

Look Back in Anger Literary Devices

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"Look Back in Anger" (1956) is a famous play by John Osborne. We can find various literary devices that contribute to its dramatic impact and exploration of complex themes. Here are some key literary devices used in the play.

Symbols

The play uses various symbols to convey its themes.

Bear and Squirrel Game

In the play, Jimmy and Alison play with a toy bear and squirrel. Jimmy is associated with the Bear and Alison with the squirrel. The Bear and Squirrel game serves as a metaphor for their relationship. It gives them a way to access a simple affection for each other that they cannot achieve in normal life.

The Bear and Squirrel game is a powerful symbol. When Jimmy and Alison act like animals, whose only concerns are food, shelter, and sex, they can forget societal and class conflicts. They can feel a simpler version of love for each other.

Osborne suggests that in a society affected by class tension and lack of opportunity for the working class, love is only possible in a dehumanized state. In the final scene, Jimmy describes their game as a retreat from organized society. They will be "together in our bear's cave, or our squirrel's drey."

By the toy bear and squirrel, Osborne also suggests that both Jimmy and Alison are young and childlike, and a bit naive to the complexities of adult society.

Jimmy's Trumpet

Jimmy plays his jazz trumpet a few times in the play when he is not on the stage. The audience can hear the trumpet from off-stage. Jazz is associated with protest music. The trumpet-playing symbolizes Jimmy's desire to be the voice of resistance against societal and working-class injustice. However, the trumpet also shows the futility of Jimmy's dream, as it largely serves to annoy others in the play.

Again, the trumpet allows Jimmy to be the dominant force in the play even when he is not onstage—he can be heard if not seen. The trumpet symbolizes his emotional reach and the powerful hold he has on the other characters.

Newspapers

The Newspaper is a symbol of Jimmy's education. Jimmy and Cliff read newspapers throughout Act 1 and Act 3. Reading newspapers is also a way for Jimmy to mimic the habits of upper-class and university graduates. Jimmy uses newspaper articles to show his intelligence and also belittles Cliff and Alison. He often comments on what he is reading.

The old newspapers also form a "jungle" in their working-class apartment. It suggests that upper-class habits can be considered chaotic in a working-class environment.

Pipe

Pipe is another upper-class symbol that Jimmy smokes. It's a way for him to dominate the scene. In Act 1, Alison says that she has "gotten used" to it. It underlines that Alison is surviving a challenging marriage with a difficult man.

Monologue and Soliloquy

The play frequently employs monologues and soliloquies. The characters express their inner thoughts and feelings directly to the audience. Jimmy Porter delivers passionate and thoughtful monologues that reveal his frustration, anger, and disillusionment with society. In the opening scene, Jimmy says, "Why don't we have a little game? Let's pretend that we're human beings, and that we're actually alive."

Dialogue and Language

The dialogue in "Look Back in Anger" is known for its sharpness, wit, and intensity. The use of colloquial and everyday language adds to the play's realism. Jimmy voices against society's complacency, "I suppose people of our generation aren't able to die for good causes any longer. We had all that done for us, in the thirties and the forties."

Social Realism

The play spawned the "Angry Young Men" movement in British drama, which aimed to depict the harsh realities of working-class life. The realistic portrayal of a run-down, working-class flat and the characters' struggles with employment and money embodies the social realism of the play.

Dramatic Irony

There are moments in the play where the audience knows something that the characters do not. It creates tension and often adds depth to the character's motivations and actions. For instance, the audience knows that Alison is pregnant before Jimmy does, and this knowledge adds depth to her emotional state and actions.

In "Look Back in Anger," these literary devices convey the characters' inner turmoil and explore class, love, and alienation themes.

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