

was rather mixed, so much so it produced a series of typical Osborne outbursts. *There is not one daily critic in London equipped to review a play properly* (New York Times), *The gentleman's agreement to ignore puny theatre critics as bourgeois conventions that keep you pinned in your soft seats is a thing that I fall in with no longer. After ten years it is now war.* (Telegram to The Times).

Christopher Innes saw these later plays as increasingly autobiographical, concerned with the *problematical relationship between the non-conforming writer and the society he addresses which co-opts the artists through commercial success. Since this mirrors Osborne's own career, his plays become increasingly a form of navel-gazing.*

After 1972 his plays were no longer performed at the Royal Court and his last play, *Déjà vu*, 1991, was a sequel to *Look Back in Anger*, but self-absorbed and grouchy, lacking the fire of the first play.

The Playwright

1950	The Devil Inside, Theatre Royal Huddersfield
1955	Personal Enemy (co-written with Anthony Creighton) : Harrogate
1956	Look Back in Anger : Royal Court, Evening Standard Award for most promising playwright
1957	The Entertainer: Royal Court
1958	Epitaph for George Dillon (co-written with Anthony Creighton): Royal Court
1959	The World of Paul Slickey: Palace Theatre, directed by John Osborne
1961	Luther: Royal Court. Tony Award for best play.
1962	The Blood of the Bamburghs and Under Plain Cover: Royal Court
1964	Inadmissible Evidence: Royal Court
1965	A Patriot for Me: Royal Court (as a club to circumvent the Lord Chamberlain's ban on the play). Evening Standard Award as best play of the year
1966	A Bond Honoured: National Theatre at The Old Vic

1968	Time Present: Royal Court
1968	The Hotel in Amsterdam: Royal Court. Evening Standard Award as best play of the year
1971	West of Suez: Royal Court
1972	A Sense of Detachment: Royal Court
1975	The End of Me Old Cigar: Greenwich Theatre
1976	Watch It Come Down: National Theatre
1991	Déjà vu: Comedy Theatre

He also wrote a number of plays for television in the 1970s and 80s, some adaptations (notably of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*) and won an Oscar for his screenplay of 'Tom Jones' in 1962.

The Play

The first production of *The Hotel in Amsterdam* was 3 July 1968 at the Royal Court Theatre, directed by Anthony Page, with an extremely distinguished cast including Paul Scofield, Judy Parfitt, Isabel Dean and Joss Ackland. It received the Evening Standard award for Best Play of the Year and a number of positive reviews, in particular, a most perceptive and sensitive critique from Harold Hobson in the Sunday Times with the headline *Prisoners of Freedom*:

The best contemporary play in London, the richest in wit, the most arresting in mood, the most accomplished in performance, and the most far-reaching and haunting in resonance... It is about fear, the fear, sometimes well-founded but more often not, that seizes people in middle life, when the future no longer seems bright and certain before them. It is about friendship. It is about goodness.... The play also, it seems to me, is about England. For England, too, is now in show business. The country may be going to the devil, without confidence and without ideals, but it has the best entertainment, the best actors, the best theatre in the world. I do not think that this satisfies Mr Osborne, for he is devoted to England with a passion that is almost frightening. He is not one of those patriots who are vocal in praise of our blood and state – but who live in Switzerland. He is tortured by our decline, and angry at our lazy and selfish complacency; they wring from him the cries of a true distress.

Ronald Bryden, too, in the Observer, noted the play's metaphorical force, saying that the play

recalls on the surface the Noel Coward of 'Present Laughter' with his showbiz ethic of comradely malice and loyalty to the freemasonry of craft. But there the parallel between Osborne and Coward ends: Osborne's new comedies are infinitely sourer, more disillusioned and complex; less celebrations of an ideal show-business morality that studies in its corruption, and the corruption of England. All the good, brave causes are not merely dead, but rotten....It's a powerful, mature moral indictment, documented with a finely precise and detailed accuracy. Cumulatively (the plays of his middle period) add up to an impressive body of work, our most penetrating and truthful portrait gallery of the mean time we inhabit.

Benedict Nightingale in *Play and Players* saw the play as *a sort of tone-poem, affecting mood and atmosphere*. But, as with almost all of Osborne's plays, not all critics were so impressed: D.A.N. Jones in *The Listener* found it *a tale of bores being bored, who can think of nothing to do but eat, drink and sneer at 'bank managers dancing together'*.

The Legacy

The whole world knew that it was John who established the idea that it would be to the stage that people would look for some sort of recognisable portrait of their own lives. It would not be from this country's then weedy novels, nor from its still shallow and mendacious journalism that people would expect strong feeling or strong intelligence, but from its often clumsy, untutored living theatre. Free from the highbrow pieties of the university on one side, and from the crassness of what came to be called the media on the other, the theatre alone could celebrate John's approved qualities of joy and curiosity. It could also affront his deadly enemy, opinion.

And for many years, ridiculously, this central claim of John's, his ruling belief in the theatre's unique eloquence held and kept its authority. *On the stage*, he said, of the little space

John Osborne

The Life

John Osborne was born in Fulham in 1929; his father was a commercial artist and copywriter and his mother a barmaid. The family moved to Surrey in 1936: his father's health steadily declined and he died in 1941. John, then aged twelve, was devoted to his father and was profoundly affected by his death – an experience in part dramatised in one of Jimmy Porter's most powerful speeches in *Look Back in Anger*. In 1943 he was sent to a boarding school in Devon about which he wrote in his autobiography: *St Michael's was probably not much seedier or inefficient than many other schools of its kind, offering the merest timid trappings of a fake public school for the minimum expense*. He was expelled in 1945 for hitting a teacher.

