human idealism and the desire that men should be more honest, more alive, more human than they normally are” (1968: 26). Hence, while he teases his wife with her education, he mocks at Cliff in the same room for his ignorance. A closer look into Jimmy as the play progresses shows that “there are marked symptoms of a persecution complex, both in the tenacity with which he clings to his working-class origin as an occasion for masochism and in his readiness to see his wife’s continued correspondence with her parents in terms of conspiracy and betrayal” (Dyson 1968: 26-27). Actually, this is the point where the main conflict of the play arises. Because of the lack of communication even in the one room attic they dwell, these people do not understand each other. Osborne actually depicts the case in the post-war society as a whole.

Jimmy believes that all the humanly necessities to survive in this meaningless, aimless and hypocritical world lie within the working class that holds the best and long lasting friendships. His response to his best friend Hugh’s mother is an exact sign of this point of view. Alison describes Jimmy’s attitude towards Mrs. Tanner as such: “[...] Oh – how can you describe her? Rather – ordinary. What Jimmy insists on calling working class. A Charwoman who married an actor, worked hard all her life and spent most of it struggling to support her husband and her son. Jimmy and she are very fond of each other” (Osborne 1966: 64). In line with this view, Trussler argues that “Jimmy Porter is self-consciously proletarian – and self-protectively proud of it” (1969: 43). Jimmy’s obsession with his working class origins leads to inner conflicts in his identity. Therefore Trussler further claims that “[h]is [Jimmy’s] own hypergamous marriage has apparently damned him in the

eyes of his former friends: and he is no doubt well aware that his wife's social condescension resembles that of his own mother – bourgeois intellectual as she was, 'all for being associated with minorities', provided they were the smart, fashionable ones" (1969: 52). In this respect, it is possible to claim that Jimmy sees a substitution for his own mother in Hugh's mother and the way he asks her opinion before getting married to Alison may be regarded as a proof for this approach. The fact that he married a girl from a higher social class makes him feel "frail" and "insecure" (Goldstone 1982: 40). In other words, his aggressive manners towards his wife actually reflect his problems with the upper classes. Since he leads a monotonous life, which makes it impossible for him to confront the real problem, he attacks Alison and later on Helena.

Moving on to the core of the problem, Goldstone states that "*Look Back in Anger* [...]" concerns itself with the increasingly destructive consequences of an unhappy marriage between Jimmy Porter [...] and Alison Redfern" (1982: 37). The critic depicts Jimmy as "a young working class intellectual [with a university degree]" while Alison is "a beautiful, sensitive girl who has left the apparent security of her upper middle class family to live with Jimmy in Bohemian poverty but emotional intensity" (Goldstone 1982: 37). For the first viewers of the play in 1956, it isn't "possible to forget the weariness of Alison enduring the abuse that Jimmy heaped upon her, seemingly without reason and without end, as he kept attacking Alison, her family, the English establishment, and apparently every value of bourgeois society" (Goldstone 1982: 38). The fact that Alison's brother Nigel has a good and respectable position in the society makes Jimmy angry towards the entire British establishment:

Well, you've never heard so many well-bred commonplaces come from beneath the same bowler hat. The Platitude from Outer Space – that's brother Nigel. He'll end up in the cabinet one day, make no mistake. [...] Now Nigel is just about as vague as you can get without being actually invisible. And invisible politicians aren't much use to anyone – not even to *his* supporters! And nothing is more vague about Nigel than his knowledge. His knowledge of life and ordinary human beings is so hazy, he really deserves some sort of decoration for it – a medal inscribed 'For Vaguerly in the Field'. [...] Besides he is patriot and an Englishman and he doesn't like the idea that he may have been selling out his countryman all these years, so what does he do? The only thing he *can* do – seek sanctuary in his own stupidity. (Osborne 1966: 20)

Despite this seemingly powerful speech criticizing all English politics, military affairs and social establishment, the stage direction in fact shows the reader the real frailty behind Jimmy's manners: "*His cheerfulness has deserted him for a moment. Jimmy is rather shakily triumphant. He cannot allow himself to look at either of them [Alison and Cliff] to catch their response to his rhetoric, so he moves across to the window, to recover himself, to look out*" (Osborne 1966: 21).

