

Alison Porter in *Look Back in Anger*: Is She Responsible for her Sufferings?

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***Abstract:** John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* is a dramatic study of a strained marriage relationship. In it Jimmy Porter is the protagonist and Alison Porter, a retired Colonel's daughter, is the heroine. The actual action of the play is centered around Jimmy's relationship with her. Despite his dominance, his wife Alison Porter, is the most important supporting character on whom Jimmy inflicts pain by his tirades all the time until eventually she feels she can bear no more. Later on she leaves him in her pregnant state to seek peace. After the loss of the baby she comes back to him when both have lost faith in each other. So they will go back to their previous unhealthy relationship causing her to become deplorable again. My reading of Alison Porter is that she is a suffering person though some find Jimmy a sufferer. This paper aims at assessing her sufferings and the reasons behind them.*

John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* mainly describes a failed marriage between Jimmy and Alison who live with Jimmy's uneducated friend Cliff Lewis. According to Nicoll the play: "... focuses attention upon the life being led by the pair, and ends inconclusively ..." (Nicoll, 12). Through it Osborne presented 'a new type of angry young hero' whose sense of working-class position prejudices his judgment about those of upper social status and this brings him into conflict with Alison who becomes victim of his cruelty. For this there is no healthy atmosphere in their house and she is always in great miseries. Critic Taylor also suggests that

"The principal sufferer from all this is his wife Alison, whom he cannot forgive for her upper-middle class

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background and whom he constantly torments in order to extract some reaction from her ...”
(Taylor, 41)

Therefore, she withdraws herself into a detached indifference to him and a rift is created between them. After more than three years of their marriage, when the pregnant Alison is unable to take her bullying husband any more, she retreats from the Porter house hoping to get rid of her sufferings as she realizes that her upper--class background angers Jimmy. Unfortunately, she loses her unborn baby, suffers terrible isolation and agony and returns to Jimmy and embraces further pain. Thus, *Look Back in Anger* is a play in which Alison’s mental distress is prolonged and unrelieved.

“*Look Back in Anger* is a one-man play per excellence” (Hayman, 17). From the beginning Jimmy appears to be dominating, full of energy for whom Alison is no match. If he does not talk, he keeps blowing his trumpet for releasing his anger: “It’s almost as if he wanted to kill someone with it” (39). Consequently, he disturbs the people around him disregarding their reactions.

Alison is Jimmy’s age and is tall, slim and dark. Moreover, she has a sorrowful look which indicates her unhappy state. There are also hints in the opening scene that crisis has been brewing in their house without sufficient money and peace and she is getting burnt slowly. Her parental house was just like an Eden compared to her new one. Actually, Jimmy’s house is unable to provide everything an upper-class daughter could possibly want as he cannot realize that he has a wife and it is his obligation to support her financially as well as mentally.

Sometimes love brings troubles with it. As in every aspect of life Jimmy and Alison are different from each other, their huge social gap matters a great deal to Jimmy who sees her family as part of the traditional British ruling class. But Alison hardly loses temper in spite of Jimmy’s nonstop offensive criticism towards her. Her silence also angers him greatly which is the result of his incessant talking and he is unaware of its cause. Hence, he sarcastically calls her “monument to non-attachment” and tells Cliff: “Nothing I could do would provoke her”(14). Jimmy cannot understand that her silence is unnatural and rather forced by him as she shares warm bond with Cliff who also belongs to Jimmy’s class. In her words: “If things have worked out with Cliff, it’s because he’s kind and lovable ...” (41).

Jimmy's own routine is deadening and he wants to spread his boredom and frustration in Alison forgetting that his financial insecurity also stops her from enjoying life. When Cliff wants to cheer Jimmy up by offering to go to the pictures, he refuses as he thinks audience will mar his pleasure as they are not as cultured as he is. Even Alison is afraid of going with him.

