CHAPTER - IV

THE ENTERTAINER

*Sense of Illusion & Dilapidation*
The Entertainer

by

John Osborne
Osborne's *The Entertainer* is a play of the Suez-era of England which depicts the miseries and travails of a lower middle class British family which finds hard to succeed in the kind of society which has steadily begun to decline. The declining, the depression, the disinterestedness and the desolateness of the 'Rice' family, in general and the entire British society of post-war scenario, in particular is pathetically presented through the symbolism of the music hall. The crisis that is witnessed in the 'Rice' family is the same as in the 'society' and as in the 'music hall'. In the Prefatory Note to the play, Osborne wrote:

> The music hall is dying, and, with it, a significant part of England. Some of the heart of England has gone; something that once belonged to everyone for this was truly a folk art.

J.R. Taylor views that Osborne was caught between the romantic nostalgia and the modern existence which has resulted in the complexity:

> ...Osborne is here writing of something, like the Edwardian splendours of India, which he cannot possibly remember himself and which becomes therefore, for him, a romantic legend to be longed for as an alternative to the indecisions and false values of modern life. The intelligent political man of left-wing sympathies in Osborne tells him - and us - that it was the faults in this antediluvian world which brought our world into existence, but the incorrigible romantic looks back admiringly, and these plays are the battlegrounds (hence much of their excitement) on which the two Osbornes fight out.1

Osborne chose that moment of Suez-debacle to write a eulogy for empire — not the colonial rule of Pax Britannica but for the manners, self-sacrifice and common decency that had governed daily British life for so long. He did not want to editorialize or chronicle about the specifics of the Suez debacle but to make one besotted English family a microcosm for the country's defeats. The
music hall of England was something of a precious life-blood, not just in the sense of providing economic subsistence for the performers or not even as a kind of an entertainment respite but a kind of ‘national heritage’ of which everyone was undebatably proud of. The sordid decadence of the music hall then, is the irrevocable loss of the heritage and the honour of England that it had been fondly preserving over the generations.

In The Observer, Kenneth Tynan wrote, “Mr.Osborne has had the big and brilliant notion of putting the whole of contemporary England on to one and the same stage....He chooses, as his national microcosm, a family of run-down vaudevillians....Archie is a droll, lecherous fellow, comically corrupted. With his blue patter and jingo songs he is a licensed pedlar of emotional dope to every audience in Britain....Archie is a truly desperate man and to present desperation is a hard dramatic achievement....”2 Billy Rice, the Grandad is stately, retired and represents Edwardian graciousness, for which Mr.Osborne has a deeply submerged nostalgia. The key figure is Dad, a fiftyish song-and-dance man reduced to appearing in twice-nightly nude revue.

Osborne structures the play as a kitchen-sink drama interspersed with Archie’s spotlit, variety-show appearances, during which the depth of his cynicism becomes apparent. When Archie sings about looking “out for good old number one,” (p.32) announces “Thank God I’m normal” (p.60) or confesses that he’s “dead behind the eyes,” (p.72) he’s describing the Britain Jimmy Porter railed against in Look Back in Anger. Osborne saw in the vanishing British music hall, with its crumbling empire theaters, a political metaphor as potent as the Weimar cabaret.

The action of the play is set in a large coastal resort. The three generations of the ‘Rice’ family look at the contemporary scenario with despair in their own way. It is interesting to note that all the three generations are equally disgusted with the state of affairs in the then society. The older generation is
represented by Billy Rice who is a spruce man in his seventies and who was a well honoured, successful music hall comedian of his times.

Billy is disillusioned and views that the music hall business died, when he left it. He says, “Has been for years. It was all over, finished, dead when I got out of it. I saw it coming. I saw it coming, and I got out. They don’t want real people any more.” (p.18) He also feels that the glory has faded not just aesthetically but also commercially. Even his son Archie himself remarks about the low turn up in the theatre, “No it wasn’t all right at the theatre. Monday night there were sixty sad little drabs in, and tonight there were about two hundred sad little drabs. If we can open on Monday night at West Hartlepool, it will be by very reluctant agreement of about thirty angry people...” (p.36) However, Archie still hasn’t given up the hope and thinks that he can sustain.

