

John Osborne

(1929 - 1994)



John James Osborne was an English playwright, screenwriter, actor and critic of The Establishment. In a productive life of more than 40 years, Osborne explored many themes and genres, writing for stage, film and TV. His personal life was extravagant and iconoclastic. He was notorious for the ornate violence of his language, not only on behalf of the political causes he supported but also against his own family, including his wives and children.

John Osborne was born in December 1929 in London, the son of Thomas Godfrey Osborne, a commercial artist and advertising copywriter of South Welsh extraction, and Nellie Beatrice, a Cockney barmaid. He adored his father and hated his mother. Thomas Osborne died in 1941. John entered Belmont College in Devon in 1943 but was expelled in the summer term of 1945 after whacking the headmaster, who had struck him for listening to a forbidden broadcast by Frank Sinatra. School certificate was the only formal qualification he acquired, but he possessed a native intelligence.

After school, Osborne went home to his mother in London and briefly tried trade journalism. A tutoring job for a touring company of junior actors introduced him to the theatre. He soon became involved as a stage manager and actor, joining Anthony Creighton's provincial touring company. Osborne tried his hand at writing plays, co-writing his first, *The Devil Inside him*, with his mentor Stella Linden, who then directed it at the Theatre Royal, Huddersfield in 1950. Around this time he also married Pamela Lane. His second play *Personal Enemy* was written with Anthony Creighton (with whom he also wrote *Epitaph for George Dillon* staged at the Royal Court in 1958) and staged in regional theatres.¹

When George Devine placed a notice in *The Stage* in 1956, Osborne decided to submit one of his plays, *Look Back in Anger*. Not only was his play produced, but it is considered by many critics to be the turning point in postwar British theatre. Osborne's protagonist, Jimmy Porter, captured the angry and rebellious nature of the postwar generation, a dispossessed lot who were clearly unhappy with things as they were in the decades following World War II. Jimmy Porter came to represent an entire generation of "angry young men".

In his next play, *The Entertainer* (1957), Osborne continued to examine the state of the country, this time using three generations of a family of entertainers to symbolize the decline of England after the war. An experimental piece, *The Entertainer* alternated realistic scenes with Vaudeville performances, and most critics agreed that it was an appropriate follow-up to the wild success of *Look Back in Anger*. After this, however, the quality of Osborne's output became erratic. Although he produced a number of hits including *Luther* (1961), a play about the leader of the Reformation, and *Inadmissible Evidence* (1965), the study of a frustrated solicitor at a law firm, he also produced a string of unimportant works.

Osborne died as a result of complications from Diabetes on December 24, 1994, in Shropshire, England. He left behind a large body of works for the stage as well as several autobiographical works. Several of his plays were also adapted for film including *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer*. In 1963, Osborne won an Academy Award for his screenplay for *Tom Jones*.²

¹ "John Osborne", **Wikipedia**, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Osborne

² "John Osborne", **HugePoems.com**, www.hugepoems.com/biography-of-poets/john-osborne

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