Actually, the differences between Alison and Jimmy's families dramatize a basic conflict in their marital life from the beginning of the play. It is true that he faced strong opposition prior to his marriage from her parents. But it does not mean that he has right to offend her in front of Cliff, and her friend, Helena Charles. Critic Mander suggests: "Jimmy is presented as a fighter, and one would expect him to relish a fight with someone of his own caliber" (**Mander**, 5). On the other hand, Alison is cultured, well-bred, and possesses the grace and bearing of a mild woman unworthy of his fighting and he never takes her pleas for a little peace seriously; rather curses her: "I wish you could have a child, and it would die"(36). It seems her serenity is at the mercy of him. Even Cliff consoles her seeing her dilemma: "He's being offensive. And it's so easy for him" (7). Whereas Jimmy is unmoved and finds pleasure in torturing her with invectives. So she recalls the strong opposition from her parents as they predicted Jimmy and Alison mismatch as a couple and she regrets her marriage: "If only I knew what was going" (25). Thus, she admits that her marriage has brought never-ending miseries for her.

Jimmy's annoyance at her is openly expressed and he criticizes her habits to Cliff: "She's so clumsy ..." (19). If she tries to adjust herself to his smoking habit that is also ridiculed by him. Accordingly, her loneliness grows and she finds herself dropped in a zoo where Jimmy is the predatory animal and she and her family are his targets. When he accidentally burns her arm, he goes into another room for fear of getting criticized by her rather than pacifying her. Therefore, he aggravates her agony. The total situation is puzzling for her as she has married for love and was unprepared for his vituperation. Thus, she suffers much. Jimmy is ignorant of them as she never verbalizes her feelings and has to take refuge in her ironing and silence. But this silence is misunderstood as a sign of indifference to him. So, whenever she feels upset, he, instead of offering any comfort to her, remains utterly insensitive to her feelings. In fact, Jimmy is nervous by her silence and it seems "... he is tired of listening to himself and would be glad to tune in on another station ..." (**McCarthy**,152) without

knowing the reason behind her detachment that he himself is making communication impossible and silence and ironing are her protections against him.

Home is the place which generally fascinates any woman and she gets deeply attached to it. But for Jimmy's constant criticism, it has no appeal to Alison as it seems he tries her patience and she has: "... been on trial every day and night ... for nearly four years" (69). So from the beginning of their married life, she is in great despair. Cliff is also worried about her gloom and tells her: "I'm wondering how much longer I can go on watching you two are tearing the insides out of each other" (24). Actually, Jimmy has accepted her but his principal qualities of mind will remain fixed and will be ruthless to her.

Since they are not well-suited for each other, she needs the protection of someone and Cliff serves as a remedy to her pain, making life tolerable for her as her longing for her family and her pains are not understood by Jimmy. According to Harold Hobson: "... he (Jimmy) tries effectively to defend the battered, punched, browbeaten and trampled-on girl, who says nothing in reply..." (*The Sunday Times*, 1956:19).

Alison's marriage with Jimmy brings about an astounding change in her social world. In her parents' home, she has been used to politeness, a life in which there are no real issues to fight for. But after marriage, she finds herself in a totally different world. Since their courtship was brief, she could not realize his deep-rooted class prejudice and strong hatred for the upper classes. After marriage, she realizes that through his marriage, he has sought revenge upon the upper class and expects to cut herself off from the kind of people she had always known. But she clings to her class for lack of security and the strong bond.

Jimmy feels irritated by the general apathy and mental inertness of Alison and is always 'at' her finding faults. Hence, he is embittered when Alison informs him that she hasn't read the posh Sunday newspaper. He shouts and abuses her and violates every decency of love and of life, and employs every savagery of tone, and mood. He reacts with an adolescent sentimentality. At the same time he himself is extremely sensitive to all kinds of shocks and interference of any sort. On the other hand, he expresses his cultural snobbery by telling her: "I'm the only one who knows how to treat the paper ..." (5). He also makes cutting remarks about contemporary society, but he

only makes them for his peculiar personality problems. In consequence, Osborne portrays him as a contradictory and complex character and his inexperienced wife fails to understand him. As a strong supporter to middle class morality she did not have physical intimacy with anyone before her marriage but Jimmy was quite angry about it as he opposed the middle class belief and morality. She also remembers his reaction to Cliff when Jimmy discovered her virginity: "He was quite angry about it, as if I had deceived him in some strange way" (27). This dialogue reveals his unconventional nature that is unsuitable for his conventional wife.

