

# Thematic Study of John Osborne's Play 'Watch It Come Down'

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## Abstract

John Osborne's play 'Watch It Come Down' is supposed to be the play having a prediction pertaining to the future of present-generation that is rapidly going on losing faith in ethics and religion. The tone of the language is satirical in several dialogues and conversations. The major themes in this play are love and sex in which the present generation is badly indulged. John Osborne's 'Watch It Come Down' is the last play which has focused on the burning issues of contemporary Europe. It shows us how the personal relations happen to fall into confusions, how the mutual understanding of husband and wife spoils and all faiths harbour between them decline and how the minor things, if frequently ignored, change into devastating causes of damnation. Right from the literary journey commenced from 'Look Back in Anger' to 'Watch It Come Down', John Osborne has continuously attained the image of an 'angry young man'. Hence this play also exhibits tension and frustration of modern-generation; compelled to wander in the want of proper profession aslike the playwright exhibits in his most popular play 'Look Back in Anger'. It also shows how the good people change into bad ones if their desirable fortune remains absent from their lives.

**Keywords:** Angry-Young Man', Faith, Contemporary, Tense, Frustration, Nostalgia And Homo-Sexuality.

### Introduction

John James Osborne (1929-1994), generally known as 'angry young man' has world-wide fame and recognition. His 'Look Back in Anger' is the most famous creation through which he got this wonderful image of 'angry young man'. Through this play Osborne has revealed numerous aspects of contemporary Europe. It is an autobiographical play in which he has revealed almost all the aspects of his life. 'Watch It Come Down' is Osborne's last play which is quite different from the earlier plays written by him. It covers many social problems of contemporary society. In the literary journey commenced from, 'Look Back in Anger' to 'Watch It Come Down', John Osborne has been swinging into the life and life-struggle of young generation whether it is of Jimmy porter of 'Look Back in Anger' or Ben Prosser of 'Watch It Come Down'.

### Research Methodology

To write this article a certain research methodology has been set and adopted in which, first of all, the text of 'Watch It Come Down' has been studied with full concentration on the themes infused in the play. Related articles, theses, discussions and reference books have been consulted for the purpose. Some important themes have been selected for the study upon which the discussion will be done in the part of 'discussion'.

### Limitations

The article is thoroughly concentrated on the major themes; sex, love, tense and frustration, joblessness and falling of man in to bad companies. Had the study of minor themes also been done, the findings would have surely come related with other dimensions too.

### Discussion

In 'Look Back in Anger', Osborne has picked up the burning issue of unemployment-problem which has swallowed many precious lives of young fellows. Jimmy Porter, its protagonist, remains always in frustration due to a want of proper profession. In 'Watch It Come Down', he has focused on some other problems of contemporary society.

According to Steven Gale, this play is the best one of Osborne's later plays. Gale also claims that Osborne expresses his frustrations and fears about the new world more seriously in his later period. On the basis of themes, it comprises the theme of death, arts, homosexuality, and nostalgia for the good old days and related topics become more central in his later writings.

In 'Watch It Come Down' (1975), Osborne seems to be a predictor who sees the problems of the coming era. He is highly worried about the forthcoming generation



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which would be overloaded with so many unthinkable and unbearable mental burdens. Having done keen observation of the present generation, Osborne concluded that the present generation had lost its faith in ethics and fell down into the worst world of superstitions.

Such problems have been raised by other dramatists too but Osborne has raised them in a different manner showing his own interest and self-victimization. As being a man of young-generation, he, himself, is a part and parcel of society; poverty-ridden and problem-facing. Due to lack of rational knowledge most of the young people are wandering aimlessly. Their future is in darkness. Their level of ethics is neither developed nor is it developing.

This play has focused on a married couple of a famous film director Ben Prosser and his second wife Sally, a novelist. The action takes place in an old railway station which was converted into a ranch house by Ben Prosser in which his wife and some other people live. Some of them are Shirley, (Sally's painter sister), Glen (an upper-class homosexual historian and biographer who is about to die), Jo (Glen's Lover and a loving woman interested in arts) and Raymond (a young working-class homosexual).

According to Herbert Goldstone, starting the commune by converting a railway station is an effort to shore up the marriage by creating an extended family through which Sally and Ben Prosser and the four others living with them could deal with their undeniable dependency needs. It can be claimed that Ben Prosser and Sally are trying to save their marriage with the help of other people living in the country-house with them.

Throughout the play, Ben and Sally have been shown attacking each other violently; verbally and physically. They kept on quarrelling. They are both angry at each other, particularly, because of the fact that they are sexually frustrated. Sally comments on their sexual life and says, "Our sex pitch has been washed out for years."<sup>1</sup>

One of the main reasons for their frustration can be supposed to be lack of communication between both. They do not try to talk to each other about what they really feel. Here, John Osborne has drawn our attention towards the problems of social, domestic and married life. He has shown us how the little matters come to be true to the devastating elements in life. They are both aware of the fact that there is a problem with their marriage but they do not like to discuss over the matters and do not try to solve them.

