

Neurotic Aggression in Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*

Neimat Zakaria Mohamed Abd El-Haleem

Assistant Lecturer at Faculty of Arts

Port Said University

neimat.zakaria@gmail.com

doi: 10.21608/jfpsu.2021.101035.1142

Neurotic Aggression in Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*

Abstract

This paper illustrates Alfred Adler's quintessential concept of neurotic aggression and its subdivisions: deprecation, accusation, and self-accusation. It focuses on psychoanalyzing Jimmy Porter's accusation. The paper tries to answer the following significant questions: What are the three probable causes of neurosis according to Adler's Individual Psychology? What are the deceiving safeguarding strategies and their subdivisions? And to what extent can Jimmy Porter be considered a typical exemplar of accusation? To answer these questions, this paper applies Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology to the scope of this study, Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1957). This paper concludes that Jimmy Porter is a typical representative character of this abnormal state. The psychoanalytic dissection is enhanced by many dramatic confrontations.

Keywords: Alfred Adler, Neurotic Aggression, John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*.

العدوان العصابي في مسرحية انظر الي الورا بغضب لأوزبورن

م.م. نعمت زكريا محمد عبدالحليم

مدرس مساعد بكلية الآداب

جامعة بورسعيد

مستخلص

يوضح هذا البحث المصطلح الهام لألفريد أدلر وهو العدوان العصابي وتقسيماته: الانتقاص والاتهام واتهام النفس. ويركز علي التحليل النفسي للاتهام لدي جيمي بورتر. ويحاول البحث الاجابة عن الأسئلة الهامة التالية: ما هي الأسباب الثلاثة المحتملة للمرض النفسي طبقا لعلم النفس الفردي لأدلر؟ ما هي استراتيجيات الدفاع الخداعة وتقسيماتها؟ والي أي مدي يعتبر جيمي بورتر نموذجا واضحا للاتهام؟ وللاجابة عن هذه الأسئلة فان هذا البحث يطبق علم النفس الفردي لألفريد أدلر علي مجال هذه الدراسة وهو مسرحية *انظر الي الورا بغضب لأوزبورن* (1957). ويخلص هذا البحث الي أن جيمي بورتر يعد نموذجا ممثلا لهذه الحالة غير السوية. وقد تم دعم النقد التحليلي النفسي بالعديد من المواجهات المسرحية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ألفريد أدلر، العدوان العصابي، جون أوزبورن، مسرحية

انظر الي الورا بغضب.

Neurotic Aggression in Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*

Neurosis is an essential concept in the Adlerian theory of Individual Psychology and the entire theory of Psychoanalysis as well. There is almost no personality theorist who never tackles this significant postulation in his perspective. Kurzweil and Phillips define neurosis as the wrap in an individual's psyche that stems from an unresolved inner conflict (8). According to Adler's Individual Psychology, it is a false interpretation of life that occurs because of one of three probable factors: organ (physical) inferiority, pampering, and neglect. In his *What Life Could Mean to You*, Adler explicates the first possible factor, organ inferiority assuming that a child who suffers from a physical disadvantage may draw a false vision of life. He may confront a trouble in feeling that a contribution to one's society is the essence of life. However, Adler observes that physical signs cannot merely be our means to decide whether the person's mental status will grow well or badly. Adler expounds that we recurrently see those powerful people who struggle to overcome their obstacles and improve their faculties for usefulness. These people are psychologically fortified by the struggle itself (10-11).

Heinz Ansbacher and Rowena Ansbacher manifest that pampering/ tenderization and neglect are other contradictory potential causes of neurosis. While pampering makes a child grows as 'a parasite' (who continuously seeks others' help), neglect makes him feel undesired or ugly. Such two feelings are closely associated as well because as adults later, all the pampered children will inevitably find themselves in different situations which will make them feel deserted and abandoned by others (89). In his *What Life Could Mean to You*, Adler advances that the Pampered child is destructively brought up under the anticipation that everything he needs should be granted. He is negatively brought up to take, not to give. Because he is self-centered, he never acquires the necessity of mutual aid. Such a pampered child has an unchanged aim: to be always first. His exclusive method to cope with problems is to

depend on others. Adler claims that this category of pampered children is perhaps the most dangerous one in the society (11-13).