In fact, Alison's married life at the beginning was a nightmare to her as it caused deep embarrassment to her because of Jimmy and his childhood friend, Hugh Tanner. With Cliff she has a very warm relationship but: "With Hugh, it was quite different" (41). Jimmy was jobless when they got married and had no place to live in either. The couple lived with Hugh, and his mother, Mrs. Tanner, in a flat in Poplar and Alison had to spend her wedding night there. She could not adapt herself to their working-class atmosphere as she was brought up with some standards in imperial India where her family were treated royally by the natives. Furthermore, Hugh and Alison disliked each other from the beginning. In the words of Alison: "Hugh got more and more subtly insulting ... " (40) and she: "... just sat there, listening to their talk, looking and feeling very stupid" (40) and dejected. Despite Jimmy's realization of her awkwardness in Hugh and Mrs. Tanner, he remained unmoved by her sufferings and took part in Hugh's insult towards her and her class when she desperately needed Jimmy's moral support for herself. Her despair was great because of poverty, joblessness of Jimmy and her inexperience of the proletariat. Still, he had no option to choose as Hugh was the only shelter for Jimmy during that period of his life. In this situation, he could have understood her agony and could have comforted her for his inability to take her somewhere else who had been detached from her family, friends and the kind of people she was used to. Jimmy and Hugh both came to regard her: "... as a sort of hostage from those sections of society they had declared war on" (42) and she was: "Afraid more than anything" (43). She could not even go back to her family after all those weeks of brawling with Mummy and Daddy about Jimmy, she knew she could not appeal to them: "without looking foolish and cheap" (41). In this 'new situation' of her life she recalled her mother, Mrs. Redfern's, warning who: "... has always said that Jimmy is utterly ruthless" (42).

Hugh and Jimmy also invaded the houses of her relatives and friends for food and drink. Jimmy used to take her with them and she used to be extremely humiliated by their crude behaviour. In fact, she had to allow herself to be used by them as she was just helpless in their midst. Moreover, she also understood that it was beyond her to change them. Hugh and Jimmy even went to Alison's brother, Nigel's political meetings: "They took bunches of their cronies with them, and broke them up for him (Nigel)" (44). Being frustrated she "almost wished they'd both go ..." (45) away from the house and leave her behind. Thus, they put her to great shame and sufferings. Hugh's departure from the country could not end her sufferings as Jimmy does not change his prejudice against her class. For all these reasons, in spite of giving herself to Jimmy physically, she had not fully embraced his ideals and could not put her family behind her either. She could have tried to be flexible because she married Jimmy despite knowing his working-class background. But his intentional insult to take revenge on her class was pitiable to her. Hence, she remains cool to his ways of life and his class as Jimmy and Hugh gave her negative impressions about the behaviour of the proletariat.

Alison's pre-marital life was without any responsibility and tension. Contradictorily, in her married life she is in poverty which is a new experience in her life. She has to perform all the household chores, cannot unburden herself to her husband, cannot mix with her family, has no recreation and lead a monotonous life. Moreover, she is pregnant and both mental and physical pressures mount.

It is true that there can be differences between pre-marital life and post marital life in terms of money, atmosphere, responsibility. Any wife can overcome these if her husband is understanding, loving and recognizes her irrespective of class. But, in her case, there is no appreciation or recognition, only disparagement. Though his unceasing talking does not give her rest, she tries to keep sufficient patience. In fact, he is angry to be ignored by her and she is afraid of him. Actually, they have limited communication as they are poles apart regarding their general outlook to life, habits of thoughts, temperaments, social and educational backgrounds. For these reasons, she listened to his ideals, but withheld enthusiasm, submitted to the attraction of Jimmy as a knight, but clung obstinately to the security of well-bred indifference in the face of his onslaughts.

Jimmy yells: “Our youth is slipping away” but fails to realize that present moments are unbelievably rich which he cannot enjoy and disallows her to enjoy. He wants to force allegiance for himself out of her. But she does not feel any respect for him for his abrasive nature. He expects allegiances: “Not only about himself and all the things he believes in, his present and his future, but his past as well” (40) forgetting that these expectations are very difficult for any wife to fulfill.

