Chapter V

*Look Back in Anger: The Text as Character and Character as Text*

Within the literary context, psychoanalysis is mainly a mode of criticism based on Freudian insights and the re-readings of Freud by Jacques Lacan. Freud employed psychoanalysis as a hermeneutic enterprise, which aims at unravelling distorted personal texts. Lacan makes psychoanalysis a branch of linguistics. According to him, psychoanalysis lends itself as a tool for post-structuralist reading of a work of art because of its concern with symbolism and the distorted significations that arise through the effect of the unconscious upon mental life.

Traditional psychoanalytic criticism often disregards the textuality of texts, their verbal surface. The psychoanalytic critics belonging to this school have a penchant for probing the Freudian motifs encrypted in the text. The work of art is treated as the subtext of the author's life. Frederick Crews's analysis of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is such a naive study. Freud's own case studies are masterpieces in weaving personal narratives out of works of art. Classic psychoanalytic criticism displaces the object of analysis from the text to the person, be it the author, the character or the reader. The characters are treated as independent personalities and *not as functions of a text*. Jones's study of *Hamlet* is tainted by such a misreading. "Jones’s reading, though inspired, makes the fundamental error of treating *Hamlet* as a real
person, vexed by unconscious impulses unfathomable even to the text itself."

The symptomatic study of *Look Back in Anger* using psychoanalysis as a critical tool envisions two reading strategies: (1) the text as a character (2) character as a text. In the first study the aberrant behaviour of the text is sought to be analysed while in the second textual (linguistic) analysis is brought to bear upon the study of Jimmy, the central character in the play. The text as well as the character exhibits a kind of infantilism—a tendency to regress from the symbolic to the pre-linguistic stages. In treating the text itself as a psyche or character the analytic critic takes a cue from psychoanalysis itself where the words spoken by the analysand are treated as symptomatic. The analytic discourse is a *symptom made word*. In this study the text is metaphorically laid on the couch and psychoanalysed. It is a critical strategy where the critic attends "to the unsaid that lies in the holes of the discourse." The stumbling of parapraxis, the lapse of words, the escape into fantasy etc. can shed light on the latent meanings within the text. The words are treated as symptomatic—containing repressed meanings. Even 'textual silence' and 'aporias' within the text are read like symptoms. As Raman Selden puts it, "... the book is not self-sufficient; it is necessarily accompanied by a certain absence, without which it would not exist. A knowledge of the book must include a consideration of this absence." This kind of criticism forces one to abandon any vestigial faith in absolute meaning and truth and traces
the verbal "play of signifiers" through which every text reveals its multiple significations.

A symptomatic study of the text, therefore, seeks to decode the evasions and ambivalences within the text. It is an attempt to "probe through the layers of secondary revision and expose something of the 'subtext' which, like an unconscious wish, the work both conceals and reveals." The psycho-pathological phenomena extend even into the text. Every symptom exhibited by the text contains a semantic element or an element of meaning. "In order to explain why the symptoms take the form they do, it is necessary to embark on a prolonged enquiry into the meaning of the symptom. From this arises what we might call 'hermeneutic necessity.'" Randolph Splitter summarizes this critical approach as follows:

... it is an attempt to trace the connections between recurrent words or signs in the text, to read each central or marginal 'subtext' in the larger context of the work, and to expose the inconsistencies, contradictions, unanswered questions and unresolved conflicts which make up the incompletely reconciled 'meanings' of a literary work.6

While undertaking this kind of a symptomatic reading, one should not be blind to the shortcomings and pitfalls that it entails. It is only metaphorically that the text can speak. Unlike the analysand, the text can say nothing more than what is incorporated in it. It cannot free associate. "The work remains obstinately mute, closed in upon itself,
without defences against the treatment that the analyst may be tempted to subject it to."7 So the analyst-critic has to be wary and tread carefully because he is on delicate ground. The analyst critic should also understand that a symptom in a text is multivalent as a word, and is capable of interminable interpretation. He should also acknowledge the fact that the knots of symptom are untied and the meanings precipitated in the space between the text and the reader.

This kind of a psychoanalytic reading of Look Back in Anger is a linguistic analysis, for it is in language that the text as a subject comes into being. It is the entry into the symbolic order of language that marks the birth of a text.8 "The text is a fragment of language, itself placed in a perspective of language."9 The text whose body is constructed in language is just like a subject who enters the symbolic world. Catherine Belsey puts it succinctly:

Due to the primacy of the symbolic in the construction of the world of meaning, it is not the subject that speaks, but through the subject 'it' speaks. 'It' here represents language that shapes human subject in its own image. 'It' here also refers to language as the material of psychoanalysis.10 It is through language that the textual unconscious comes to the fore. This is why the symptomatic analysis attempts to scan the body of the text to get at the textual unconscious, which is structured, in the form of
language. The text never speaks. The text is spoken by 'language' and constituted according to the possibilities offered us by words.