The neglected child, quite the reverse, settles a negative interpretation of life (that ignores essential positive powers like love and aid) because he does not find a trustworthy "other person". He has encountered a cold and an unfriendly community; thus, he is incapable to communicate with others. This child will establish an expectation that it will be the same in the future. The neglected child, the orphaned and the abandoned as well, is constantly distrustful of others and unable to trust even himself. He has to be aided by being given the experience of a trustworthy other person. Afterwards, this feeling of trustiness has to be regularly broadened until it comprises the environment surrounding him (13-14).

Adler elaborates that the three negative considerations of physical inferiority, pampering and neglect are great temptations for the child to draw his incorrect interpretation of life. These children have to be helped to change their visions of life and to what it is mainly all about (social interest/ the community feeling) (13-14). Besides, in his article "What Is Neurosis?", Adler reveals that preventing neurosis (by a better recognition of the root of the trouble) is possible and necessary. This can be done through the indispensable support of the family, the teacher, the educator, and other helpers (Carlson and Maniaci 198).

Way supposes that once developed, neurosis is constantly accompanied by some abnormal marks shared by all neurotics. Such symptoms comprise a lack of orientation, ego centrality, a fear of encountering failure, a distrust of oneself, an undeveloped social interest, an attempt to evade any test of life, a supposedly unfriendly society, and an envy of other people's success with a pleasure in their misfortunes (92-112). Furthermore, Hergenhahn and Oslon elaborate Adler's opinion that the insecure neurotics have to keep their little self-esteem and feeble sense of worth through their conscious or unconscious use of one of the following 'safeguarding strategies': excuses, neurotic aggression, and distancing. In the first place, 'excuses' refer to the neurotic character's developing of some

symptoms as justifications of his own shortcomings. Consequently, the neurotic individual excessively makes use of some phrases like “Yes, but...” and “if only” (112). Adler presumes that while ‘Yes’ signifies the neurotic character’s onward movement towards his community and the progressive solution of his problems, its subsequent ‘but’ takes him adversely a step backwards. As a result, for Adler, the stronger the ‘but’ is, the greater the neurotic person’s problem will be (*Social Interest* 227).

Hergenhahn and Oslon elaborate that neurotic aggression is a safeguarding strategy that takes one of three different forms: deprecation, accusation, and self-accusation. First, deprecation refers to the person’s inclination to overvalue his own deeds/ achievements and to undervalue those of other people. Second, accusation is the neurotic person’s willingness to blame other people for his own defects or shortcomings, seeking out ‘revenge’ against them. His revenge goes together with an aspiration that other people have to undergo more suffering, because they are the cause of their own misfortunes. Self-accusation/ self-torture denotes the neurotic person’s predisposition to harm himself or to commit suicide just to obtain others’ attention (113-114).

Jimmy Porter is noticeably represented as an exemplar of accusation. First, Jimmy suffers from an inner contradiction between his guiding fiction (future goals) and his real life. He is alienated from his real self, the “central inner force common to all humans and yet unique in each, which is a deep source of growth” (Horney 17). Jimmy’s accusation is essentially embodied in two main demarcations: blaming the upper class for his own shortcomings, and his constant seeking of revenge. It is significant to point out that Jimmy hates all the upper-class members, not only Alison’s parents. This defining point is clarified in Cliff’s declaration to Alison that Jimmy hates some of his own mother’s posh relatives just as he hates her parents. More important is that Jimmy unconsciously transfers his harsh reproach of the upper-class people, represented basically by Alison’s parents, to her personally. He strives for his own avenge through his wife, and her own comfy world. Alison

confides to Helena about her distressing torment with Jimmy, especially during their life in Hugh's flat bemoaning: "I felt as though I'd been dropped in a jungle. I couldn't believe that ... two educated people could be so savage" (II. i. 65).

In this quotation, Alison describes that time in Hugh Tanner's apartment as a 'nightmare'. She feels as if she has been taken from her relaxing world, family, and friends, and dropped into a "jungle" among so ruthless people. Hugh and Jimmy have considered her as a "hostage"/ a captive who has come from an "enemy territory to them" (II. i. 65). Thus, she has found them "frightening". Moreover, she bitterly adds: "They started inviting themselves – through me – to people's houses ... Just about everyone I'd ever known" (II. i. 65). This essential extract expounds Jimmy's and Alison's two contradicting behavioral attitudes. Both Jimmy's and Hugh's parasitism are completely refused by Alison's customs. However, she cannot stop them. She describes them as 'pets', 'wolves', or 'parasites' when they have invited themselves to everyone Alison has ever known. Alison's friends have been "too well-bred". They haven't slammed their door or refused their visit. However, Jimmy, Hugh, and Alison have continued "plundering" their food and cigars as "ruffians". Hugh, in particular, is described by her as the barbarian invader.