The same offensive manner is obvious in his depictions with regard to Alison's father, Colonel Redfern as well. Jimmy once again refers to the different points of view between them about the contemporary issues and Redfern's derogatory remarks about him. Colonel's background as a ruler in Indian colony and exploitation of other people through colonialism disturb Jimmy's proletarian views. In a sense, the colonel represents what is against the notion of brotherhood for Jimmy. Father-in-law's military career may also be considered as an opposing feature to a working class member who puts emphasis on the civil action:

I suppose people like me aren't supposed to be very patriotic. Somebody said – what was it – we get our cooking from Paris (that's a laugh), our politics from Moscow and our morals from Port Said. [...] I hate to admit it, but I think I can understand how her Daddy must have felt when eh came back from India, after all those years away. The old Edwardian brigade do make their brief little world look pretty tempting. All home-made cakes and croquet, bright ideas, bright uniforms. Always the same picture: high summer, the long days in the sun, slim volumes of verse, crisp linen, the smell of starch. What a Romantic picture. [...] If you've no world of your own, it's rather pleasant to regret the passing of someone else's. (Osborne 1966: 17)

About Jimmy's criticism against Alison's brother and father, there is a common point against the established values that are respected by both men. After all, Nigel and the colonel stand up for the establishment without allowing any change. The concept of change is implicitly important for Jimmy who is not contented with the present situation he is living in. Hence, it may be argued that while talking against these two men and the values they represent, Jimmy also gives voice to a general problem in his own generation. "He is certainly prepared to denounce his own generation for getting too used too readily to a diminished role in the world" (Quigley 1997: 42). That is why in criticizing his generation and those authority figures like Alison's brother and father, Jimmy says that, "[n]obody thinks, nobody cares. No beliefs, no convictions and no enthusiasm. Just another Sunday evening" (Osborne 1966: 17). He in fact tells "the ills of a difficult moment in English history that Jimmy, in effect, helps both to shape and define" (Quigley 1997: 43). In this respect, Quigley believes that although "the picture presented is biased, distorted and exaggerated, it is sufficiently true to speak of a generation" (43). This attitude in Jimmy is hence a result of a world of transitions. As the society goes through radical changes, Jimmy looks for others to blame and this is in fact what he can only do under these circumstances. His lifestyle on a typical Sunday, the only day that he freely spares for himself, proves his inability: "God, how I hate Sundays! It's always so depressing, always the same. We never seem to get any further, do we? Always the same ritual. Reading the papers, drinking tea, ironing. A few more hours and another week gone. Our youth is slipping away. Do you now that?" (Osborne 1966: 15). In another interpretation, Jimmy is actually to be blamed for not doing anything other than following the same habits all his life and blaming his wife and her social class for everything around him. Just looking back in anger will not solve any of his problems.

Jimmy's other interaction with the social class problem takes place when he has a relationship with Alison's friend Helena who feels affection towards Jimmy in time although initially she has no other feeling towards Jimmy apart from hatred. Gradually she comes to accept the unbearable conditions Alison had to live through. As regards this tripartite relationship, Dyson states that "Helena is an entirely honest character, from a world poles apart from Jimmy's own. She is middle-class not only by birth, but by instinct and conviction; which is why she is essentially disruptive to Jimmy" (1968: 28). The critic thus interprets this explicit middle class characterization as the reason why "she can never really hurt him as Alison can" (Dyson 1968: 28). Contrary to his tender feelings and love for Alison, Jimmy seems to be much more concerned about the sexual and material aspects in this relationship with Helena. In fact "Alison is far nearer to Jimmy, since he is trying to win not only her love, but her allegiance to his vision of life; a vision where the 'book of rules' must be closed at the outset and committal worked out in individual terms" (Dyson 1968: 29). This is also why Alison's letters to her family seem to disappoint him more than Helena's leaving. The "book of rules" emphasized by the critic in the above quotation is

actually a reference to Helena who believes in the necessity of these rules in personal relationships. She is like a visiting royalty in Jimmy's life (Taylor 1968: 77). On the contrary, Jimmy is certainly fighting against the conventions and he believes that as opposed to rules, sincerity is indispensable in human relationships as he shows in his reaction to Alison's secret letters. So, it may be argued that although these two women walk into Jimmy's life with their particular social values, both of them give rise to different protests in his responses.