Billy, however feels that his son Archie is a fool still believing that there is still something in it, “But I’ll bet there’s more in the saloon bar of the Cambridge than he’s got in there.” (p.23) and “It’s all over, finished. I told him years ago. But he won’t listen. He won’t listen to anybody.” (p.45) Billy finds that the modern society has become chaotic and everyone is going through life in a drab, monotonous, mechanical way without actually growing through it. This has resulted in the wearing and tearing of the spirit. He laments over the inability of the modern generation to understand the importance of living life to the fullest possible extent, discovering it in all its truest hue and getting the ‘feel of life’ that one has really lived. Billy tells his grand daughter Jean, “…I feel sorry for you people. You don’t know what it’s really like. You haven’t lived, most of you. You’ve never known what it was like, you’re all miserable really. You don’t know what life can be like.” (p.23)

Billy does not mean to say that their own generation did not have problems or they did not have to stand the toughness of times, but it was that they did not wear that toughness on their sleeves and walk about banging heads
or feel so remorseful to be down in the dumps; they knew how to combat and counter-act because of their enlivening spirits. This is why, Osborne, who always craves for that ‘ordinary little enthusiasm’ in life has that irresistible regard and amusement for the older generation and it gets reflected through the words used by his characters and in his very characterization. Osborne himself talking intimately about his own elderly family members has said, “They ‘talked about their troubles’ in a way that would embarrass any middle-class observer. I’ve no doubt that they were often boring, but life still had meaning for them. Even if they did get drunk and fight, they were responding; they were not defeated.”

Archie Rice is the second generation representative who is also a music hall, stand-up comedian playing in third-rate women strippers’ revue called ROCK’N ROLL NEW’D LOOK. He is a middle aged man of about fifty who admires his father Billy deeply, pities his wife Phoebe wholeheartedly, patronizes his son Frank affectionately and his daughter Jean unsurely. His form of self-protection is a “comedian’s technique, it absolves him seeming committed to anyone or anything.” (p.34) He takes everything in his stride and neither affects anything nor allows anything to affect him.

The historic art of music hall was based on true wit and talent that was really engaging and skilful enough. “Unlike his father he lacks the “folk” quality that Osborne speaks of as being at the heart of the music hall, and with this deficiency he is unable to create any rapport with his audience, and has little respect for them. His humour is that of insult, sneer, and innuendo - the dirty joke, the sly smile, the complete prostitution of both personal and professional standards for the sake of some response from the audience.” “Thank you,” he says, “for that burst of heavy breathing.” (p.59) Archie has brought nude girls on to the stage at Rockliffe to provide cheap entertainment to the people and Billy does not approve of the ways of Archie.
Billy feels that a letter should be written to the Council to see that the place where all the profanity in the garb of music hall tradition is carried on should be shut down. He feels that it is illogical and foolish to expect that a family man will take his wife and kids to see a lot of third-class sluts standing about in the nude. He views that the success of an Entertainer depends on having a distinct style, a style of his own, a stature to stand before the audience and entertain them without adopting sub-standard ways or immoral tricks. He says, “You had to have personality to be a comedian then. You had to really be somebody!” (p.38) and as such is well aware of the limitations of Archie and knows that he is going to be a failure as he lacks originality and all the other requisite qualities that make an entertainer. Little faith he has in his son’s success or in his financial discipline that he prophesizes, “You haven’t got a thing you can call your own. And as sure as God made little apples, I’ll lay a sovereign to a penny piece, you’ll end up in the bankruptcy court again before Christmas, and you’ll be lucky if you don’t land up in jail as well.” (p.37) He senses the premonition of a danger in the ways of his son.