This does not imply that there is any particular pre-existent subjectivity which learns to express itself in the words made available to it by language, but rather that the initially 'absent' subject becomes concrete through its positioning in a meaning system which is ontologically prior to it and more extensive than it.\textsuperscript{11}

So a symptomatic reading of \textit{Look Back in Anger} attempts to trace the marks of unconscious which are written on the form of aberrant images and symbols. These images are symptomatic because they repress the signified. Jill Barker outlines this reading strategy:

Because a text is read as giving access to profound psychic structures in the same way that a psychoanalyst reads the discourse of a patient, the critic traces the paths that desire follows through an obscure and variable code of significant symbols and metaphors. This mode of criticism gives us a method by which we can open out a text to complex metaphoric readings.\textsuperscript{12}

In our analytic reading we are concerned more with how the text \textit{behaves} than with what it means. Many images that recur in the play are 'over-determined' in a Freudian sense, making \textit{Look Back in Anger} a psychopathographic text. The text exhibits a kind of neurosis through its infantilism—an attempt at reverting to the pre-linguistic stages of life.
It is only in this light that one can understand the animal imagery with which the play is replete. This tendency to use animal imagery to characterise people is seen in other plays of Osborne too. In a scene in *The Hotel in Amsterdam*, Laurie ascribes an animal personality to each of his companions. But in *Look Back in Anger* the animal imagery assumes pathological implications. Jimmy’s denunciation of Alison, Alison’s mother and Helena abounds in animal imagery. Helena is a ‘bitch’ (*LBA* 79). “. . . she is a cow. . . . She seems to have become a sacred cow as well” (*LBA* 99). Alison is derogatorily termed a “stupid bitch” (*LBA* 57). Alison is also a ‘python’. “She just devours me whole every time, as if I were some over large rabbit” (*LBA* 81). Again in Jimmy’s lyric he makes the following reference. “Avoid that old python coil” (*LBA* 49). Mrs Redform is also denounced in animal terms. She is called a “rhinoceros in labour” (96), a “female rhino” (99), “an old bitch” (97), “an overfed, overprivileged old bitch” (110). Jimmy has a penchant for characterising Cliff using animal imagery.

We are at a loss to explain this textual behaviour other than symptomatically. This is the symptom made word. Here the dominant discourse in the text is subverted by another discourse that stands out from the main discourse like a neurotic symptom and which thereby problematizes the position of the subject. This kind of textual subversion is at work in George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*. Within the text there are the writings of Mordecai in Hebrew which problematize and de-stabilize the dominant discourse. This untranslatable part is outside the text’s control. This Hebrew text within the text ruptures the text
itself in the same way as a neurotic symptom or verbal slip subverts the analytic discourse of an analysand. This symptomatic imagery inscribed on the textual body of *Look Back in Anger* articulates something that defies any kind of articulation—textual desire. “They open up another area than that of representation—of subject and object caught in an eternal paralysed fixity—in order to investigate the very movement of articulation and difference—the movement of desire.” Julian Wolfreys is also of the view that such textual imagery resists immediate, signification and refers to a latent content (desire) in the textual psyche.

In the case of physical symptoms, the psyche writes its desires on the body of the subject. A text, too, can be thought of as a body, on which linguistic features such as plot and imagery are inscribed as metaphors of psychological stress. Following from this, the events in the narrative need not be seen with their cause/effect relationship, but rather as if they were events in a dream.

The fragmentary animal images bring about a rupture within the text itself, so that the text itself becomes a split subject. Subjectivity becomes the field of the Other (the textual unconscious) which speaks through the images. This non-symbolised imagery marks the text as the site of an irreconcilable conflict between the body of the text and language—a Freudian conflict where the body is not quite at home in
language. Terry Eagleton refers to the conflict which is foreshadowed in the writings of Freud thus:

For his lesson is that the body is never quite at home in language, will never quite recover from its traumatic insertion into it, escaping whole and entire from the mark of the signifier. Culture and body meet only to conflict; the scars, which we bear, are the traces of our bruising insertion into the symbolic order.\textsuperscript{15}

The animal imagery in the play is a pointer not only to textual repression, but textual regression as well. The text resists subjection to the symbolic world of language and exhibits the deviant behaviour of regressing to non-symbolic animal imagery. It is a textual regression from the symbolic to the imaginary.\textsuperscript{16} From the symbolic level of language characteristic of human being, the text reverts to the prelinguistic level, to which the animal imagery is actually a pointer.

There are other symptomatic, metaphoric structures in the play which bring about a rupture in the body of the text thereby creating a crisis between the subject and language. The serene unity of the text is thereby fractured. There is a metaphorisation of desire in the text—the characters are seen as metaphors. Jimmy is a teddy bear while Alison is a squirrel. Note the words of Alison: "(pointing to the chest of drawers up) you see that bear, and that squirrel? Well, that's him and that's me" (\textit{LBA} 91). Cliff is a mouse. The following conversation among Jimmy, Alison and Cliff is worthy of note.
Jimmy:  (pointing at Cliff) He gets more like a little mouse everyday, doesn't he?

