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DILEMMA OF THE PROTAGONIST IN JOHN OSBORNE'S PLAY *INADMISSIBLE EVIDENCE*

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Abstract

The sensitive man's dilemma in a complicated society, his struggle to accept contemporary values, and his rebellion against them are the overarching themes in John Osborne's plays. *Inadmissible Evidence*, written in 1964, explores these themes with a larger significance than just a peculiar British problem. The play reflects Osborne's matured writing style, reminiscent of his first play, *Look Back in Anger*. At its core, *Inadmissible Evidence* depicts the plight of Bill Maitland, the protagonist, who faces the challenge of reconciling his innermost feelings and beliefs with the societal expectations imposed upon him. Osborne's insightful exploration of Bill's psyche, coupled with his use of symbolism, adds depth and complexity to the character's struggles, making him a relatable and compelling figure. The play's themes of societal conformity and individuality, as well as the tensions between the two, continue to resonate with audiences, making it a timeless classic in the realm of British drama. Through his portrayal of Bill's predicament, Osborne invites us to reflect on our own struggles in navigating societal norms and staying true to our authentic selves. In conclusion, *Inadmissible Evidence* stands as a testament to Osborne's talent as a playwright and his ability to create a work that continues to capture the human experience. It offers a thought-provoking commentary on the complexities of contemporary society, making it an important work that warrants continued study and appreciation.

Keywords: Society, consequences, relationship, alienation, identity, contradiction, existence

Bill Maitland, the protagonist *Inadmissible Evidence* and a small London solicitor, represents the isolated man in an advanced society. He is at odds with the obstinate reality around him. He is up against a society which is fast discarding him. The agony of the hero of the play, comes from the gradual inexorable realization that the world and he are parting company. The tormenting self awareness that he is all alone is not something wholly personal; it is as much of his failure as of the age in which he lives, of the civilization of which he is part, of the

values he has been brought up. In this play, John Osborne once again deals with the theme of failure of communication between different characters and its consequences as we found in *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer*. Bill Maitland, the tortured, disillusioned middle aged protagonist of the play may be cry from the loud mouth Jimmy of his youth, but whereas porter has some sort of future to live for, with Bill everybody walks out of his life, he is ignored, he has no love, no strength, no future, he is complete failure. The world it seems, is conspiring to

ignore his existence, his friends and associates turns away from him, taxis for hire take no notice of his attempts to hail them. People he is talking to on the telephone hang upon him in the middle. His employees in the office don't take notice of him; his clients burble on their own problems; his daughter when she comes to visit him stands wordless and reactionless and leaves without opening her mouth.

The play reveals how Maitland miserably fails to make his mark either in his profession or in his relationship with others. Bill Maitland, the protagonist of the play, is in dilemma. He is aware of the fact that he is losing grip over his relationships. He is constantly trying to catch hold of the loose ends. His concern for establishing relationships with others relieve him, partly at least of the responsibility of being a human failure in life and by implication, makes society responsible for it. In his nightmare he confessed his inability to establish relationships with others. In this fantastic dream-trial scene his long-suppressed guilt is being adjudged by his own conscience.

I never hoped or wished for anything more than to have the good fortune of friendship and the excitement and comfort of love and the love of woman in particular. I made a set at both of them in my own way. With the first with friendship I hardly succeeded at all. With the second, with love, I succeeded, in inflicting, quite certainly inflicting, more pain than pleasure. I am not equal to any of it. But I can't escape it, I can't forget it. And I can't begin again. You see?¹

Maitland has no illusion about himself. In the very beginning of the play he accepts his defeat, his inability to establish relationship with others and all the waits for is the progression of misery and complete sense of isolation. The whole play is dedicated to show the progression of Maitland's isolation and destruction as the other's leave him one by one and he is reduced to a helpless tragic figure. The play opens amid the "bones and dead objects of a solicitor's office" (p.9). In the dream sequence he is being judged by his clerk. Bill confesses from the dock:

As for why I am here, I have to confess this: I have to confess that : that I have depended almost entirely on other people's efforts. Anything else would have been impossible for me, and I always knew in my own heart that only that it was that kept me alive and functioning at all, let alone making decisions or being quick minded and all that nonsense about me... (p.19).

