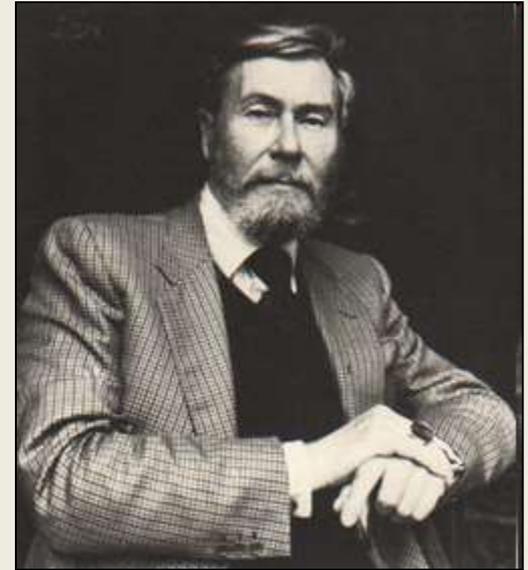


JOHN OSBORNE
(1929 – 1994)
AN INTRODUCTION





John James Osborne

(December 12, 1929 – December 24, 1994)

- He was an English playwright, screenwriter, actor and critic of The Establishment. The stunning success of his 1956 play *Look Back in Anger* transformed English theatre.
- In a productive life of more than 40 years, Osborne explored many themes and genres, writing for stage, film and TV.
- Osborne was one of the first writers to address Britain's purpose in the post-imperial age.

Born to:

- Thomas Osborne
(a commercial artist)
and
- Nellie Beatrice
(a Cockney barmaid).

- He adored his father
and hated his mother.



- During his peak (1956-1966), he helped make contempt an acceptable onstage emotion.
- He argued for the cleansing wisdom of bad behaviour and bad taste.
- He combined unsparing truthfulness with devastating wit.

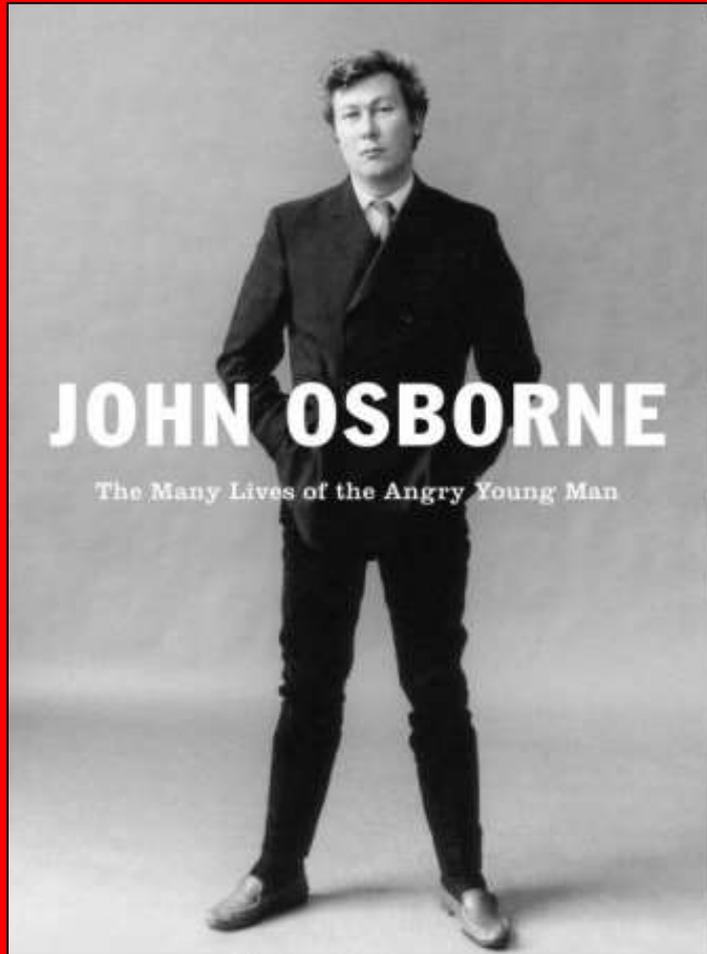
- His father died in 1941, leaving John an insurance settlement.
- He used the money to finance a private education at Belmont College.
- He was expelled in 1945 after assaulting the headmaster, who had struck him for listening to a forbidden broadcast by Frank Sinatra.
- School certificate was the only formal qualification he acquired, but he possessed a native intelligence.



Years of Struggle

- He briefly tried trade journalism.
- Introduced to theatre by tutoring a company of junior actors.
- Became involved as a stage manager and in acting.
- Tried his hand at writing plays.
- Married Pamela Lane, his first wife.
- In 1956, with the publication of Look Back in Anger, he became famous.