Here, John Osborne has slightly attacked the married people who do not play their positive and balanced role in society. Instead, they want to see what other people can do about their marriage. They do not feel satisfaction and imitate others. So, Sally asks Ray to spread a rumour among the others that she and Ben are separating. Emine Tecimer writes: "Although the couple does not intend to separate and on is only pretending in order to evoke their friend's reaction, ironically they admit that a separation is possible and Ray explains to Glens that it is almost as though they want their friends to make a decision for them".<sup>2</sup>

Osborne wants to point out the facts that communication is very necessary between husband and wife. Due to lack of communication, they cannot establish healthy and peaceful relations. In this play, due to lack of communication between Ben and Sally, both are compelled to lead a life of tension and frustration because they cannot openly say that they love each other. However, sometimes they try to express what they feel. For instance, Ben says to Sally:

"You have great capacity for love. And nowhere to put it .....You only accept love. You can't respond to it."<sup>3</sup>

There is another couple in the house too. It is of Glen and Jo. They seem to be the foil to Ben and Sally because they are a loving couple that can say whatever they feel about each-other. Through the play the tender moments of Jo and Glen come immediately after Ben and Sally's quarrels;

"Jo: My dear heart, I love you..... You are what I care for... Even in my bed with others..... and (keep) my heart in yours.

Glen: It is there, my dearest. It is there. Always."<sup>4</sup>

The glimpses of repentance and reconciliation are quite visible in this play. Ben and Sally do feel sorry when they think that they have built a wall between both and their mutual understanding has gone away. Their detachment has poisoned their peace and happiness. The frequent quarrel has made a ditch which is very difficult to be filled up. However, after their bitter quarrels, they can apologize for the things they have created since they realize that they might hurt each-other. And they try to make it up:

Ben: I'm sorry.

Sally: No, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said those things. It is my fault.

Ben: I-I, well, bad time..... But I bought you a present....

Sally: Thank you. That was sweet of you...."<sup>5</sup>

Ben and Sally are the main focus of the play. According to Gale, Ben and Sally are emotional, irrational, and noisy and Glen and Jo are the intellectual centre of the play. The real action of the play centres on Ben and Sally; however, Glen and Jo articulate the thematic meaning. It can be asserted that the search for communication is one of the main themes of the play because all the characters search for contact with other people therefore; they use their arts as a means for communication. Ben makes movies: "Sally tries to write a novel, Shirley paints and Glen writes a biographical book on the 20<sup>th</sup> century, although he admits that books are an 'outmoded' form of communication."<sup>6</sup>

Since Sally and Ben are sexually frustrated, as it was mentioned before they search for physical contact with other people. Immediately, after one of their quarrels, Ben phones his ex-wife Marion and he says that he wants to see her. After the phone-call, he asks Jo if he could kiss her and then kisses her passionately. Sometimes later Sally comes to Jo and they talk:

"Sally: Do you love me?

Jo: Yes, I always have.... Do you want to make love to me?

Sally: Yes. I want to kiss you on the mouth. My tongue between your bright teeth. I want to hold you in my arms a whole night with our bodies like twin fortresses, lap in lap... May I kiss you?"<sup>7</sup>

It can be claimed that both Ben and Sally, instead of looking at them, are looking for other people in order to receive love and passion. They both go to Jo since as she herself claims "she is a loving creature". Jo can love anyone because according to her love is like religion without pain."<sup>8</sup>

Let us see what happens one night when all the people in the house except for Sally and Ray come together and Jo tells them that only love can save them because of the fact that only by loving can they release themselves. So she offers: "We'll all have dinner and talk and think of love, even if there are lumps of hate within us. Please say yes. There isn't long."<sup>9</sup>

Sally wants to do it as soon as possible because she thinks that time is running out. Hence, after doing the keen study of the play, we come to understand that 'Love' is the central theme and is given much significance in the sense that without love life is troublesome and such loveless life leads to frustration. For living a happy life, love is necessary. For instance, another reason for Ben's frustration is he thinks like Bill Maitland, that he is not loved by his daughter.

Bill Maitland tells Jo that he cried in front of his daughter which is despicable for him. When Marion says that his daughter loves and admires him, he says as if he was questioning his self-worth: "For what? Being a renegade father's no great shakes."<sup>10</sup>

Bill Maitland further tells Marison that he could not tell Sally, "I am neither liked nor loving."<sup>11</sup>

Here, John Osborne has attacked over the thirst and hunger of lovers of his contemporary England. He wants to tell us that the contemporary English society had lost in love and sex forgetting other fields of human-progress.

Not only Ben and Sally, the other people also have been shown burning in the fire of love and sex. The other people living in the ranch-house are also frustrated as they are not pleased to live in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in contemporary England.

However, the local people including the Major do not like their life-style and attacked them violently.

**Objective of the Study** The main objective behind writing this article is to focus on the themes of 'Watch It Comedown', a play by John Osborne. focusing on the themes, the researcher has selected some major themes.

**Conclusion** Hence, John Osborne's play 'Watch It Come Down' is a play which has love and sex as the prime themes. The main motive behind focussing on these social and moral problems, Osborne intends to improve the prevailing vices in contemporary society. If we talk of its tone of language used in the play, it is to say that the playwright has infused satire and irony in such a manner that they can be felt and enjoyed only when the reader goes through the play into the micro and macro reading.

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