(He is trying to re-establish himself).

He really does look like one. Look at those ears, and that face, and the little short legs.

Alison:  (looking through her bag) That's because he is a mouse.

Cliff:  Eek! Eek! I'm a mouse.

Jimmy:  A Randy little mouse.

Cliff:  (dancing round the table, and squeaking) I'm a mouse, I'm a mouse, I'm a Randy little mouse. That's a mourris dance.  (*LBA* 75)

It is no wonder that Alison is left to exclaim.

Alison:  Look out, for heaven's sake! Oh, it's more like a zoo everyday.  (*LBA* 70)

This metaphoric crossing within the text has the effect of disturbing the character's sense of boundaries between the subjective interiority and the objective exteriority. This metaphoricity breaks the fixed boundary of the character's self so that the self desires to become the other.

Jacques Lacan has identified the longing for this unity as the profoundest desire of the subject, referring to it as an
eternal and irreducible human desire... an eternal desire for the non-relationship of zero, where identity is meaningless.\textsuperscript{17}

By presenting images of self in another space the textual metaphors act as mirrors providing a version of self transformed into another, becoming something for someone else. The metaphoric substitution is an attempt at articulating the 'real' lived experience which fails to be caught in the nets of the signifier. It points to an exchange of signification between the body and language. Anika Lemaire puts it succinctly:

All our intentions find their symbolic matrix in the body and no concept expresses cultural, ethical or religious values without slipping into metaphors of the lived body... the lived body effectively bathes in language and in return language has the power to model the body, to repress, deploy or to repress its virtualities... Exchanges of signification between the body and language bear witness to the fact that the most fundamental language is metaphorical language... The word is the symbol for the lived body.\textsuperscript{18}

The text almost mimics the fantasized womb-like merger of child and mother.

The text, just like a neurotic patient, suffers from repetition. Just as in the plays of Pinter, a knowledge of the recurrent images is vital for
any understanding of the play. The text goes on repeating the metaphoric imagistic structure of Teddy bear and squirrel making it symptomatic. It is worthy of note that Freud considers neurosis itself a repetition—a return of the repressed. Lacan calls this repetition automatism. This repetition makes the textual subject analogous to a patient in analysis. As Maud Ellman puts it:

A thing, which has not been understood inevitably, reappears; like an unlaid ghost it cannot rest until the mystery has been solved and the spell broken. Possessed by such unconscious mysteries, the patient is obliged to repeat the material as a contemporary experience, instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, remembering it as something belonging to the past.¹⁹

The text almost anticipates this symptomatic behaviour in the stage direction to the opening scene. A toy Teddy bear and soft woolly squirrel form part of the stage setting. "Down R, below the bed is a heavy chest of drawers, covered with books, neckties and odds and ends, including a large tattered bear and soft wolly squirrel" (53). This image reappears in many parts of the play just like a neurotic symptom. In the conversation between Jimmy and Cliff in Act 1, there is a sly reference to Jimmy as a bear. Cliff: "Not as bad as you, you horrible old bear (goes over to him and grabs him foot) you're a stinking old bear, you hear me?" (76).
Jimmy's reference to Alison as a squirrel is repeated in many parts of the play. The images of the bear and squirrel surface in all the turning points in the play. Alison has taken the decision to leave the house. "Jimmy gets up, looks about him unbelievingly and leans against the chest of drawers. The Teddy bear is close to his face, and he picks it up gently, looks at it quickly, and throws it downstage" (107). Alison resorts to a similar gesture before departing from the house. "She picks up the squirrel from the chest of drawers, is about to put it in her suitcase, hesitates, and then puts it back" (112).

Freud himself refers to this phenomenon as 'repetition compulsion'. According to Freud, an analysand "is obliged rather to repeat as a current experience what is repressed, instead of . . . recollecting it as a fragment of the past." For Freud, there is a repetition of patterns of behaviour within the course of a single individual's life which he illustrates in his essay "The Uncanny" with his reading of Theodor Hoffmann's The Sandman (1919). Just like a person in analysis the text here attempts to master its own experiences through repetition.

Another symptom exhibited by the text is Jimmy's imaginary role-play which seems to be pathological in its implications. Traditional critics could not come to terms with such a corpus of fantasy material in the text of the play. Listen to one such criticism: "The end of the play with Jimmy and Alison playing their game of bears and squirrels is most unconvincing and unsatisfactory." The eruption of this fantasy
material works as an 'anti-narrative' bringing to the fore the repressed material in the textual psyche. This anti-narrative may be an artistic strategy or pathological aberration inside the text. This is a play within the play—a theatrical metaphor that stages the other scene—Desire—that lies behind the manifest text. Such a symptomatic role-play comes to the fore in the middle of the first act.

\[\text{Jimmy} : \text{(staring at her anxious face)} \quad \text{You're very beautiful. A beautiful, great-eyed squirrel.} \]

She nods brightly, relieved.