After a brief spell as a junior journalist, he entered the theatre as assistant stage manager and understudy on a 48 week tour of *No Room at the Inn* and for the next six years he was an actor – and aspiring playwright – in a number of repertory companies. As his mother, the famous (or perhaps, as portrayed in Osborne's autobiography, infamous) Nellie Beatrice put it after watching a performance, *Well, he certainly puts a lot into it. Poor kid*. In 1956 he was acting with the English Stage Company at the Royal Court when he submitted *Look Back in Anger* to the artistic director, George Devine, who saw in the play a ferocious and scouring articulation of a new post-war spirit. It was an enormous commercial success, transferring to the West End and to Broadway. Kenneth Tynan wrote: *I could not love anyone who did not wish to see Look Back in Anger, it is the best young play of its decade*; Arthur Miller described it as *the only modern English play*; and Alan Sillitoe wrote, *John Osborne didn't contribute to the British theatre: he set off a land-mine called Look Back in Anger and blew most of it up*.

The following year *The Entertainer* cemented Osborne's reputation and he was able to buy houses in Chelsea and in Edenbridge, Kent, where he lived for the next two decades. For the next ten years or so there was a new Osborne play almost every year, including *Inadmissible Evidence*, *A Patriot for Me* and *The Hotel in Amsterdam*, but the critical response

The Hotel In Amsterdam

By
John Osborne

Hotel porter/waiter Michael Gerrard
Gus Mark Sutherland
Laurie Paul Davis
Margaret Izzie Cartwright
Annie Christina Baker
Amy Clare Wooster
Dan Rob Hurcum
Gillian Jackie Bullock

Director Lynette Shanbury
Stage Manager Erik Pearson
Assisted by Milly Tucker
Set Built by Richard Kessel and team
Costumes Evelyn Moutrie
..... Caroline Bronne-Shanbury
Properties Margaret Rudolph
Lights/sound operation Mac

*The director would like to thank Ruislip Dramatic Society,
East Lane Theatre Club, Roger Turner, Shirley Wootten and
especially Caroline Bronne-Shanbury*

behind the proscenium arch at the Royal Court Theatre, *you can do anything*. John knocked down the door and a whole generation of playwrights came piling through, many of them not even acknowledging him as they came, and a good half of them not noticing that the vibrant tone of indignation they could not wait to imitate was, in John's case, achieved only through an equally formidable measure of literary skill,

There is in everything John writes a love for the texture of real life, a reminder of real pleasure and real pains. *I never*, he wrote in what I once claimed was his most characteristic statement, *had lunch in Brighton without wanting to take a woman to bed in the afternoon*.

It is the final irony that John's governing love was for a country which is, to say the least, distrustful of those who seem to be both clever and passionate. Nothing bewilders the English more than someone who exhibits great feeling and great intelligence. When, in John's case, a person is abundant in both, the English response is to take in the washing and bolt the back door. Of all British playwrights of the 20th century he is the one who risked most. And, risking most, frequently offered the most rewards.

An extract from David Hare's speech at John Osborne's memorial service in June 1995

'I write of the comfortless tragedy of isolated hearts.'

John Osborne

We really do live in a wicked world. I believe that writers should express their position about this as well as they can and in the country in which they have elected to live. Writers are often more thoughtful than the rest of the community and occasionally more literate. However, they should speak modestly as gifted or admired individuals and not as part of a privileged pressure group with access to revealed truths.

Our Next Production

Molly Sweeney

by Brian Friel

Molly Sweeney is a three-handed play by Brian Friel, author of *Aristocrats*, *Translations* and *Faith Healer*. Its central character is Molly Sweeney, blind from childhood, whose sight is restored. The play explores how this affects her relationship with her husband, her surgeon and the world around her. What she “sees” when she is blind and what she sees with her newly found sight are two different things.

What is fantasy and what is real ?

Directed by Crystal Anthony
Wednesday 25th to Saturday 28th January, 2006
7.45pm Travellers Studio, Harrow Arts Centre
Box Office : 020 8866 7075
Tickets : £7.50

Other Local Productions

Ruislip Dramatic Society presents *Local Affairs* by Richard Harris 23-26 November, 8.00 pm at the Compass Theatre. Tickets £9 (concessions £8 Wednesday and Thursday only). An hilarious comedy by Richard Harris, the award-winning playwright and creator of such classics as *Outside Edge* and *Stepping Out*. Box office: RDS tel: 01895 637422/07960 751597 or from Compass tel: 01895 673200 (<http://www.ruislipdramatic.org>)

East Lane Theatre Club presents *My Three Angels* by Sam and Bella Spewack, at their theatre in Wembley. Thursday 8th – Saturday 10th and Wednesday 14th – Saturday 17th December 2005, 7.45 pm. A charming Christmas comedy directed by Linda Hampson, Box office: 07762 622215 (<http://www.eastlanetheatre.co.uk>)

PROSCENIUM

The Hotel In Amsterdam

By John Osborne

Wednesday 19th to Saturday 22nd October 2005
Compass Theatre, Ickenham

The Hotel In Amsterdam