LOOK BACK IN ANGER



- *Look Back in Anger* was largely autobiographical.
- The play was based on his time living with Pamela Lane in cramped accommodation in Derby.
- She cuckolded him with a local dentist.
- The producer was prepared to gamble on the play because he saw in it a ferocious and scowling articulation of a new post-war spirit.
- From the play was coined the phrase 'angry young man'.

REVIEWS



Reviews were mixed:

- The *Evening Standard*, for example, called the play "a failure" and "a self-pitying snivel".
- The Observer* praised it: "It is the best young play of its decade".
- The Sunday Times* called Osborne "a writer of outstanding promise".

The play went on to be an enormous commercial success, transferring to the West End and to Broadway, touring to Moscow and in 1958 a film version was released with Richard Burton and Mary Ure in the leading roles.

The play turned Osborne from a struggling playwright into a wealthy and famous angry young man.

A series of plays on different themes followed:

<i>The Devil Inside</i>	Theatre	1950
<i>The Great Bear</i>	Theatre	1951
<i>Personal Enemy</i>	Theatre	1955
<i>Look Back in Anger</i>	Theatre	1956
<i>The Entertainer</i>	Theatre	1957
<i>Epitaph for George Dillon</i>	Theatre	1958
<i>The World Of Paul Slickey</i>	Theatre	1959
<i>A Subject Of Scandal And Concern</i>		1960
<i>Luther</i>	Theatre	1961
<i>Plays for England</i>	Theatre	1962
<i>The Blood of the Bambergs</i>		
<i>Under Plain Cover</i>		
<i>Tom Jones</i>	Screenplay	1963
<i>Inadmissible Evidence</i>	Theatre	1964
<i>A Patriot For Me</i>	Theatre	1965
<i>A Bond Honoured</i>	Theatre	1966
<i>The Hotel In Amsterdam</i>	Theatre	1968
<i>Time Present</i>	Theatre	1968
<i>The Charge of the Light Brigade</i>		1968

WORKS OF JOHN OSBORNE

<i>The Right Prospectus</i>	TV	1970
<i>West Of Suez</i>	Theatre	1971
<i>A Sense Of Detachment</i>	Theatre	1972
<i>The Gift Of Friendship</i>	TV	1972
<i>Hedda Gabler</i>	Theatre	1972
<i>A Place Calling Itself Rome</i>	Theatre	1973
<i>Ms, Or Jill And Jack</i>	TV	1974
<i>The End Of Me Old Cigar</i>	Theatre	1975
<i>The Picture Of Dorian Gray</i>	Theatre	1975
<i>Almost A Vision</i>	TV	1976
<i>Watch It Come Down</i>	Theatre	1976
<i>Try A Little Tenderness</i>	Theatre	1978
<i>Very Like A Whale</i>	TV	1980
<i>You're Not Watching Me, Mummy</i>		1980
<i>A Better Class of Person</i>	Book	1981
<i>A Better Class of Person</i>	TV	1985
<i>God Rot Tunbridge Wells</i>	TV	1985
<i>The Father</i>	Theatre	1989
<i>Almost a Gentleman</i>	Book	1991
<i>Déjàvu</i>	Theatre	1992

