

humour notwithstanding.

In conclusion, it may be mentioned that regionality as a literary characteristic was arguably first popularised by the Irish dramatist John Millington Synge (1871-1909), and at least twenty-four English writers have been identified by literary historians as 'regional novelists', among them being Phyllis Bentley (1894-1977), H. E. Bates (1905-74), Sid Chaplin (1916-86), Daphne du Maurier (1907-89), and James Hanley (1897-1985). In Indian literature, Phanishwar Nath Renu (1921-77), the writer of *Maila Anchal* ('The Soiled Linen') (1954), is often credited for being the most famous modern Indian regional writer. Lately, writers from North-East India have united to create a genre of 'North-east Indian Writers in English', among them being Jahn timer Barua, Siddhartha Sarma, Nitoo Das, Aruni Kashyap, Manash Pratim Borah, Janice Pariat, Nabanita Kanungo, Mona Zote, Jahn timer Baruah, Ankush Saikia, Bijoya Sawian and Uddipana Goswami. It can therefore be observed that Neoti Ray, who consciously writes her dialogues in the regional Rajbanshi language, has contributed most mellifluously to the sub-genre of 'northern Bengali fiction', begun by Samaresh Majumdar and Debesh Ray in the 1980s, which, if translated into English, seems to bear immense potentialities in the beginning of the 21st century.

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Containing the Chaos: Analyses of *The Entertainer* by Osborne Concerning the notion of a fragmented Alienation and the anxiety of the *Unheimliche*

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Abstract: John Osborne's works created a huge uproar in the late 50s and 60s when they first appeared. This study attempts to re-read the author's works and his time with all the shakeups; it is a re-reading of the past angst, the passed anger, through certain ever-present but overlooked psychic stress, anxiety of lessness/alienation. The study shows the disintegration of the modern man, centering on the plays of Osborne by linking it with the evocation of an 'uncanny' feeling for an increasingly unknown ambience, an unfamiliarity that breaks a full generation apart.

Keywords: Osborne's works, angst, psychic anxiety, alienation, Lessness.

“Puff your plume in anger and fight, cock,
Delight the owner of knife
Smear sting with pollen and flap your wings.
As I said: Twist the arms and keep them bent
Roll the rug and come down the terrace after disturbed sleep
Shoe boots ...rifle...whirring
bullets...shrieks...” (Malay, 2008)

It is a long story the origin of which can be traced back to years before; a story that talks of man as a helpless creature, diligently digging its own grave deeper and deeper. The present age, bystander of all its splintered truth points to an empty cultural landscape: a scenario that was so very evident and reacted throughout, as hinted even in the late 18th and 19th century. The incredibly astonishing 20th century with the significant years 1900, 1913, 1922, 1939, 1956 and so on has gone through more than a few explorations in and outside the sphere of the Individual. Drama provides a space where the questions are raised to problematize the identity and the placement of a modern man in the present age. Through its use of different insignia or emblematic representations, language, radical scenes, modern drama is considerably significant, so far as the ratification of the 'piece-full' reality(ies) of the slippery truth of a world is concerned, which at present time is considered to be pseudo-modern, neither modern nor postmodern¹. Multifaceted ideas, often with straightforward, almost rugged diction are presented as a form of communication. The plays of the time demonstrate the unfamiliarity with a changed world through these techniques for most of the times. The modern plays are envoys of that metamorphosis, the changing

patterns of a 'virtual' reality; it is a world in which the journey is from Reality to realities, from the collective to pluralities, from the known organic world to an unknown scattered existence. The stage after 1940s is consistent in projecting the inner crisis of the existence of the Empire and the aftermath. The plays of British dramatist John Osborne, whose 1956 play *Look Back in Anger*'s first appearance was thought to be, to quote critic Clive Barnes, the "actual birthday...of modern British theatre", (Barnes, 2012) provide the audience/reader that site that space in which one could readily distinguish the disoriented selves with fury, facing the irksome reality: people like Osborne felt extremely 'unfamiliar' with the state of contemporary affairs of the great old British world; consequently this alienation caused a rift between the man and his soil: the land, for them was becoming the other which destabilized his/their self/selves. The dissatisfaction primarily begot the clichéd metaphor tagged always with Osborne, 'anger'!