Hoarding, nut-munching squirrel (She mimes this delightedly) with highly polished, gleaming fur, and an ostrich feather of a tail.

\[\text{Alison} : \text{Well, you're a jolly super bear too. A really sooooo per, marvellous bear.} \]

\[\text{Jimmy} : \text{Bears and squirrels are marvellous.} \]

\[\text{Alison} : \text{Marvellous and beautiful.} \]

She jumps up and down excitedly, making little "paw gestures" (78).

This fantasy material in the text is pathological in its implication because fantasy can be seen as literature’s counterpart to pathology. The real subject of fantasy is not the subject but his desire. Osborne makes use of sexual fantasy in other plays also. \textit{Under Plain Cover} opens with the portrayal of a couple whose marital harmony accrues from their mutual liking for dressing up to indulge their sexual fantasies. The subject is present in the fantasy in a de-subjectivised form.
Fantasy, however, is not the object of desire, but its setting. In fantasy, the subject does not pursue the object or its sign; he appears caught up himself in the sequence of images. He forms no representation of the desired object, but is himself represented as participating in the same. . . . As a result, the subject, although always present in the fantasy, may be so in a desubjectivised form, that is to say, in the very syntax of the sequence in question.23

Through the fantasy the characters in the text become fractured, ruptured signs where the boundaries of the self are dissolved. Rosemary Jackson refers to this factor in Fantasy: "Fantasy breaks the boundaries separating the self from the Other, leaving structures dissolved, or ruptured through an open-endedness of being."24 Alison refers to this aspect in her conversation with Helena.

Alison : (pointing to chest of drawers up R.) You see that bear, and that squirrel? Well, that's him, and that's me.

Helena : Meaning?

Alison : The game we play: bears and squirrels and bears.

Helena looks rather blank.

"Yes, it's quite mad, I know. Quite mad (pick up the two animals). That's him . . . and that's me . . . (91).
This imaginary role-play resists immediate signification. But an analytic probe points to the textual subject's tendency to slip back from the symbolic to the imaginary—to the idyllic state of undifferentiated emotionality in Lacan's pre-mirror-phase. The text reveals its infantilism by fantasizing a return to the state of undifferentiation—to a condition preceding the mirror-stage and its creation of dualism. This also reminds us of Julie Kristeva's concept of the semiotic or the chora. "The semiotic corresponds to the stage when the child is intimately connected through the drives to the mother's body, and constitutes a dynamic space where the borders between self and other are fluid and shifting." The textual subject here behaves like a child which hankers for a merging with the mother's body.

Jimmy's words to Helena at the end of Act II are thus pregnant with repressed meaning and the suppleness of the imagery points to an escape into the imaginary. Kissing her quickly, he says: "Put all that Junk always and we'll get out. We'll get pleasantly, joyfully tiddly, we'll gaze at each other tenderly and lecherously in "The Builder's Arms" and then we'll come back here, and I'll make such love to you, you'll not care about anything at all" (130). The character desires an escape from the structures and the syntax of the symbolic. The play ends with the grim warning that the textual subject cannot inhabit the idyllic world of the imaginary forever. The symbolic is waiting menacingly to catch the subject unawares in the nets. Note Jimmy's words at the end of the play:
And I'll see that you keep that sleek, bushy tail glistening as it should, because you're none too bright either, so we've to be careful. There are cruel traps lying about everywhere, just waiting for rather mad, slightly satanic and the very timid little animals. (140)

Let us turn from the text to the character. Here we undertake a textual analysis of Jimmy's character. The analysis of character has undergone a radical change in the post-modern context. In the classical view a character had been thought to be a unity—a coherent, indivisible and continuous whole—the name given to the realistic representation of an actual, empirically verifiable reality outside a literary text. There is a one-to-one correspondence between the character in a text and the real flesh and blood person outside the text. As Helen Cixous writes,

the ideology underlying this fetishization of 'character' is that of an 'I' who is a whole subject, conscious, knowable and the enunciatory 'I' expresses himself in the text, just as the world is represented complementarily in the text in a form equivalent to pictorial representation, as a simulacrum.26

This type of character study proposes to undertake a probe into the essence. As Thomas Docherty puts it, "reading character has been a process whereby the reader learns to probe and bring to light the usually occluded murky depths of individual essences."27 The classical
critics fail to take into account the textual nature of the reality of the character that is encoded in language. The new view acknowledges the fact that the body of a character in a text is structured in language.

Much of the criticism on Jimmy makes this illusionist fallacy of mistaking the character for the 'real'. Some see Jimmy as a textual counterpart of John Osborne. For them there is an autobiographical touch in the dramatic portraiture of Jimmy. Osborne seems to have invested much of his own personal emotions in the character. Osborne's turbulent personal life can be taken as a reference point for the elucidation of the character. There is so much in common between the two that many are the critics who consider Jimmy the self-portrait of Osborne. Jimmy shares his mentor's socio-economic background. Behind Jimmy's revilement and angry outbursts one rarely fails to trace the animal energy of his mentor who passionately chafes at anything and everything. Jimmy seems to articulate Osborne's disaffection with the contemporary society. He is touched to the quick by the lethargy and passivity that mark the people of his time. He complains: "Nobody thinks, nobody cares. No beliefs, no convictions and no enthusiasm" (LBA). Jimmy's dramatic account of his father's death reminds us of Osborne's father who died under the very same circumstances.