Jean Rice, aged twenty-two is the daughter of Archie and is the representative of the third generation or the youngest generation, the most contemporary one. Unlike Archie, she is scholarly and is superciliously left-winged. Billy is fond of her as she has inherited some of the qualities of him. He also has enormous faith in her potential and in her success:

You’re a good girl, Jean. You’ll get somewhere. I know you’ll get somewhere. You’re not like the lot in this house. You’ll do something for yourself. You take after your old grandfather. (p.20)

She has been engaged to Graham Dodd, who is well-educated. However, differences have cropped up between them over her teaching ‘art’ to a bunch of tough kids of London Youth Club which Graham had disapproved. This gets aggravated further when she attends a protest at Trafalgar Square over the issue
of Suez Canal hoping for some change in the attitude of the Prime Minister and the Government. Graham is against her politically stimulated conscience and her reformist tendencies. Jean, on the other hand is a girl of individuality and she wants to ascertain and establish herself which Graham does not permit. Jean breaks up with Graham. She has come home hoping to redeem Archie of his escapism, “You’re like everybody else, but you’re worse—you think you can cover yourself by simply not bothering. You think if you don’t bother you can’t be humiliated…” (p.77) This is almost darting at the callousness of her father Archie as she knows that the world will not care for anyone who do not impact on it. Not only that, it will even subject such people to ridicule if they don’t offer resilience.

Phoebe Rice, aged around sixty is the step-mother of Jean. She goes to films to kill her sense of loneliness and boredom. She forgets the plot of the story and the characters in it before she reaches home. She cannot sit still and does not listen to any one like the rest of the people in the house. If she is insisted to sit and listen, she feels depressed and remains abstracted. The abstainance of people from listening when someone is speaking will entail in lack of feeling and lack of concern, something against which Osborne was particularly vehement in all his plays. If Jimmy in Look Back in Anger laments over the fact that ‘nobody cares’, ‘nobody listens’ and ‘no enthusiasm’, Billy, in fact distressfully tells Jean, “I suppose you’ve no right to expect people to listen to you. Just because you’ve had your life. It’s all over for you. Why should anyone listen to you?” (p.22) To be angry is to feel and to be able to listen is to be able to care.

Phoebe’s life has been one long struggle in poverty. When she was twelve years old, she had to scrub the dining hall floor for five hundred kids to fend for herself and for her family. She also feels lot of insecurity about her life, is scared of getting old and does not want her funeral ceremony to be done at the mercy of someone else. “It takes all the gilt off if you know you’ve got to go on and on till
they carry you out in a box.... But I don’t want to end up being laid out by some stranger in some rotten stinking little street in Gateshead, or West Hartlepool...."

(p.40) She, with all the self-pity and remorse says that she knew that she was the ugliest bloody kid any one can see in one’s life but her achievement is that she made Archie want her.

Phoebe knows the very many affairs that Archie had with women of whom she was also one, the resultant of which, Jean’s mother, ‘a person of principle’ walked out of the life of her husband Archie but died soon leaving behind Jean. Archie could have left Phoebe or Phoebe could have left Archie but neither of them did it. This could be understood as their mutual sympathies have survived all their infidelities of life, which are actually more potent threats for the sustenance of a marital bond than mere difference of opinion that Jean and Graham have. However, ironically enough, the latter factor proved to be more prevailing in the estrangement of relations as seen in the case of Jean and Graham than the former.

This, in a way is a critique of the changing values in the relationship between man and woman, in the institution of marriage and the system that is associated with it in the course of the emergence of a new post-war generation. This generation, again in itself is so perplexed of the inherent, appalling weaknesses in the way ‘love’ and ‘attachments’ are turning out to be. This confounded confusion is well voiced by Jean:

...you could love somebody, that you could want them, and want them twenty-four hours of the day and then suddenly find that you’re neither of you even living in the same world. I don’t understand that. I just don’t understand it. I wish I could understand it. It’s frightening. (p.29)

Archie, though cynical, perhaps understands all the complexities involved with the modern youth. On hearing that Jean has broken off her engagement, he
says, “Have you really? Well, I should have thought engagements were a bit suburban for intellectuals like you anyway.” (p.39) He also knew that his daughter Jean is not like him and that she is principled, values the values, relentless in her pursuits, uncompromising and does not budge in matters concerning her individuality. She is a glorious blend of both instinct and intellect. It is really a great difficulty for the partners opposite to contain a girl of Jean’s nature as they will be cast aside, the moment they cannot get themselves cast in her moulds.