He forgets that she also needs some space and they are two separate individuals who have different likes and dislikes. Cliff tries to stop Jimmy from brawling as he is a witness of Alison’s unbearable pain but Jimmy defies his request and says: “It’s the only thing left I’m any good at” (53). Cliff is his only friend as “To others, he is simply a loudmouth” (2) and lots of people have gone away from him. This dialogue shows Jimmy’s complicated nature for which he makes very few friends. As a husband he is also very difficult to deal with.

Thus, Jimmy and Alison begin to misunderstand each other right after their marriage. Anxiety, despair are parts of human lives. Here Jimmy fails as a husband to perceive her pain. He needs but is too proud to demand absolute attention and love from her and she also fails to shower it on him on her own as she cannot read his mind. Listening has soothing effect but he hardly listens because of his unawareness of the truth that simple acts of sympathy and listening can transform any relationship.

Despite disagreement or differences, marriages survive because of vital requirements of conjugal life. In their case these elements are missing. As Mukherjee points out:

“This very vocal anger starts at the very beginning of the play and goes through many forms- invectives, parody, malice, mimicry, ruthless provocation and outright unbelievable cruelty right up to the end of the play” (Mukherjee, 12).

Jimmy expects ‘bite’, ‘enthusiasm,’ ‘curiosity,’ about things and people. He angrily cries for these things from her: “Oh heavens, how I long for a little ordinary human enthusiasm” (8) forgetting that he has made her dispirited.

Actually, her sufferings start when Alison’s family returned from India where she spent a blissful life. Their arrival in England brought

miseries for her as her family faced some problems. For some years, they were out of touch with English values and attitudes. Furthermore, her father was disillusioned, the mother was busy with her social life and she was feeling helpless and lonely. In fact, her grief started since then. Her only brother: "Nigel was busy getting himself into Parliament" (42). She needed a true companion. During that time she met Jimmy at a party. Nobody liked him there except her. She found him handsome though: "... there was oil all over his dinner jacket" (44). Her parents did not like her idea of marrying Jimmy because of the social disparity and his unemployment. So, the opposition of her parents for the class distinction has been intolerable to him and she fails to live in total peace and weeps in isolation.

After the arrival of Alison's actress friend Helena, she makes her family replacement and gives her a detailed account of her marriage with Jimmy and the kind of wretched life she has been leading with him. She speaks out her thoughts to lighten her tension for her inability to do it with Jimmy. We cannot blame her as we sometimes confide secrets to our trusted friends. Moreover, Helena is more mature and experienced than Alison. She tells Helena that for twenty years she had lived a happy, uncomplicated life, and suddenly thereafter this spiritual barbarian has stormed into her life and has thrown a challenge at her. She also mentions that earlier the opposition of her parents to the relationship crystallized her own strong feelings for Jimmy, and made up her mind to marry him. But his abuse of Alison is purely sadistic, as he amuses himself by seeing how much abuse she can take. At one point of time Jimmy shows his outburst: "Perhaps, one day, you may want to come back. I want to be there when you grovel ... I want to watch it" (35). Thus, he exhibits his unusual as well as childish nature with whom few wives will be able to cope with.

Before their marriage he has been a subject of humiliation by Alison's mother. Her parents tried everything to stop the marriage of Jimmy and their daughter only because of class prejudice. To him Alison's mother is an epitome of upper-class values and also a great hater of working-class people. She never liked Jimmy and was deadly against their marriage. So after the marriage Jimmy wants Alison not to keep herself in touch with her family. Since his expectation is illogical, she is deeply attached to her family which is known to him. We cannot blame her for her correspondence with her family because marriage never breaks ties between married daughters and their parents. Hence, married women remain mentally in their parents' world which is quite