Beckett, in his *The Unnamable* (1949-50) presents a character who declares, "It is myself I hear, howling behind my dissertation" (Shimon, 2002, pp.60-1.). England as the 'Other' becomes a backdrop behind the protagonists 'howling' in a lost world. One can trace the story back to the year 1859 which is the publication year of Darwin's *Origin of the Species*. It is this book which shook the principle belief of creation, the genesis, God and the whole 'square' world; its theory engendered pandemonium amongst the existing intellectuals and had a long-lasting significance for the coming ages. The evolutionary premise terminated the concept of a fairy-tale, good-bad 'binaristic' universe, with all the inherent black and white duality, that species which one can see in the organic wholesomeness of the Elizabethan cosmos. Darwin's work showed the process of evolution: it put the entire procedure of the origin of life on earth in plain words of anatomy. As a result, the notion of a prevailing, pervading, pre-existing umbrella-like protection, named God/ church/ Law and along with these other ideas, say, faith, morality, ethics, truth, trust, love were gradually disappearing: the elementary, indispensable thought-atoms that had once gelled and held the human civilization, were collapsing. Things were falling apart, while the 'centre' was, if truth be told, becoming more and more crudely impotent to hold!

The Entertainer, Osborne's second play shows the protagonist Archie Rice whose father Billy Rice had been the man of the "good old days". (Carter, 1969, p.63) A six member family of the Rice and their individual story is pitted against the background of the Suez Crisis. Centering mainly upon Billy, his son Archie and grandson Mick—who dies being unable to endure the 'pity of war'²—the story iterates the theme of failure across generations. The old father Billy is a representative of the then dying music-hall, of which he was an unbeaten member. This father persona is a recurring one in many of Osborne's plays. They are respectable, placed at a distanced position, living in their 'age', incapable of accepting the 'compromise' of their time and unable to reconcile to the

present circumstances. Billy's character is a corollary to the German play *Maria Magdalena*, by Hebble, in which the father is irritated with everything, complaining against all and sundry. Again this play is an instance of the poly-vocality or multi-vocality and it sheds the 'accusation' that Osborne's plays are mere 'dramatic monologues'. Osborne himself acknowledges it, when incorporating scenes of this play in an anthology of extracts of contemporary plays. He thus explains it: "...my work does not consist entirely of dramatic monologues delivered by a central character striding a vague context inhabited by dramatic nonentities" (Trussler, 1969, p.70.).

Now, it is significant to note that the Suez Crisis of 1956 is a watermark; it is that moment when demonstrations are made in Trafalgar Square and the colonial Cyprus is problematized with an undercurrent of the imminent Hungarian revolution, though it is not mentioned in the play; it is the 'official' incident that spotted the end of Empire (both England and France). The Suez crisis drove the last nail in the coffin of the Edwardian nostalgia. A sense of loss, an impending indictment is perpetually brooding over the atmosphere of the play; it is expressed and developed through multiple narratorial voices and in several figurative ways. Symbolically enough, Billy ate the cake, made for Mick in act II, sc.6; Phoebe, got angry, as it was for her son whose death-news they are about to receive:

Phoebe: (to Billy) You've been at that cake.

Billy: What?

Phoebe: You've been at my cake. You've been at my cake, haven't you?

Billy: (flushing) I was hungry-

Phoebe: That cake was for Mick. It was for Mick, it wasn't for you.

Billy: I am sorry-

Phoebe: I bought it for Mick, it was for when he comes home.

Archie: Well, never mind. (Osborne, 1998, p.51.)