A closer look into Jimmy's characterisation shows that the frailty mentioned within the harsh attack on Nigel is actually a characteristic feature of the protagonist in that he is fragile in all his criticisms and human relationships. Despite his harsh attitude, he loves and cares for his wife; his friend and his ill mother are so important for him that he can leave everything behind; his close friend Cliff is indispensable for him since without Cliff, who is a "no man's land" in his relationship with Alison, it would almost be impossible for him to resume his marriage (Trussler 1969: 49). Moreover, he is aware of all the conflicts that he personally experiences and his generation cannot solve. The role of his father as a revolutionary ideal, but with an unrealized status even by the closest relatives in the pre-war period is still open to debate in the construction of his identity. On this point, what Trussler brings forth is quite important as he claims that Jimmy looks for solutions by nostalgia as it is obvious in his long conversation with Helena when he mentions his experience about his father (Trussler 1969: 54). Therefore, Jimmy's continuous obsession with the past may be taken as the reason of all failures stemming from the lack of a clear-sighted look into the future (Trussler 1969: 54). In turn, this failure nourishes anger and Jimmy finds himself in a kind of vicious circle producing anger and discontent all the time. However, Quigley claims that the return of the couple, that is Jimmy and Alison, at the end of the play to their flirtatious game is not an escapist incident contrary to what it has been throughout the play, but a renewal for the relationship (1997: 50). In other words, there is still hope for the relationship and maybe for the generation which Osborne represents in Jimmy's character. While the playwright portrayed Jimmy as the speaker of an unsatisfied generation, he analysed the post-war generation with regard to the problems of the decade covering the 1950s and comparing with the norms of the 1930s through Jimmy's late father. Taylor finally asserts that Osborne cannot find any great causes other than "trivial problems" which, when come together, lead to disillusionment in the character (1968: 81). Therefore, it may be stated that the deficiencies of the modern world made Jimmy as he is presented on the stage.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it may be argued that by means of these two plays, the conflicts between social classes with regard to the early twentieth century Russia stretching back to the mid-nineteenth century and the postwar British society are analyzed. Chekhov follows a path in which social classes come up against each other with implicit criticism on the reasons for their conflicts, whereas Osborne adopts an explicit attitude in exposing the desperate daily life of his characters, which result from other social matters. Contrary to the moderate Chekhovian style delivering his message without distracting scenes, Osborne takes his audience directly into the core of the argument in a room full of monologues as if they were watching a political play. In other words, Chekhov does not interfere in the ordinary relationships among the characters, but Osborne deliberately draws them into conflict with each other and tries to represent clashing social classes. Although there is a gap of approximately half a century between these two plays about two different societies, one

common point is the uneasiness between on the one hand nobility and lower class and on the other hand middle class and working class respectively. Due to the economic, political, educational and social differences, an infinite process of labeling others like enemies in an inhospitable manner continues. Self-interest and the advantages of a specific community such as a particular social class play a vital role in this division. Since both plays deal with decades which witness great changes for these two societies in almost all these aspects, we see unstable social conditions leading people to look for their own profit. Until a permanent and confidential social order providing hope for these social classes is established, the individuals continue to struggle against each other reflecting the characteristics of the social classes they belong to. Both Chekhov and Osborne succeed in creating their characters as representatives of particular social classes, so it is possible to see clearly the social class concept with particular differences. The ultimate result of this division remains to be unhappiness and social discontent for all individuals.

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