Jimmy's accusation towards all the upper-class (especially Alison's parents), is psychoanalytically connected to the neurotic idea of success. For Way, the neurotic individual's success does not mean achievement, but rather "the humiliation of others" (104). Therefore, Jimmy recurrently insults, underestimates, and hurts his wife as well as her parents (her mother in particular) as evidence of his neurotic 'humiliation' of them. Jimmy's marriage of Alison is a part of his revenge, too. Although Jimmy loves Alison, it has been like a war to achieve triumph over her parents who "did just about everything they could think of to stop" (II. i. 67) them from getting married. For Jimmy, he has really rescued Alison from her mother who doesn't hesitate to cheat, lie or do anything to prohibit that marriage. Hiring detectives is one of her "tactics" as well. Jimmy

excitingly recalls the day of his marriage that signifies the moment of his neurotic success and his enemies' defeat: "How I remember looking down at them [Alison's parents]" (II.i.77).

Another dramatic situation that enhances psychoanalyzing Jimmy's aggressive behavior as accusation is that time when he finds out Alison's letters to her mum. While Alison answers Helena's call, he searches her handbag to find out if there is something of him somewhere. For Jimmy, sending and receiving these letters is a betrayal. As soon as Alison returns, he nervously outbursts because his name is not written in all of them (as if his name is a dirty word for Alison too) and throws the letter at her feet to avenge his hurt esteem. Jimmy outbreaks: "She writes long letters back to mummy, and never mentions me at all, because I'm just a dirty word to her too" (I. 57). This dramatic confrontation emphasizes Jimmy's dismay of Alison's superior standard of living. He is quite certain that her mother does not like him. Therefore, she does not recall his name in her letters to Alison (just as a dirty word). Alison's imitation of the same behavior is totally refused by him. To avenge his hurt self-esteem, Jimmy resorts to his aggressive behavior once again when he throws Alison's letter down at her feet. Jimmy's behavior psychoanalytically matches Way's assumption that in order to avenge himself (for his dependence), the neurotic character tries to do others injury and to deprive them of their worth (101).

Although she is repeatedly described by Jimmy as a passive woman of no sensation, Alison feels Jimmy's affliction. More important is that Alison realizes his seeking revenge through her. She broadly admits this feeling to her father before taking her home. Despite his listening of Alison's recalling of Jimmy's mocking description of him as one of the old plants from the Edwardian Wilderness, and of Alison's mother as "A good blow-out for the worms" (II. ii. 91), the patient father notices that Jimmy has apparently taught Alison a great deal. Such a "great deal" is her mental growth that now she can correctly make a comparison between Jimmy's hurt and her father's. She states that both are

angry. However, her father is outraged as everything has changed to the worse while Jimmy is furious because everything is the same. In this respect, Jimmy's insult of Alison's parents denotes his neurotic triumph over them. Therefore, Colonel Redfern openly asks his daughter about the real reason for Jimmy to get married to her and Alison responds: "Perhaps it was revenge" (II. ii. 91).

Jimmy's aggressive physical behavior towards his wife resulting in burning Alison's arm is another connotation of his multi-dimensional aggression. He suffers from an extreme boredom and cannot stand witnessing Alison every day in front of her ironing board. Consequently, he makes a hectic intentional movement, pushes Cliff on the ironing board. It collapses and they all end up in as a pile on the ground. Later, Jimmy holds her arm and frankly concedes that his abusive action has been on purpose. For Heinz Ansbacher and Rowena Ansbacher, the neurotic person satisfies himself through revealing his sense of guilt without an intent for improving his aggressive behavior (119). Jimmy's apologizing without adjusting his violent behavior is applicable to this postulation.