The cake symbolizes that 'fruit' of the Victorian prosperity, the known extravagance that has all been eaten up, by the earlier generation, living 'nothing' for posterity. The shoulder-shrugging ignorance of Billy or Archie here increases the anxiety of Phoebe leading to a compartmentalization that leaves her outside the construct 'family', alienated and fretful. For Archie the music hall³ with all its almost carnivalistic entertainment symbolizes the good old England, the merry people with the inner assurance of superiority, the extended owner of 13 million square miles of this earth. Here comes the significance of the title; the 'entertainer' is no more needed, as the mirth is non-existing. The second act closes with Archie singing blues while the third act opens with Frank's song, a post-funeral dirge probably, unashamedly unequivocal in its character: "Those playing fields of Eton/ Have really got us beaten..." (Plays, 1998, p.68). The nostalgia, that evolves proves its

vulnerability not in the desolation but in the ever-emerging sense of it in which the 'porters' are to live. They are gradually becoming 'bent impotents' by the heavy baggage stripped of the ability to stand straight: Archie belongs to a class of neurotics, who are unable to reunite with a meager present. His failure in proper communication with his daughter, his diatribe against his wife, his superficial affairs –all is to cover up the feeling of being unknown, therefore fighting the sense of the 'Unheimliche'. Osborne once commented on being a 'neurotic' in a talk regarding Tennessee Williams' *Streetcar Named Desire*:

The argument of the adjustment school is that characters like Blanche and Brick are not normal", and they aren't like *us*. In fact they are, yes-neurotics....Adler said somewhere that the neurotic is like the normal individual only more so. A neurotic is not less adequate than an auditorium full of "normals". Every character trait is a neurosis writ small. (*The Plays*, 1969, p.74.)

This present is incorrigibly harsh to survive: the unseen Mick's death is followed by Billy's death. Billy significantly dies when Archie was planning for a good come-back, and re-rising the dying music-hall. Death, both in its physical and metaphysical sense captures the leitmotif of the prolegomena of the modern society. An anachronistic approach is no longer applicable: Archie's attempt to regain the historical era is rendered useless. Billy, "fine figure of a man" (Simon, 1969, p.66.), with his silky, grey well-maintained hair and probably twenty-five years old dress is representing that known time; but the irony lies in the fact that, it is completely virtual. It proves its imaginary virtue by the sudden death, the removal of the 'father', a Metanarrative with which people are first born in this world. The sleazy pokerfaced womanizer and second rate comedian coming to us as a foil to his father surely had an attraction towards him; an anti-oedipal one may be. This half-man, half-virago persona, he is attributed with is unbearable to him too. This is subtly expressed in his paranoiac absorption in for Bass: "... all my life I've been searching for something. I've been searching for a draught Bass you can drink all the evening without running off every ten minutes that you can get drunk on without feeling sick..." (John, 1998, p.70). Intoxicated state provides a mind with a space, however virtual. Archie is trying to build up one, a space in order to take refuge, from a shallow place: "Listen, kiddie, you're going to find out that in the end nobody really gives a damn about anything except some little animal something. And for me that little animal something is draught Bass" (John, 1998, p.70). A self-indulgent Archie, foreshadowing Bill of *Inadmissible Evidence*, faces substantial amount of ignorance from his near ones. Phoebe, his wife is busy watching films; this woman is unable to stop Archie from womanizing and as a frustrated wife she desperately tries to build a separate niche for herself; his daughter Jean accuses him. For her he is a gory escapist "trying to escape the pain of being alive" (Alan, 1969, p.64.).

The play is an important document of the plurality a postmodern would

talk about. The sense of being alone is highly emphasized. Phoebe is an unsuccessful consort; she confines herself in her respective past, vainly trying to be easy-going, indulging in the cinemas, her “occupational therapy” (Alan, 1969, p.66.). Jean with an aborted relationship is trying to stay with her 'family' in a much well-made fashion. The question of the old Metanarrative again and again recurs, the absence of which heightens the tension. She is unwilling for a renewal of the relationship with Graham, who is significantly “...assured, well-educated, their emotional and imaginative capacity so limited it is practically negligible...” (Alan, 1969, p.70.). This character with its idiosyncrasies reveal the modernist pseudo-assertions; he is unthinking in temperament and brutally foils the prolegomena of a modernist individual like Archie in an unidentified subsistence. Frank, son of Archie belongs to another world, a person who prefers to go to jail instead of serving the 'good brave cause' like Mick. It is interesting to note that each and every character is caged within himself/herself and contradictory to another. They as a 'family' fall under a collective structure but within this Metanarrative collectivity of the nomenclature 'family', plurality encroaches. Jane points the finger at Archie; she accuses that he is the assassin of his own father Billy; Archie wanted his father to perform on stage, make a comeback only for survival; he is a third standard comedian and nobody is going to buy a ticket in his name. Billy is the successful one in the trade and that is the only reason behind this scheme. Parents of his new girlfriend were going to patronize but for the intervening 'moral' father. Billy tells them about the marital status of Archie, and the project is dismissed. What is illustrated is a wholesale mechanization of humanity and therefore a seclusion that proves to be a fatal one, so to say; men are machines with animal need; they are the muppets; the relationships are a strip row of the little bits and pieces offering a sequel of an 'accelerated' *UbuRoi*. The individual worlds merge as one tries to turn from one's own failure to another's fault. This is how Archie retorts about his wife:

Look at her. What has she got to do with people like you? People of intellect and sophistication. She is very drunk, and just now her muzzy, under-developed, untrained mind is racing because her blood stream is full of alcohol I can't afford to give her... (*The Plays of John Osborne*, 1969, p.71.)

The vicious invective is not only from Archie's side; his wife too is sharing this inheritance of hatred. This “hollow allegory”⁴ is reinforced in Phoebe's attack when Billy ate the cake made for the celebration of Mick's Pinteresque homecoming: “Oh, you'll buy another one! You're so rich! You're such a great big success! What's a little cake-... it was for Mick when he comes back, because I want to give him something...” (Plays, Vol.2, 1998, pp.51-2). The constructs break down; the relationships fall. In *The Entertainer*, this deconstruction of a known structure permeates through almost all the characters –Billy, Archie, Phoebe,

Frank. The self-sufficient, well-assured Graham Dodd and Brother Bill are two characters who do not belong to this group. The latter tries to surge Archie from the present ignominy by asking him to shift to Canada which Archie does not accept. Apart from them, Jean is another one who is shown to present the old ethical virtues. She is the last person to continue a mechanical, lustful relation with Graham, a person totally incapable of sublimation. These concepts, again, for example, sublimation, ethics, morality are the older constructs for which the modernists cry out. The same is the case with Archie; he tries to return to the traditional music-hall, fruitlessly; his vain endeavor is palpable as we see a lonely Archie singing blues all alone in an empty shadowy stage; the only thing that he can concentrate on is indeed a draught Bass, the 'little animal something'; because that is the only fixation through which a probable cancellation of the negation is possible. The desperate urge for fulfillment remains in a state of 'incompletion' with the lines aptly summing up Archie's existential crisis: "We're all out for good old number one". (Alan, 1969, p.70.).

Samuel Beckett in his *Dante...Bruno. Vico...Joyce* made a captivating comment, "the danger is in the neatness of identifications." (Introduction, Simon, 2002, p.1.). Osborne could identify neatly the faltering society and its faces; thus he could problematize things which would apparently look very simple and perfectly acceptable to others, who get 'used to' to things. Knowledge for him becomes treason; it is a soul-crushing incarceration, a shifting from the known world which is equivalent to the perception of the natural. It is without any hope of release or redemption of whatsoever nature. Like a modern Sisyphus, he was perhaps too intelligent and too knowledgeable for his own good and was punished by the 'gods', the Metanarratives, for this impudence. The concept of lessness in its Hydra-faced reality (ies) confronts the modern 'Hero'. He does not possess the larger-than-life potential to come round. He can only conceive the fragments of a lost world and be discontent with the present world. The anxiety, produced in the process then, is that of an unknown existence. Something, that is negative to a familiar existence. This anxiety begets the sense of meaninglessness/worthlessness. Thus, Archie's ordeal too, was therefore, Sisyphean in nature, albeit not in Camus' sense, since Camus considered his hero ultimately 'happy', despite his cruel fate, as "the struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart." (Camus, 1955, p.3). Alas, this modern Sisyphus of ours didn't even have any notion of 'heights'; or, did he have one, after all?

References :

- Critic Alan Kirby opines that postmodernism is dead and a new knowledge paradigm has entered the cultural landscape. His most recent book *Digimodernism* centers on the pressures of technologies that opened a new authority, a new existence beyond the elusiveness and ironic self-awareness of postmodernism.
- The memorable phrase from Wilfred Owen's unfinished preface which he wrote at Ripon in May, 1918: "My subject is War, and the *pity of War*. The Poetry is in the pity."