Billy makes several interesting remarks which provide an insight into the change brought about in the English society,

When I was younger, every man-and every man wore a hat in those days, didn’t matter if he was a lord or a butcher-every man used to take his hat off when he passed the Cenotaph. Even in the bus. Nowadays I’ve watched people just go past it, not even a look. If you took the flags of it I expect they’d sit down and eat their sandwiches on it. (p.79)

Billy may not be exactly like Colonel Redfern, the ‘sturdy old plant of Edwardian wilderness’ but, he is certainly nostalgic and evinces proud and honour in the ‘England that was’ and bewails with an element of sarcasm mixed in it at the ‘England that is’. He even says, “Now! why, half the time you can’t tell the women from the men. Not from the back. And even at the front you have to take a good look, sometimes.” (p.18) Jean’s political awareness immediately makes her respond, “Like the Government and the Opposition”. (p.18) She is thoroughly conscious that the Conservative Party in ruling and the Labour Party in opposition are one and the same in their callousness towards the amelioration of the people. There is no distinguishing between them just like there is no distinction between men and women of modern day England as Billy observes. This, very much has a contemporary appeal and one gets to know the
choicelessness of the public in trying to look to a legislative that can better their lives.

Phoebe is seen feeling grateful to Old Bill, the successful barrister brother of Archie, “I like him because he’s a gentleman. He’s different from your father, even if they did go to the same posh school and all that. I like him because of the way he treats me.” (pp.50-51) He used to slip a couple of fivers in her hand every time he came to see them. He was the one who always used to bail Archie out of his financial crunch. Even his mere patting her arm and showing his affection makes her happy. This is an indication of the kind of grand image that Bill holds for her. It also reveals that Phoebe could be pleased so easily, the product of her own loneliness and disregard by the society. This kind of ‘craving for care’ repletes several times in the play.

Jean is the one who can discern people and their attitudes with greater understanding than Phoebe. When she says that she is able to visualize his patting her arm, Phoebe picks up the cue that she is actually trying to make a dig against her uncle Bill and against her own admiration for him. When Phoebe repeatedly asks her to tell her explicitly what she meant by that remark, Jean sarcastically says, “It’s just that I know exactly how Uncle Bill patted your arm—just in the same way as he’d wait on the men at Christmas when he was in the army. So democratic, so charming, and so English.” (pp.51-52) This is a biting remark of Jean’s abhorrence directed against the kind of patronization that her uncle Bill used to display. In fact, at deeper levels, it is the same kind of antagonism that was nurtured by the middle class people against the way their country England tried to patronize them through the concept of ‘Welfare State’ which they looked at as a thing of deceit and frailty.

Archie and Frank join the scene of debate and Archie even participates in it with active interest. He has to listen to the degrading statements of his wife before their children, “You can’t afford not to like him. You owe him too much”
and again “He’s something you’ll never be” (p.52) This is almost like smearing on the self-respect of Archie. He, as an accomplished satirist, picks up this as an opportunity to reveal his worth, “And I’m something he’ll never be—good Old Bill. He may be successful, but he’s not a bad sort. Do you know that my brother Bill has had one wife, no love affair, he’s got three charming gifted children. Two of them took honours degrees at Cambridge, and all of them have made what these people call highly successful marriages.” (p.52)

Archie, here, is trying to emphasise attention on the way in which the society defines success. Archie does not have any of the attributes and achievements that his brother has. But, on a closer look, one really contemplates whether ‘is this all success about!’ The success being defined in terms of materialism, marriages and medals is not real success. This is really a defiant, intellectual, philosophical gesture of Archie towards making the society realize to restructure the pillars or even replace the pillars on which the concept of success rests.