Jimmy's multilayered abuse towards his wife comprises another emotional aspect. One of the apparent examples is when he speaks in a better way about Madeline, his past mistress neglecting Alison's presence: "Just to be with her [Madeline] was an adventure" (I. i. 36). Another instance is his harsh wish that Alison may lose a child just to be awakened from her "beauty sleep" and to have a recognizable human face. Jimmy's violence extends to Cliff, his sole friend. Throughout his role, Jimmy shows his fierce doings towards Cliff even when he asks him to make tea. For Mariko Kaneko and Kosuke Niitsu, anger is an activator of aggression (Penrod and Paulk 154). In Jimmy's case, his constant brawling is his neurotic symptom that functions as a mask whenever he is encountered by a problem (that he finds he cannot manage) (Carlson and Maniaci 196).

Indeed, Jimmy Porter has many causes for his irritated mode. When he has been ten years old, he encounters the distressing

trauma of his father's death. This effective sorrowful experience matches Adler's opinion: "Memories can never run counter to one's life style" (*What Life Could Mean to You* 59). Later, Jimmy Porter suffers from class division in England during the 1950s and the obvious inequality between his working class and his wife's upper middle class. Consequently, as an exemplar of accusation, he avenges for his broken self-esteem and his being socially marginalized. Moreover, Jimmy rejects the sweet stall considering that he deserves a better one as a university graduate. His extreme inconvenience reaches its climax because of boredom, and lacking life enthusiasm as if he were an animal. Jimmy screams: "Let's pretend that we're human beings" (I. i. 32).

Jimmy's constant hostility is another essential aspect of his neurosis. He confesses his general aversion of women: "Have you [Cliff] ever noticed how noisy women are?" (I. i. 42). He directs his cruelest resentment towards the women surgeons. He, surely, finds Alison a true instance of those noisy women. He rudely describes her everyday actions (again in her presence) observing that she is very clumsy. Furthermore, he negatively describes Miss Drury, the owner of their flat as an old robber.

Helena Charles, Alison's actress friend takes the greatest part of Jimmy Porter's animosity. When Cliff asks him about Helena, he answers that she is one of his natural enemies ... What does she want? What make her ring up? It can't be for anything pleasant" (I.55). Helena recognizes Jimmy's antipathy and deals with him in the same way. After listening to Jimmy's heaving playing of the trumpet, she is brave to announce her description of jazz music as "Rubbish" (II. i. 70). Again, she asks him the most substantial question: "You think the world's [has] treated you pretty badly, don't you?" (II. ii. 76) and she is ready to slap his face as well. Jimmy's response is amazing. He asks her if she has ever seen somebody die. Such a question represents his mere criterion that anyone has changed from naivety into perceptiveness. It is astonishing that after Alison's departure, Helena spends "several months" (III. i. 101). In act III, she exactly repeats Alison's "leaning

over the ironing board" (III. i. 101) in act I. However, Jimmy does not cause her arm burning. He knows that Helena belongs to the same working class of living. Thus, she grasps his trouble.

To sum up, this paper concludes that surely, John Osborne has been much affected by the Adlerian concept of neurotic aggression especially accusation. Jimmy Porter's multidimensional accusation has been elaborated. Some examples of these neurotic symptoms are his blaming of the upper-class people for his own failings and shortcomings, humiliating and seeking his revenge of them, continuous anger and brawling, and his constant hostility and abusive behavior. The psychoanalytic dissection has been enhanced by various dramatic situations.

Works Cited

- Adler, Alfred. *Social Interest: Adler's key to the meaning of life*. Oxford and Boston: ONE WORLD Publications, 1998.
- . *What Life Could Mean to You: A New Translation by Colin Brett*. Minnesota: Hazelden Foundation, 1998.
- Ansbacher, Heinz L. and Ansbacher, Rowena R. *Alfred Adler: Superiority and Social Interest: A Collection of Later Writings*. Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964.
- Carlson, Jon and Maniacchi, Michael P. *Alfred Adler Revisited*. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- El Touny, Gamal. *John Osborne Look Back In Anger*. ARE: The Egyptian Scribe, 2003.
- Hergenhahn, B. R. and Oslon, Matthew H. *An Introduction to Theories of Personality*. 6th Ed. New Jersey: Pearson Education International, 2003.
- Horney, Karen. *Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle Toward Self- Realization*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1950.
- Kurzweil, Edith and William Phillips. *Literature and Psychoanalysis*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- Penrod, Maurice G. and Paulk, Scott N. *Psychology of Anger: New Research*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2014.
- Way, Lewis. *Adler's Place in Psychology*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1950.