But such an autobiographical study of character—where the author is taken as the reference point of the character—has limited scope in the post-modern context. It helps us to study the author's life, not the character's. Finally, explicating the character in terms of the
author is to impose a limit on the text, and to close the writing by furnishing it with a final signified.

There are a host of other critics who are baffled by Jimmy's misdirected animal energy and aggression. They are at a loss to explain it. John Mander voices the confusion:

There is no doubt that Jimmy's anger is vital to the economy of Look Back in Anger; it is Jimmy's anger that drives the play, that makes the wheels go round. . . . The origin of the energy is, certainly, as unclear as its direction: it is simply there, an elemental devastating force.28

They don't take into account the fact that modern characters interrogate the apparently fixed boundaries and categories of traditional representation.

Here we attempt to read the character in another way. The character is treated as a text—a linguistic construct. The constitution of human subjectivity is to be understood in textual terms. Even the most private contours of 'personhood' are written and read in extra-personal terms of social language. Human beings are 'subjected' by the language in which they are written. Even Michael Foucault holds such a view in The Order of Things. Here Foucault speaks of human subjects as the beings of language. Banveniste says in Problems in General Linguistics that it is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a subject. Kim L. Worthington writes:
Human beings are to be understood as texts: this metaphoric claim has frequently been made by contemporary critical theorists for whom the acts of writing and interpretation which constitute textual meaning are thought to be paradigmatic of the conceptual processes through which we come to know ourselves and our world.\(^{29}\)

Theorists in various disciplines have recognized language as the epistemological foundation of subjectivity. If the subject as text is written in language, the discourse of the character can be deciphered and de-coded only through language.

This view finds extensive support in Lacanian formulation of the genesis of 'subjecthood'. In Lacan's view selfhood is a kind of *writing* by extra-personal systems of signification. One's sense of oneself is never a spontaneous apprehension of an original self but a belated realization of something which is always already written in the structures of symbolic language. The text of the self is always written in and through language.

These post-structuralist insights encoded in Lacanian psychoanalysis are to be outlined in detail if Jimmy as a linguistic construct is to be properly deciphered and de-coded. Lacan has considerably modified Freud's original perceptions about the psyche and re-defines the subject as linguistic. The greatest insight of Lacan is that (traces of this can be seen even in Saussure) instead of people shaping language to their ends, people are shaped and determined by
language. “People are not just producers of language, but are themselves constructed by the linguistic structures within which they function.” It is language that speaks us. The ‘I’ in the language is an ‘I’ that pre-exists the individual. The ‘I’ is a site of positioning in discourse. Entry into language makes the person identify himself with his own mirror image afforded to him in the world of language. “In this sense, as Lacan argues, textuality precedes and creates the matrix of signification and meaning and not vice-versa.” Society becomes a signifying structure which writes the individual. The subject is represented in the language of society through the various subject positions that he has to occupy with the result that he becomes a mere signifier.

It is only the textuality of Jimmy’s reality that helps us explain the textual nature of his anger. Explication of anger is vital for an understanding of the play because “Jimmy Porter’s anger, in a sense, is the hero of the play.” Anger appears in the play as a symptom which is structured in language and demands a linguistic explanation. We have to read his anger on a figural and not a literal level. It should be remarked that Look Back in Anger is Osborne’s attempt at perfecting a new theatrical idiom—a new language. This is hinted at in the remark of Osborne given below. “What is most disastrous about the British way of life is the British way of feeling and this is something the theatre can attack. We need a new feeling as much as we need a new language. Out of the feeling will come the language.” This is why his anger has baffled many traditional critics. Jimmy’s anger is subjectivity
that refuses to be caught in the nets of the signifiers and may be explained as follows. Entry into the language affords the subject a counter to negotiate his experiences. It affords the child a point of reference to its own identity. The child gets represented in the world of language. Language forms the child in its own image. The pronoun 'I' is a position which pre-exists and lies in wait to receive the child on its entry into the symbolic world of language. But this representation in the world of language splits the subject giving birth to the unconscious. Language fails to represent the essence of the subject. "Language names things and thus murders them as full presences, creating an alienation between word and the thing, an alienation that infers gaps or a ternarity into language itself."34 The subject is present in his own utterance as a lack. As Lacan puts it, "I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object."35 There is a part of him that remains unrepresented—that is not caught in the nets of the signifiers. There is a disjunction between the subject that is represented in the text—the textual 'I'—and the unconscious 'self' which eludes and evades representation. The rupture in his personality is so great that Jimmy is quite puzzled with himself. Note his words: "Sometimes, I wonder if there isn't something wrong with me" (LBA 58). There is thus a split between the said and the saying—between the 'I' of the utterance and the psychic reality it represents.