Archie cannot endure his wife bemoaning her fate of not able to get educated and the hardships she faced as a child. He, acting as a witness to her victimization and as a sympathetic man, defending her against the heartless society says, “Nobody ever gave her two pennyworth of equipment except her own pretty unimpressive self to give anything else to the rest of the world. All it’s given her is me, and my God she’s tired of that! Aren’t you, my old darling? You’re tired of that, aren’t you?”(p.55) Alan Carter, speaking about the kind of relation that persists between Archie and Phoebe, says, “...she needs to visit the cinema two or three times a week to pass the time away; she hates Archie “receiving” his young girl friends but is incapable of doing anything about it....His virtues are that he admits that he is a bastard, certainly where his wife is concerned, yet he can be very tender toward her, although he betray her constantly.”

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Archie also gets the clue that Phoebe is going to break the truth to the children that it was actually their uncle Bill who had funded for their education. This is another painful and shameful thing for Archie because as a father, he failed even to provide education for his children. But, before she tells, he himself decides to tell them the agonizing fact so as to at least protect his honour of being candid,

She’s going to tell you that old brother Bill paid for all your education. That’s what she wants to tell you, Jean. That scholarship didn’t pay for the things that really mattered, you know. The books, the fares, the clothes, and all the rest of it. Bill paid for that. For all of you. Frank knows that, don’t you, Frank? I’m sorry, Phoebe. I’ve killed your story. Old Archie could always kill anybody’s punch line if he wanted. (p.55)

Archie knows that he is a failure not only as an artist who is unable to connect with his audience in the music hall as an entertainer but also as a person expected to play several roles in the family. More than his failure, his sense of failure is his tragedy. The frustration, the helplessness, the bitterness, the isolation and circumscribing all these, the predicamancy, all of which are always a part of the central characters of Osborne are depicted even in the characterization of Archie. This becomes pathetically and elaborately evident when Archie says,

... we’re dead beat and down and outs. We’re drunks, maniacs, we’re crazy, we’re bonkers, the whole flaming bunch of us. Why, we have problems that nobody’s ever heard of, we’re characters out of something that nobody believes in. We’re something that people make jokes about, because we’re so remote from the rest of ordinary every day, human experience. But we’re not really funny. We’re too boring. Simply because we’re not like anybody who ever lived. We don’t get on with anything. We don’t ever succeed
in anything. We’re a *nuisance*, we do nothing but make a God almighty fuss about anything we ever do. All the time we’re trying to draw someone’s attention to our nasty, sordid, unlikely little problems. (p.54)

In a moving incident, Phoebe, in anticipation of her son Mick’s return from the war gets a cake ready in the kitchen but Billy eats a part of it. Phoebe makes a discovery of it. Even when Archie tries to pacify her saying that they will get another one, she breaks out like a volcano of anguish:

> Oh, you’ll buy another one! You’re so rich! You’re such a great big success! What’s a little cake—we’ll order a dozen of ‘em! I bought that cake, and it cost me thirty shillings, it was for Mick when he comes back, because I want to give him something, something I know he’ll like, after being where he’s been, and going through what he has-and now, that bloody *greedy* old pig-that old pig, as if he hadn’t had enough of everything already—he has to go and get his great fingers into it!’ (p.57)

This, indeed is a pitiable scene that reflects the conflicts in middle class families. They are full of insecurities, not only financial but also emotional. “Osborne handles moments such as this, when a flash of anger or passion allows a glimpse of the suffering of otherwise subdued and pathetic characters, with considerable compassion and integrity. This compassion is at the heart of *The Entertainer*.6 Alan Carter too lauds this scene for its humanely, moving vigour, “This passage is incredibly human and worked wonderfully in the theatre, one could sense the welled-up rage and misery of Phoebe from whom fate snatches the smallest satisfaction.”7

It is also to be reckoned on the other hand that the bursting out of Phoebe, naturally would have been so distressing and embarrassing for everyone around, more particularly to Billy who has become old and might have fancied the cake a
bit, which is not a crime. Hearing her remarks, "BILLY stands, ashamed and deeply hurt...even though he vaguely realizes the condition she is in. He puts down the drink he has been holding, and the cigarettes." (p.57) He asks Jean an excuse and then crosses down to his room and goes out. During his hey days, he might have spent so much money, might have purchased so much to eat for his family, but during the concluding days of his life, he had to bear the brunt of listening to abuses, being branded as a glutton and what not. This would indeed adversely affect his health. The relations among family members, in middle classes, though frequently hailed as 'ideal', in reality are superficial, painful and at times even neurotic. They are least concerned about the effect that would befall on others of the words that are uttered.