natural. Therefore, he should not view his wife's continued exchange of letters with her mother as signs of conspiracy and betrayal. When Jimmy found out that she is in touch with her mother, and never mentions him in her letters he gets infuriated with Alison and : "... He comes to feel that Alison has betrayed him by coming over to him in marriage while remaining mentally and spiritually in the worlds of her parents" (**Dyson**, 31). This causes tension in their married life. In reality, she refrains from mentioning his name in her letter. Her intention is not to provoke anybody. Due to prior insult to him, Jimmy is still furious with her mother. He crosses his limit when he utters: "I said she's an old bitch, and should be dead!"(53) This is a show of his utmost meanness and his unforgiving nature towards his mother-in-law. It is normal for men and their in-laws to have some conflicts; Jimmy takes this situation to an unbearable level in wishing death to her. Even Helena, tries to put Jimmy in his place: "You've no right to talk about her mother like that" (53) but fails to stop him as his provocation is constant knowing the weakness of his opponent. Here, Alison's silence is the sign of her utter despair. So after enduring years of disillusion, she aspires to peace by retreating from Jimmy though it cannot relieve her pang; rather her exit and subsequent return to Porter house will lead her to further turmoil.

Surprisingly, Jimmy is not very upset with Alison's father, Colonel Redfern, or any male person in the play indicating his biased attitude to them and his insecurity with women in general; otherwise he would hate his father-in-law too. It is clear that this is not due to Allison that they have conflicts often; he is shown as the instigator of every conflict in this play. Not only in terms of love, but also regarding women altogether, Jimmy sees women as the enemy and has attacked every woman in this play verbally. He mistrusts all women and we know that trust is the most vital element in marriage Therefore, without it Alison and Jimmy cannot expect to live in peace. He cannot trust women as his mother was unfeeling towards her dying husband. This complete lack of sympathy between his mother and wife gives him a twisted view of husband –wife relationship and distrusts Alison making her life wretched and she cannot accept more in her pregnancy.

He wants to possess Alison's complete love. At the same time, he knows that it is impossible. So it seems he intentionally destroys her love for him by inflicting pain on her. It is felt by Alison and her expresses it to Helena that what he really wants is something quite different from both of them (**Alison and Helena**). Jimmy's constant tirades drive Alison to

withdraw herself from his life when he needs her comfort for the sick, Mrs. Tanner, Hugh's mother. Surprising Jimmy she prefers a visit to church rather than a dying woman. As Alison does not go with him, his sense of betrayal peaks and he addresses her "Judas." Consequently: "Now the conflict of husband and wife is fierce ..." (The *Observer*, 1960: 3rd November). Here, she is not influenced by Helena; it is her own decision and a sign of protestation. When she is about to go to the church, Mrs. Tanner's stroke shocks Jimmy and makes him reveal his need for Alison. But she rejects his request in favour of going to church with Helena. To stop her from visiting church he expresses: "I've given you just everything. Doesn't it mean anything to you?" (59) as he wants her to heal his disturbed mind forgetting her agony. We see that he weeps at the infinite sadness of his life when Alison refuses to accompany him for his dying foster mother. We cannot blame Alison's callousness as Jimmy himself has made her withdraw sympathy for Jimmy's class because she cannot forget her bitter experience with Hugh, a member of Jimmy's class.

Alison, by rejecting his offer to visit Hugh's mother, rejects him, his world and his own ideas which hurt him very much. As his life partner, she is expected to accompany him knowing Jimmy's deep attachment to this old woman. But Alison does not care about his close ones because of his meanness towards her family. Actually, mismatching and lack of understanding will not let her live in harmony. So Alison wants to escape from this unhealthy life and: "... the play advances to a truthful climax ..." (The *Sunday Times*, 1956: November).

Knowing everything of Alison's anguish, Helena sends a telegram to her father, Colonel Redfern, to take her away from the Porter house. She does it as she thinks after Alison's departure, "Jimmy will come to his senses" (63). Although Helena sends the wire without prior consult with Alison, she welcomes Helena's decision considering it a relief from her misery and says: "No, I don't mind. Thank you" (62). Moreover, she is carrying a baby without the knowledge of Jimmy and is afraid of informing it to him. The pregnancy of a wife is definitely a good news to a husband and it is generally expected that his wife will inform it to him. But in her case in want of compatibility we see, she hesitates to reveal her pregnancy to him; whereas, she discloses the news to Cliff, and Helena with whom she is mentally close. When Cliff requests her to tell the news to Jimmy, she refuses to do it as: "It's always out of the question. What with-this place, and no money, and oh-everything" (25).