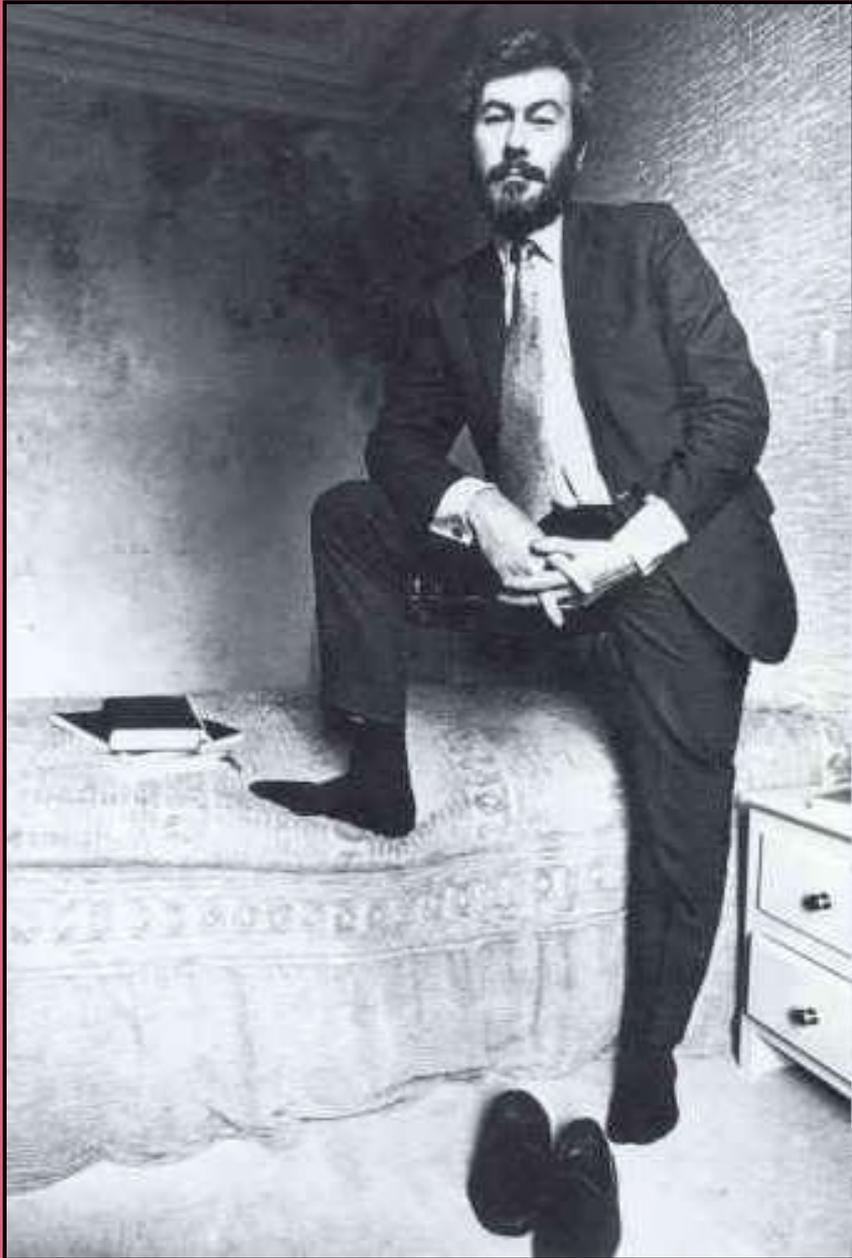


AWARDS

• ***Luther*** depicting the life of Martin Luther won Osborne a **Tony Award**.

• Osborne won an **Oscar** for his 1963 adaptation of ***Tom Jones***.

• ***Look Back In Anger, A Patriot For Me*** and ***The Hotel in Amsterdam*** won **Evening Standard Best Play of the Year** awards.



PRIVATE LIFE

Osborne was married five times; the first four ended in divorce, the last in his death:

1) Pamela Lane (1951-1957)

Inspired Alison Porter in *Look Back in Anger*

2) Mary Ure (1957-1963)

3) Penelope Gilliatt (1963-1968)

4) Jill Bennett (1968-1977)

5) Helen Dawson



Osborne and Jill Bennett



ILLNESS & DEATH

- After a serious liver crisis in 1987, Osborne became a diabetic, injecting twice a day.
- He died from complications from his diabetes at the age of 65 at his home in Clunton, Shropshire.
- He is buried in St George's churchyard, Clun, Shropshire alongside his last wife, the critic Helen Dawson, who died in 2004.



Graves of Osborne and his fifth wife in Clun churchyard

KITCHEN SINK DRAMA

It is a term coined to describe a British cultural movement which developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s in theatre, art, novels, film and television plays. Their 'heroes' can usually be described as angry young men.



It used a style of social realism which often depicted the domestic situations of working class Britons living in rented accommodation and spending their off-hours in grimy pubs to explore social issues and political controversies.

They are often set in poorer industrial areas in the North of England, and use the rough-hewn speaking accents and slang heard in those regions.

John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* (1956) is thought of as the first of the idiom.

The kitchen-sink drama is placed in an ordinary domestic setting and typically tells a relatively mundane family story.



THE ANGRY YOUNG MAN

Angry Young Man (*n.*)

1. One of a group of English writers of the 1950s whose works are characterized by vigorous social protest.
2. A vigorous critic of economic or social injustice.

The term was applied by journalists in the 1950s to the authors and protagonists of some contemporary novels and plays that seemed to sound a note of protest or resentment against the values of the British middle class.

*Jimmy Porter in **Look Back in Anger***



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ESTIMATE

Osborne's work transformed British theatre. He helped to make it artistically respected again, throwing off the formal constraints of the former generation, and turning attention once more to language, theatrical rhetoric, and emotional intensity.

He saw theatre as a weapon with which ordinary people could break down the class barriers and that he had a 'beholden duty to kick against the pricks'.

He wanted his plays to be a reminder of real pleasures and real pains.