Osborne also presents two diversified personalities in the play in the form of Mick, Archie’s elder son aged nineteen and Frank, the younger one. Mick does not appear in the play and is known only through the conversations of the other characters. Mick heard the clarion call of war and went to fight for the Suez whereas Frank, being a conscientious objector refused to fulfill his obligatory National duty and was sent to jail by the Government where he was made to work as hospital porter stoking boilers. After getting released from the prison, he starts working in a late-night drinking place playing piano and then becomes a weedy boiler stoker in a hospital.

Osborne has got his political convictions by touring several countries. He visited Russia but returned angry as he could not endure the organized enthusiasm which made him sick. Alan Carter observes, “In America he enjoyed himself because he was not involved. In England his deep feeling for his country and his sense of outrage at its injustices constantly trouble him. This outrage at injustice makes him a socialist by temperament, but he is often furious with the Labour Party, feeling that it has not made people think beyond material issues. In The Entertainer Archie Rice paraphrases this sentiment in an anecdote related to his family:8

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There was a chap at my school who managed to get himself into the Labour Government, and they always said he was left of centre. Then he went into the House of Lords, and they made him an honourable fish-monger. Well, that just about wraps up the Left of Centre, doesn’t it? (p.62)

Archie, always has got so much to say. He is loquacious, being an artist. He, funnily, as if apologetic to his family members for his excessive speaking, even says, ‘If you can dodge all the clichés dropping like bats from the ceiling, you might pick up something from me.’ (p.62) “The cumulative effect is that we begin to see Archie’s relationship with his family as an extension of that with his audience, treating them to a string of unfully and inconsequential remarks, talking all the time to avoid the pain of silence.”

It is to be understood that ‘Silence’ can be so horrifying, particularly for an artist as an artist is habituated to expect some kind of response from the audience, a praise, an applause, a gesture of appreciation. Its absence indicates the failure of an artist. An artist, that too like Archie, who finds it immensely difficult to evoke response from the audience in the music-hall naturally wants to compensate that at least in his household. Silence can have a deadening effect apart from a constant reminder that he is a failure. Hence, he speaks endlessly. With the same fervour, he goes on to say, “We’re all a bit slewed, which means that we’re a bit more sub-human even than we usually are. (To Frank.) Isn’t that right, you great weedy boiler stoker you! I’ll bet the patients in that hospital all freeze to death—he must be saving the National Health thousands.” (p.58)

Archie’s comic reference to that of saving the National Health thousands is actually another satire on the ‘Welfare State’. The four pillars in the welfare state were to be: a New Education System, a National Health Organization, a Social Security System and the Nationalisation of the country’s key industries. The play actually is an indictment on the failure of Welfare State to do
something more useful. All the four pillars are attacked, The New Education System that could not offer the best education for Archie's children who had to be funded for by their uncle, an education system that produces posh and unconcerned people like Graham. A National Health Organisation and Social Security System where no one feels secure; Phoebe craves for at least a decent burial and she dreads that even that will remain unfulfilled. The Nationalisation of industries could not prevent young like Frank rotting away as stoking boilers.

Frank does not know what to do with himself. He feels that the Government is regimenting the lives of people. Frank, on seeing the proposal of Clare, the niece of his mother to emigrate to Ottawa in Canada and manage their hotel, feels quite interested in it. He does not have any attachment towards his own Nation and thinks in terms of the opportunities to be explored. The bitterness of the post war generation youth is reflected when he says to Jean:

Look around you. Can you think of any good reason for staying in this cosy little corner of Europe? Don't kid yourself anyone's going to let you do anything, or try anything here, Jeannie. Because they're not. You haven't got a chance. Who are you-you're nobody, you've no money, and you're young. And when you end up it's pretty certain you'll still be nobody, you'll still have no money-the only difference is you'll be old! You'd better start thinking about number one, Jeannie, because nobody else is going to do it for you...They're all so busy, speeding down the middle of the road together, not giving a damn where they're going, as long as they're in the bloody middle! (p.68)

