

LITERARY REBELLION IN TRANSITION: THE CULTURAL LEGACY OF THE ANGRY YOUNG MEN MOVEMENT IN POST-WAR BRITAIN

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Abstract: This extended paper explores the rise, development, and legacy of the "Angry Young Men" literary movement, which emerged in post-World War II Britain as a response to widespread social dissatisfaction and institutional stagnation. Characterized by class-conscious realism, anti-establishment rhetoric, and stylistic innovation, the movement provided a voice for a generation of disaffected writers and intellectuals. Through in-depth analysis of literary texts by John Osborne, Kingsley Amis, and Alan Sillitoe, this paper investigates how literature became a medium for rebellion and cultural transformation. It further considers the lasting impact of the movement on modern British literature and the relevance of its themes in the context of 21st-century socio-political challenges.

Keywords: Angry Young Men, British literature, post-war society, class conflict, rebellion, realism, identity, social change

Introduction

The "Angry Young Men" literary phenomenon emerged in Britain during the 1950s, a period of dramatic economic, political, and cultural transformation. In the aftermath of the Second World War, Britain was grappling with the decline of its empire, economic instability, and growing disillusionment with traditional structures of power. Against this backdrop, a group of young writers began to articulate the frustrations of a generation that felt alienated by the stagnant norms of society.

The term "Angry Young Men" was coined by the media following the success of John Osborne's 1956 play *Look Back in Anger*[2], which portrayed a disaffected working-class intellectual expressing his discontent with post-war Britain. Although the label was initially imprecise and imposed externally, it soon came to signify a collective voice of protest that challenged institutional authority, questioned cultural elitism, and called for authenticity in personal and artistic expression.

Main part

This study adopts a qualitative research framework, integrating literary analysis with socio-historical contextualization. Primary sources include the canonical texts of the movement, such as Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*[2], Amis's *Lucky Jim*[1], and Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*[3]. These texts are examined through

close reading techniques, with particular attention to narrative style, character development, and thematic motifs.

Secondary sources, including scholarly critiques, historical commentaries, and biographical accounts, are used to frame the primary texts within the broader cultural and political atmosphere of post-war Britain. The interdisciplinary approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how the Angry Young Men writers responded to and helped shape the cultural discourse of their time.

Historical Context: Post-War Britain and the rise of discontent
In the 1950s, Britain was undergoing a painful period of recovery. The end of the Second World War brought not only physical and economic devastation but also a crisis of identity. Traditional British values tied to empire, hierarchy, and moral conservatism were being challenged by a new generation of citizens.

The rise of the welfare state, increased access to education, and the slow dismantling of the class system created both opportunities and tensions. Many of the Angry Young Men were beneficiaries of these changes, gaining access to universities and publishing platforms previously reserved for the elite. However, they remained acutely aware of the persistence of social inequality and cultural exclusion, which they addressed directly in their writing[5][9].

Class Consciousness and Working-Class Protagonists Class struggle is a recurring theme in the literature of the Angry Young Men. Their protagonists are often educated but economically disadvantaged individuals who find themselves at odds with the conservative values of the upper and middle classes. Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* [3] features Arthur Seaton, a factory worker whose defiance and hedonism reflect the frustration of working-class youth.

Similarly, Amis's Jim Dixon from *Lucky Jim* [1] uses humor and sarcasm to expose the pretentiousness and absurdity of academic life. These characters exemplify the tension between social mobility and cultural alienation [6][9].

Anti-establishment and political cynicism. A defining trait of the movement is its skepticism towards traditional institutions, including government, academia, and the church. Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* [2] captures the emotional and intellectual disenchantment of post-war youth through Jimmy Porter's fiery monologues, which criticize societal complacency and emotional repression [7] [10].

This anti-establishment stance extended beyond literature into public life, influencing political thought and activism in subsequent decades.

Realism and the use of everyday language. The Angry Young Men rejected the refined language and detached formalism of previous literary traditions. Their works embraced realism, regional dialects, and everyday speech, making their stories more accessible to broader audiences. This stylistic shift helped democratize literature and aligned it with the lived experiences of ordinary people [8].

Cultural impact and legacy. While the movement's visibility declined in the late 1960s, its influence persisted. It inspired a wave of working-class writers, playwrights, and filmmakers who continued to explore themes of alienation, identity, and class conflict. In contemporary literature and television, echoes of the Angry Young Men are found in narratives that challenge authority and foreground marginalized voices [9].

Moreover, the movement's legacy is evident in current debates about inequality, cultural representation, and the role of literature in advocating for social justice.

Conclusion

The Angry Young Men movement marked a critical juncture in British cultural history. By fusing personal narrative with political critique, its writers opened new avenues for literary expression and cultural reflection. Their works remain a testament to literature's power to question, confront, and transform society. As the 21st century grapples with new forms of alienation and inequality, the movement's insights continue to resonate, offering both historical perspective and contemporary relevance.

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