Cliff also worries for Alison and tells: "This has always been a battlefield, but I am pretty certain that if I hadn't been here everything would have been over between these two long ago" (61). Helena also finds the situation: "Sick with contempt and loathing" (54).

After getting the telegram, Alison's father, Colonel Redfern, immediately rushes to her house for the first time. Her parents have always been worried about her new life though opposed her marriage strongly. But now they have got affected by the gloom of their daughter.

At the time of Alison's departure from her house, Cliff requests her to tell Jimmy about her decision herself. Expressing his disappointment Cliff says: "The place is going to be really cock-eyed now" (73). Despite being the witness to Jimmy's constant harangues on Alison and her family, he cannot take her decision to leave Jimmy easily because he will miss her for her gentle, loving nature. In contrast, Alison is unmoved by Cliff's pleas, rather she requests him to look after Jimmy in her absence as her sufferings reach at the highest point. Now she cannot have patience to cope up with his verbal attack in her pregnant state. Actually, what Cliff understands is never understood by Jimmy. For this lack of understanding Jimmy brings her sufferings. In spite of Cliff's advice to her wait until Jimmy returns from London, she sticks to her decision firmly to withdraw from him in his absence for fear of getting mortified in her father's presence.

She is determined to go away as she cannot get the company, support of her husband at all. In addition, Helena sounds logical and caring. Before the arrival of Helena, Alison has tolerated Jimmy's tirades. Despite Cliff's reminder that Jimmy's had: "gone too far ...(56), Jimmy was unheeding to his (Cliff) warning. So, she departs from the emotionally messy premises thinking to get rid of her ache.

Alison seeks the refuge of her family in her utmost crisis. When she hands over a note to Cliff before her departure, he reminds her that it would have been better if she herself had told Jimmy of her decision. But she is resolved to leave without meeting him. Thus: "Alison makes communication between them finally impossible by withdrawing ..." (Worth, 103). We cannot blame her as Jimmy is chiefly responsible for her decision. The separation in class ultimately ended in the separation of the pair as Alison packs to leave Jimmy for ending her problem.

We cannot accuse Alison of getting influenced by her friend to abandon Jimmy. In fact, it is her own decision. Because after her father's arrival at her house, he requests her to stay back and says: "This is a big step you're taking" (71) but fails to produce any effect on her decision. It means, she can take her own decision and is not amenable. Even she rejects Cliff's request to wait till Jimmy's return from hospital. The idea of going back to her parents' house is an escape from the harsh world to a perfect realm of no agony but she will be doomed to suffer further pain there.

After Alison's leaving, Jimmy comes back from London losing his dear one, Mrs. Tanner. He has watched Hugh's mother die and has no pity for Alison when he returns. We can feel his misery when he utters: "She (Mrs. Tanner) was alone, and I was the only one with her" (77). He suffers from terrible mental agony as he has to bear suffering alone forgetting that he himself put his wife in that mental state repeatedly and makes her remove her feelings for his class. So he unreasonably gets furious with Alison.

After Alison's departure, when Helena informs him about his wife's pregnancy, he remains unaffected and utters nasty things: "I don't care if she's going to have a baby" (76) which expresses his severest meanness by this dialogue. Surprisingly, he is remorseless for his brutal behaviour with her. She can be untouched by his problem, but, the unborn baby belongs to him and it is going to be their first issue.

Alison deserts Jimmy for seeking solace in her family. When she was staying in her parents' house, she unexpectedly lost her unborn baby and there she was a lonely sufferer in her family with whom she could not unburden herself. She found them distant. She had undergone an unexpected experience- miscarriage, which had crushed her spirit. The loss of the baby had been a crucial experience, for Alison. She experienced loss for the first time which is terrible.

Sometimes when a woman leads a lonely life without her husband, the loneliness and the gap can be filled by a child. Her unborn child has been a great comfort to her and would have continued to be a comfort if she had not lost it. It seems she is in perpetual sufferings. Now she needs the comfort of companionship and she seeks them from Jimmy, her last resort.