As a solicitor specializing in crimes and divorce, Maitland is no longer able to solve the affairs of others in trouble for he has not even the ability to solve his own. He speaks less with anger than with guilt as is evident from, "they used to say I had a quick brain" (p.18). He is stuck by a realization that marriage mistresses, his children, himself are meaningless. "I don't know what you have to do with me at all, and soon you won't, you'll go out of that door and I'll not see you again" (p.105), he remarks to his teen-aged daughter. He tells her outright, "but there isn't much loving in any of your kindness, Jane, not much kindness, not even cruelty, really, in any of you, not much craving for the harm of others, perhaps just a very easy, controlled sharp, I mean 'sharp' pleasure in discomfiture" (p.106). The younger generation she represents can no more understand Bill than did the parents.

In the play, Osborne has laid stress on the miserable plight of Maitland as an alienated person, but the play lacks the social reference in the sense that it is not made clear in what way industrial society is responsible for his alienation. However, Osborne succeeds in bringing out Maitland's sense of isolation in all areas of life, his haunting sense of inability to establish relationship with others and the final stage of his struggle, the acceptance of total isolation. As the progression of Bill's isolation is revealed to us step by step, we also witness some traits of his nature, his inadequacies and moral lapses which are responsible for his failure of relationship for his failure of relationship with others.

Maitland's failure to connect with others is rooted in the contradiction in his personality. These contradictions are due to the psychic distortions that he has suffered in the absence of a valid perception

into the nature of reality surrounding him. His inability to relate with others in a positive way is therefore primarily due to these distortions. While he desires love and friendship from others, he himself is spiteful. He frankly admits, "I myself, am more packed with spite and twitching with revenge than anyone I know of. I actually often, frequently, daily want to see people die for their errors. I wish to kill them myself, to throw the switch with my own fist" (p.80). One may feel pity for him but he is not worthy of love and friendship because of his mean and spiteful nature.

Bill is progressively deserted by his clients, wife, children and mistresses. Osborne shows this distortion overtaking Maitland with cumulative horror of a dream. His obsession with sex and promiscuity in his life dominates his existence, the minor triumphs of his conquests offering a transient defense against the major failure of his life to build true relationship with his family or himself. Instead of making amends he takes a defensive course by having recourse to indiscriminate sex. His wild sexuality thus implies a compensatory device which gives him a bogus sense of heroism. Loveless lust corrupts his entire being. It ruins his family life consequently his image and credibility is lost. He is not able to make his wife, Anna, and mistress Liz, happy since he cannot respond to them in a healthy way. As if this is not sufficient trouble he gets involved with Joy, his secretary, sexually. He is not given due respect by his employees. One of his employees Shirley openly refuses to obey him:

Bill : What ? Oh, get me a glass of water, Shirley *Shirley* (pause) Helpless? (p.21).

Eventually he fails in having good relationship in almost every sphere of life relating to others, relating to social world, professional world, family love and his failure in relating specifically to his own self. Even his business associates turn away from Bill. He always has these fears that his employees would join some other company.

Hudson: No, Not exactly.

Bill : You mean you are thinking of leaving? (p.51).

Even his father ignores him. He says, "my old father lives in the country, as you know, but he doesn't want to see me these days" (p.100). Not only does his father ignore him even his parents in law have long ceased to acknowledge his existence. He reveals this to his daughter Jane, "Your other grand parents can hardly bring themselves to acknowledge me" (p.103).

Maitland's relations with his wife are strained and they seem to be standing on the point of separation. He feels his independence curtailed in the company of his wife. He makes no secret of his infidelity and tells his daughter that he does not care for her also. He says, "you should know I shan't with you, or, at least, your mother then, just because I shall be with Liz – a subject that bores you..." (pp.103-104).

Maitland finds his daughter and his wife deserting him as they are justified in doing so. Jane Bill's daughter arrives and departs. He knows it beforehand. Only Liz, his mistress remains and she too will leave him as he has rightly realized, "she may be the last to pack it in, but pack it in she will..."

Even in the unsatisfied life of his clients, Bill, discovers scraps of his own useless life, in their accusations he discovers justification of his own style of living. The subjective and the objective seem to have lost all relevance for him, and he answers his own questions rather than those of his clients. The incidents in the life of his clients seem to interpret his own life as is evident from the conversation.