The above outline will help us to explicate Jimmy's anger on a figural level. Jimmy's anger opens up a space anterior to his inscription in the world of language. His anger is his subjectivity which escapes or
exceeds the codes of representation, questioning in the process the language and limits of representation itself. It is the symptomatic space which attempts to present the unpresentable regions of experience—the unconscious part of his self. It is the return of the submerged part of himself. Jimmy turns against society because society which is structured like language fails to represent his innermost cravings. This is why he is led to denounce society in vehement terms.

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 first be for the Brave New—nothing—very—much—thank you. About as pointless and inglorious as stepping in front of a bus. (LBA 129)

His anger is a repository of repressed and pre-linguistic signifiers and is a constant source of disruption of the symbolic order. It makes its appearance because the signifying system is revealed as inadequate in representing the ‘I’ which lies beyond the text.

It is through anger as a pre-linguistic language that Jimmy writes his desire on the body of the text. Desire itself is his ‘unconscious’ which fails to be represented in language. It is only natural that anger and aggression return us to the issue of lack, for it is lack (absence) that generates desire and absence that generates language. Language gives birth to desire as it institutes an absence in that which is represented.
Lacan himself is conscious of the fact that Desire results from the mismatch between the body (the real) and language. Desire is produced by the gap between a fundamental language and the inability of language to articulate a demand to see that the need is met. Desire is effected by the transition from the imaginary into the symbolic. It is the mark of the failure of language and of the loss of the undifferentiated pre-symbolic state of the infant.\textsuperscript{36}

As a textual metaphor Jimmy's anger is thus his desire that sneaks through the interstices and spaces between words. This is why it has such a disruptive power. Roselind Minsky turns our attention to this subversive nature of Desire.

So our identity in language, which at first seems to be so seductively stable, is potentially de-stabilised by our own unconscious desire and loss, the part of us that feels a sense of longing, an emptiness lying like a shadow behind the confidence of the 'I' we use in our sentences.\textsuperscript{37}

Jimmy's anger may be explicated from another angle also. This is often related to the question that is often asked in the post-modern context as to how the subject can rebel against the restrictive symbolic structure—e.g. language. An escape from the monolithic structure of the mighty symbolic is possible only by the articulation of a private innovative language. Jimmy's anger is such a private innovative language. As John Mander puts it, "the neurotics' is a private world,
and his language a private language. . . . This has an evident relevance to the question of Jimmy's anger.  

This leads to the dispersal of the received, normalized modes of expression. There are many passages in the text where Jimmy articulates his disaffection with the society which itself is a symbolic structure. Listen to one such vehement ejaculation.

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. (LBA 58, 59)

Kim L. Worthington also observes in Self as Narrative that such anti-structural devices for evading social structure are quite common. "Human subjects, as post-structuralist texts, are condemned either to numb resignation and conformity withconstitutionally complicit modes of practice or to the empty gesture of non-significatory fragmentation as anti-structural escape." Thus Jimmy's anger is an anti-narrative that rebels against the existing signifying structure. James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916) illustrates this point well as he is brought up through the discourses of religion, politics, family and education, the 'nets' of language as Joyce calls them, and as he tries to forge his own language as an expression of his own identity.

This articulation of the private innovative language extends to all the activities of Jimmy. He has developed a private morality and taunts
Alison for her virginity. Note the words of Alison: "Jimmy's got his own private morality, as you know, what my mother calls 'loose'" (74). This private innovative language so much confounds the Colonel that he is left to exclaim. "As for Jimmy—he speaks a different language from any of us" (108). This resistance to the symbolic is reflected in Jimmy's penchant for taboo words associated with human anatomy and bodily functions. Jimmy refers to such topics as mating season (25), flatulence (56) and artificial insemination (77). Many of the words used by Jimmy especially in his lyrics have erotic terms like whoring, necking, pecking etc. He swears at his wife and Cliff: "Why don't you both get into bed and have done with it" (31).

This resistance to the symbolic on the part of Jimmy may be traced back to the peculiar nature of his textual past. Jimmy as a signifier is marked by 'deferred signification' because the present is related to the past in his personal narrative. Psychoanalytic reading places past events in the historical context of repressed childhood. The present itself is a repeated past. This is why Jimmy's childhood and the relation with his father become all the more important.