She wants to show him her sufferings but he is unwilling to feel her pain for his obsession with his loss of life and is furious with her for leaving him in his distress. Life partners are expected to be comforting to each other. In their case, both of them are unable to do it. When she returns, she surprisingly finds Helena as his mistress who once came to stay as her guest. Jimmy is blameworthy for his secret relationship with Helena who was his enemy when Alison remained in his house. Thus their illegal relationship is unbelievable to her. Moreover, she never doubted his loyalty to her. Alison's entrance breaks the optimistic mood that had been developing between Jimmy and Helena and we expect Alison to reproach her friend as well as Jimmy. Surprisingly, she displays self-restraint, suppresses her disbelief and modestly regrets her arrival: "I must be mad, coming here like this. I'm sorry, Helena" (93). It is easily understood that she is in great pain. We really appreciate her level of tolerance with Helena on whom she has trusted her marital secrets. So, she has proved herself above ordinary as a life partner to Jimmy. In her baffled state, it is Helena who reminds her: "You are his wife, aren't you? ... You have all the rights-"(94). But we see Jimmy does not have any guilt. Contradictorily, Helena feels guilty and believes all along that her affair with Jimmy is sinful and decides to leave because she is aware of Alison's rights as Jimmy's wife in this house. She is determined to leave Jimmy forever so that Alison can fill up her vacuum. Helena has also noticed that Alison has lost her baby and decides to leave Jimmy for Alison's sake. Helena's self-realization and her desertion of Jimmy pave the way for the reunion of the couple.

If Alison had left Jimmy before, situation could not have been so worse. So we can say that she is somewhat responsible for her lengthened sufferings. After the arrival of Helena, Cliff sensed an extramarital menace that would mess Jimmy's marital life. But Alison considered her a true friend and never suspected her as a usurper. This also exemplifies her immature nature which led her to sufferings and Jimmy's secret involvement with Helena.

We do not see any attempt of Jimmy to embrace her return. If Helena had not left, Alison could not have got him back. Jimmy remains unmoved by her sorrow and she is at the mercy of his mistress though he is mainly responsible for all these unpleasant situations. Thus the wife wins over the other woman and the wreck off a marriage is somehow salvaged. But it cannot guarantee their secure marital life as she will remain depressed and distrust him for her knowledge about his

illegal relationship with Helena. If she had not returned, he might have continued his relationship and would have forgotten about Alison's existence. After the loss of the baby she comes back not only to Jimmy but also to his angry life and her sufferings will restart. In fact, they do not have solidarity which exists between husband and wife. As Kathrine J Worth puts it: "... they both are defeated by an incompatibility that goes too deep to be cured..." (Worth, 5). So, her peace-seeking return will be futile. According to Dumur: "Finally... everything returns to a *status quo*" (Dumur, 174). John Russell Taylor also says: "... at last he and Alison are united again in their idyllic dream world of bears and squirrels... never to make it as human beings in the real world around them" (Taylor, 43) as there is no place for them to retreat in reality, except the safety of the fantasy world.

It is pitiable that because of situation Alison has had to return to insulting Jimmy for prolonging her sufferings. He is clearly threatened by her protest and this is the main problem that he must overcome. In reality, people like Jimmy do not change their ways of thinking overnight, this will take a long time before Jimmy becomes an acceptable person in his society. Moreover, for the circular pattern of the play, her return will bring brief peace in her life. And they will go back to their earlier damaging relationship. Hence, to live with such husband will be a kind of test again.

Throughout the play Alison is portrayed as a tortured soul who sometimes has increased her troubles for her lack of insight, tact and maturity about human relationship. But Jimmy undeniably plays an important part in her sufferings. Fate also has major role to make her a perpetual sufferer. After their reunion, in Cliff's absence, Jimmy will be encouraged to make piercing remarks and will make her life a nightmare again as: "... in the end she accepts her role as the dominated partner ... crawling" (Carnal, 130).

Notes:

All quotations are from John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, London, Faber and Faber, 1957

Alison Porter in *Look Back in Anger*: Is She Responsible for her Sufferings?

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