Mrs. T : To those malpractices. That. In March 1961 when the petitioner was seven months pregnant with the child Laura, the respondent violently chastised the child Edward with a heavy blush of a type....

Bill : No truth at all in these allegation....

Mrs. T : After the said occurrence on the 19th July 1961....

Bill : As described, bears no relation to what actually happened.

I do admit there were many times when I failed. Many times.

Mrs. T : The petitioner left the respondent.

Bill : I failed in giving her compl satisfaction. My wife left me on the 12th day of September 1963 (p.81).

The clients who come to Maitland also withdraw from him. Their problems turn out to be similar to the problem of Maitland. One of the clients tells Maitland of her husband's problem in establishing relationship with others. This problem comes out to be similar to Maitland's problem.

Mrs. G : He comes home to me, and I know that nothing really works for him. Not at the office, not his friends, not even his girls. I wish they would (p.55).

His female clients are important in that they symbolically throw light on Maitland's situation. They stand for anyone of his woman unable to love him because of their compulsive need to withdraw. Maitland can feel his client Mrs. Garnsey withdraw from him. His clients Mrs. Tonks and Mrs. Garnsey are both played by the same actress signifying the sameness of all Maitland's relationships.

Not only his friend and relatives avoid him and turn away from him, but even taxis ignore his call. His failure to hire a taxi symbolize his failure to assess his own presence. Even the liftman ignored him.

Bill : And the caretaker turned his back on me. I was walking up the stairs and I was going to ask him – you know, quite politely – why the lift wasn't working. And he turned his back on me (p.28).

Estranged and isolated, Maitland finding himself incapable of having relationship with anyone then turns to his wife, Anna for support, "Sometimes I think you're my only grip left, if you let me go, I'll disappear, I'll be made to disappear, nothing will work, I'll like something in a capsule in space, weighless, unable to touch anything or do anything, like a groping baby in a removed, putrefying womb... No, I'll not leave you.... I've told you" (p.64). Maitland is so much self-righteous and conceited that he never questions his moral right to demand support from his wife who he has already deserted in favors of his mistresses. Their relationship was destined to end in final separation as it was not based on love, respect and understanding.

Estranged from all others, he finally cuts off from his wife too.

Bill is aware of the fact that people don't like him but this knowledge never makes him analyses his own nature and values. He takes his values more correct rather than those of society. He thinks others have no justification for treating him the way they are doing. He knows that people want to get rid of him because he wants to get rid of them. Bill is so much self-righteous that he justifies his actions while he resents the action of others.

In Maitland's character we see a modern isolated human being, his failure to adjust his needs to the accepted social code of conduct and his implied protest against current values. He is unwilling to accept the current values of society, but also does not have any other values to adopt in their place. He is in search of finding his identity and the meaning of his existence in society but in vain. Maitland's protest against the negation of individually in the present civilization of modern times is explicit in his speech. He also expresses his hatred for modern technology and society in a long satirical speech:

Bill : I swear and affirm... I hereby swear and affirm. Affirm. On my.... Honour? By my belief. My belief in... in... the technological revolution, the pressing, growing, pressing, urgent need for more and more scientists... (p.10).

This powerful hatred against society is bound to create in Bill Maitland the sense of estrangement from the society. However, this sense of estrangement and frustration appears more as a typical product of his peculiar nature than of society. The trouble with Bill is that he is striking into his own subjectivity. But he thinks that trouble with him is that people are withdrawing from him. Elements in his subjectivity are hindrances in his path to harmonize relations with others. Temperamentally he is so selfish, conceited and self-righteous a person that people withdraw from him. At the end of the play, we find Maitland standing alone cut off from the rest of the world and feeling the pang of his alienated existence.

His practice wither, taxis pass him by, his staff leave and porters ignore him. Finally, his family and mistress desert, and unable to fight on, Bill threw in towel and admits the obscurity of his existence.²

So, we can conclude that Bill Maitland is in dilemma. He is the only Osborne hero who is better positioned to create a viable life of dignity. He is a lawyer, not a sweet-stall keeper or actor. But he pursues his dark desires in such a manner that his private and public worlds come crashing around him. He makes a mess of the chance which his society offers him.

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