A retrospective reading of Jimmy's past shows that he resists the symbolic due to the peculiar nature of his relation with his father. The failure of the paternal metaphor naturally leads to the resistance to the symbolic because it is the paternal metaphor that initiates the child into the world of the symbolic. The emotionally surcharged passage where he describes the death of his father has Oedipal overtones.
For twelve months, I watched my father dying when I was ten years old... we all of us waited for him to die... Every time I sat on the edge of his bed, to listen to him talking or reading to me, I had to fight back my tears... All that feverish failure of a man had to listen to him was a small, frightened boy. I spent hour upon hour in that tiny bedroom. He would talk to me for hours, pouring out all that was left of his life to one, lonely bewildered little boy, who could barely understand half of what he said. All he could feel was the despair and the bitterness, the sweet, sickly smell of a dying man... you see, I learnt at an early age what it was to be angry—angry and helpless. (102)

Jimmy has not completely introjected the father-image and not submitted to paternal metaphor as a signifier. Jimmy's weak father fails to be the paternal metaphor in the Lacanian theory as he fails to initiate the child into the symbolic order. As Catherine Belsey puts it, "ultimately the 'father' will stand for the symbolic order in its entirety, the paternal authority representing Law." His anger is thus neurosis resulting from the failure to negotiate the Oedipal stage successfully. As Althusser observes,

... if the Oedipus complex has not been negotiated sufficiently well, if the peace has not been suitably realized in the child's unconscious, elements of contradiction subsist
in the child’s unconscious that then gives rise to what Freud calls *neurotic* formations.\(^{41}\)

The paternal bond is an important factor in almost all the plays of John Osborne. Father is the primal source of emotion in many of his plays. *Look Back in Anger, The Entertainer* and *Inadmissible Evidence* are plays over-shadowed by the father-image. In *Time Present*, the shadow of Pamela’s dying father lies across scene after scene. The patriarchal figure of Wyatt Gillman dominates the play *West of Suez*. *Luther* is another play that hinges on the pivotal role-played by Luther’s father. “With very few exceptions, the most intense of all the family relationships for an Osborne character is the paternal bond and the ‘lessons in feeling’ in his drama almost invariably touch on this subject in their emotional moments.”\(^{42}\) The Oedipal overtone in *Look Back in Anger* is comparable to that in D. H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers*.

It is in the context of his resistance to the symbolic that one has to analyse his oral fixation and his attitude to women, both of which are linguistically structured as symptoms in the play. There is a streak of femininity in Jimmy’s character characterised by passivity. This is the reason for his unnatural relation with Alison and Helena. In Jimmy’s case sexual excitement depends on fantasies, special clothes or masochistic love-plays. The femininity in his character is due to mother-fixation wrought by a weak father-image.\(^{43}\) Jimmy finds it difficult to relate with young women due to mother-fixation which results from Oedipus complex. He fails to have any marital felicity with
Alison and his co-habitation with Helene doesn’t usher in any kind of happiness. He sees women as mother-surrogates. Jimmy experiences the thrill of sexual excitement only when he is with a debased sexual object. Legitimate sex leaves him frigid and forbidden sensuality releases a capacity for pleasure. Due to the entry of perverse components into his sexual aims, only a debased sexual object arouses erotic desire in Jimmy. Note Alison’s words to Helena: “He wants something quite different from us. What it is exactly I don’t know—a kind cross between a mother and a Greek courtesan, a hunch woman, a mixture of Cleopatra and Boswell” (135).

Jimmy uses abusive words against both Helena and Alison to debase them as sexual objects. Note Jimmy’s words about Alison:

All this time, I have been married to this woman, this monument to non-attachment and suddenly I discover that there is actually a word that sums her up. Not just an adjective in the English language to describe her with—it’s her name! Pusillanimous! It sounds like some fleshy Roman matron, doesn’t it. (65)

Jimmy can sexually enjoy women only by making them whores.

Analysis reveals that Porter’s sexuality is structured like language. It is operative in language through metonymic displacements. This is why Porter’s sexuality remains a mystery to many a critic. Katherine J. Worth puts it thus: “He alternates between sexual longing and loathing in a way that seems incomprehensible to the onlookers in the play.”44
The original text of his primal need—union with mother—takes a detour and is metonymically transferred to other signifiers.

Another symptom exhibited by Jimmy is the regressive movement in his character and the fixation to the oral stage of sexual organization. Freud postulates that even though any bodily part has the potential to be eroticized, there are three zones which are especially vulnerable to sexual excitations. They are the mouth, anus and genitals. The mouth serves as a somatic area marked by erotogenicity. Jimmy’s orality is the belated signification of his thwarted sexual development. Orally fixated characters show symptoms of sadistic and cannibalistic tendencies. For Jimmy oral zone is erotogenic and he derives sexual gratification from the tickling of the surface. In the oral stage the child relates to objects exclusively through the mouth. Jimmy’s excessive greed for food is symptomatic of oral fixation. Jimmy himself refers to this tendency: “I’m not a pig. I just like food—that’s all” (56). Again “Oh, yes, yes, yes. I like to eat” (56). Cliff also refers to this: “Like it! You’re like a sexual maniac—only with you it’s food” (56). Jimmy’s language also is characterised by a profusion of oral images connected with food. Note Jimmy’s description of his own wife:

You’ll end up like one of those chocolate meringues my wife is so fond of. My wife—that’s the one on the tom-toms behind me. Sweet and sticky on the outside, and sink your teeth in it (savouring every word) inside, all white, messy and disgusting. (93)
Oral images surface many a time in his conversation with Cliff. Note an example. Jimmy says: "... Did you ever see some dirty old Arab, sticking his fingers into some mess of lamb fat and gristle?" (68). Even spirituality precipitates a wealth of oral images. "Do you think that some of this spiritual beef cake would make a man of me" (123).

