

M16: Deconstructing Jimmy Porter: what about a psychoanalytic view?

'There aren't any good, brave causes left. If the big bang does come, and we all get killed off, it won't be in aid of the old-fashioned grand design. It'll just be for the Brave New-nothing-very-much-thank-you.'

It's 50 years since John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* crashed onto the stage at the Royal Court, but as a recent G2 article asked (G2 'Fifty Years of Anger' 31.03.06), is it still relevant? Times have changed, the political and social scene has moved on, and many of those involved in the first production are now dead. Recently a student on the MA for Psychoanalytic Studies at the Tavistock Clinic completed and published a dissertation in a US journal (Schlussel, 2005) on the subject of 'delayed adolescence'. Here she revisited the dilemmas of Jimmy Porter and his contemporary fictional character Charles Lumley in John Wain's *Hurry on Down*, to find out whether their anger might have a more general relevance beyond their historical period. What happens when adolescent angst, anger and confusion about who to be extends beyond the teens and into the twenties or thirties? Fellow students have recently written on such diverse topics as the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins in relation to early experience of language, the novels of Ian McEwan and sibling rivalry, the notion of evil and the death instinct in contemporary life, and the effect on learning of having to flee one's country of origin.

Can psychoanalytic thinking be applied to culture and society, and have something to say about it? While psychoanalysis has and probably will continue to have its detractors, this two year course (with a one-year optional route) run jointly by the Tavistock and the University of East London continues to attract those who want to get a different view of the human project. Twenty students as a maximum on each year follow three strands, and at the end make their own particular sense of what they have experienced, in a dissertation of their choice. They observe a baby or a young child in the family home each week, and discuss this in small groups with experienced clinicians, to think about ordinary human development, its pains and its pleasures. In the second year some students get the chance to observe an institution (not their own)-to see if these concepts can help in seeing how we work together (or not) in groups- a different take on 'The Office'. They get an in-depth look at Freud and Klein, and then broaden their view to include Winnicott, Bowlby, Lacan, Anne Freud and the post-Kleinians. On the Applications strand aspects of both past and contemporary culture: drama, film, art, narrative, social phenomena and the philosophy of research, become the site of enquiry. New doors are opened, and new paths might be taken, or old ones revisited with a different perspective. Students frequently talk of the value of the course and its effect both on their professional and their personal lives. One student talked of 'a greater sense of the world around me'; another described the course as being 'challenging and rewarding in equal measure'.

Judith Edwards

Reference

Schlussel, A., 'Making a political statement or refusing to grow up' in the *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 65, No. 4, 381-403

For further information, Visit www.tavi-port.org or contact the M16 course administrator Monica Rodriguez on 0208 938 2553