Reference to food with repressed oral overtones is characteristic of the plays of Pinter also. There are Meg's cornflakes and Goldberg's gefilte fish in *The Birthday Party*, while there is Lenny's cheese roll in the *Home Coming*. Reference to exotically named meals abound in *The Dumb Waiter*.

Porter's verbality itself is a regression to the oral stage of sexual organization. He is fond of mouthing long monologues. Language becomes eroticised and his long monologues lead to the tactile stimulation of the labial region. To Jimmy, labial titillation affords a kind of masterbautic pleasure. His lips are profoundly tickled by the mouthing of aggressive words.

Jimmy is introduced in the play as a fractured sign—a site of contradictory significations. The textual ambivalence of Jimmy is a symptom of the split in the subject. In his study of *Look Back in Anger*, Choudhary pinpoints this contradiction in the character of Jimmy. "The contradiction in his character lies in his rejection of the world and his anger that the world takes no notice of him."45 "He is a disconcerting mixture of sincerity and cheerful malice, of tenderness and free-booting cruelty; restless, importunate, full of pride, a
combination which alienates the sensitive and insensitive alike" (LBA 54). This textual ambivalence which is symptomatic continues throughout the play. He is a sadist as well as masochist. Sadism and masochism which can be taken as contradictory significations of Jimmy as a textual signifier, are sexuality in disguise. Jimmy derives a kind of sadistic pleasure from inflicting pain on others. He is happy only when he makes others unhappy. He seems to derive a kind of orgiastic pleasure form verbally assaulting Alison. He himself confesses: “Living day and night with another woman has made me predatory and suspicious” (80). He bullies and browbeats Cliff to his satisfaction. His treatment of Helena is none too different. “I have never seen such hatred in someone’s eyes before,” (LBA 85) says Helena.

At the same time Jimmy gets masochistic pleasure from persecuting himself. He seems to enjoy his own destruction. Helena provides him with masochistic pleasure when she slaps him and later kisses him. Alison refers to this when she says: “Oh, don’t try and take his suffering away from him—he’d be lost without it” (98). As Katherine J. Worth remarks, “Jimmy is a suffering hero and the action is designed to illuminate his suffering rather than to force a conflict.”46
Notes


7 Green, “Prologue: Psychoanalytic Reading of Tragedy,” *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism* 47.

8 Here one has to take into account the post-modern and post-structuralist view of subject and subjectivity. Post-modernism questions the autonomy and unity of subject. Subject and subjectivity are constructed in language and discourse. It is language that writes the subject.

9 Barthes, “Theory of the Text,” *Untying the Text* 35.

10 Belsey, *Desire* 56.

Barker, “Does Edie Count?: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on ‘Snowed Up’,” *Literary Theories* 76.


Freud is the discoverer of the unconscious as now we understand it. His formulation was that processes within the unconscious come to the fore in several ways, including physical symptoms, dreams, linguistic patterns as puns, repetitions etc. Silence is also symptomatic because silence implies those things which are unsaid but implied. The Freudian premise is that the unconscious is a repertoire of things that are ‘repressed’ and the functioning of the unconscious depends on how the child has negotiated the events in its infancy. The experience of infancy contains a sense of oceanic power, followed by the discovery of the possibility of loss. The knowledge of loss is accompanied by a desire for that which was lost or for a representative of that loss. Lacan re-reads Freud and his exegesis underscores the psychic processes involved with the entry of the subject. The subject enters the symbolic order from the imaginary. Imaginary is an area where there is a merging of identities between the child and the mother. The text of *Look Back in Anger*, as is indicated by the non-human, animal imagery, shows a proclivity to slip back from
the symbolic to the imaginary—to that pre-Oedipal state where there was a symbiotic relation between the mother and the child.


This insight is seen in Althusser also. Althusser is of the opinion that we are interpellated into the social structure as subjects through identification with the role that is assigned to us. We identify with the role and form an imaginary relationship with it. This imaginary consciousness helps us to make sense of our role but it represses our real relation with it. Althusser puts it thus: "... all ideology has the function of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects." [Louis Althusser, "Ideology and State," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. B. Brewster 58].

22 Choudhary, *Contemporary British Drama* 32.

24 Jackson, *Fantasy* 87.


26 Helen Cixous, qtd. in Jackson, *Fantasy* 84.


30 Barker, "Does Edie Count?: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on 'Snowed Up'," *Literary Theories* 76.


32 Choudhary 29.


What happens to the person in the world of language is akin to what happens to the subject on his entry into the socio-cultural world during the Oedipal stage. The Oedipal stage marks the transition from the imaginary world of dual relationship (where the child enjoys symbiotic relation with its mother) to the symbolic world of society and culture. This marks the socio-genesis of the subject. Identification with (paternal metaphor) makes the child a signifier. He gets a name, a subject-position in the signifying system of the family and other constellations in the society.