Alan Carter views that in the words of Frank, one can find the reason for Archie being discarded by the society:

This is exactly what has happened to Archie, he has been passed like a blank hoarding at the side of the road. His response to this
hangue of Frank’s is characteristic. Ignores the implications of his son’s words he tells Frank to be quiet or he’ll wake up the Poles living below. Frank’s speech illustrates the various levels of the play. It is an indictment against Archie, a bitter social criticism, and at the same time, an expression of the wider theme of frustration with the increasing meaningless of a life lived in mindless self-absorption.10

The system enforced by the Government is also a frequent reference point of frustration. Even amidst the fanfare of the ‘Welfare State’, the post-war generation feels embittered as they were not really taken care of for the basic spirit underlying the welfare state was lacking.

This profoundly felt distress echoes several times in the play whether it is in the seemingly contemplative ironical remark of Jean, “They’re all looking after us. We’re all right, all of us. Nothing to worry about. We’re all right. God save the Queen!” (p.31) or Billy’s realistic caution to adopt self-care when he says to Jean, “You mustn’t go short. We all need looking after. And you’ve got to look after your own kind. No use leaving it to the Government for them to hand out to a lot of bleeders who haven’t got the gumption to do anything for themselves.” (p.21) or Frank’s young, intense, feverish, frustrating, “Nobody else is going to do it for you because nobody believes in that stuff any more. Oh, they may say they do, and may take a few bob out of your pay packet every week and stick some stamps on your card to prove it, but don’t believe it-nobody will give you a second look.” (p.68) which is a pungent remark on the way the Employment Exchange worked or even Archie’s explicit, biting sarcasm, “This is a welfare state, my darling heart. Nobody wants, and nobody goes without, all are provided for.” (p.53)

Archie, in the end, tells a story to the audience about an ordinary, little man who woke up to find himself in paradise and is applauded by the Saint for
having blessed with the joy of eternity. On being asked by the Saint about his feeling over there, the man takes a long look around him at all the multitudes of the earth, spread out against the universe and tells him just a word which splashes in eternity and the Saint after a moment of astonishment throws his arms round the little man and kisses him saying that it was the same word which he has been longing to hear some one say ever since he came over there. Mary McCarthy, gives an interpretation related to the then prevailing contemporary scenario, “The word exactly is hell (h-e-l-l), and that is what John Osborne had to say about this other Eden, demiparadise, the Welfare State."11

Archie is not altogether a man devoid of affection. He genuinely loves his family members. Phoebe while talking about her son Mick says, “Archie worries about him. He doesn’t say so, but I know he does.”(p.30) He still can caringly caution his daughter Jean, “If you’re not careful, Jean, people will start putting labels on you pretty soon. And then you’ll just be nobody. You’ll be nobody like the rest of us.” (p.76). He, after receiving the news that his son Mick has been murdered by his captivators in Egypt, leaves his signatory song, “Why should I care, Why should I let it touch me”, is moved and begins to moan a blues slowly and spiritually, “Oh, lord, I don’t care where they bury my body,...’cos my soul’s going to live with God!” (p.73)

He even makes a moving pitiable appeal to his family, “We’ll try to be a little normal just for once, and pretend we’re a happy, respectable, decent family.” (p.58) but his disgusting sense of failure as an artist, both aesthetically as well as commercially had its impact on his capacity to securely get intertwined with his family. Archie states:

...You see this face, you see this face, this face can split open with warmth and humanity. It can sing, and tell the worst, unfunniest stories in the world to a great mob of dead, drab erks and it doesn’t matter, it doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter because-look at my eyes. I’m dead behind these eyes. I’m dead, just like the whole
inert, shoddy lot out there. It doesn’t matter because I don’t feel a thing, and neither do they. (p.72)

“The revelation of ‘old Archie, dead behind the eyes’, has become almost as famous as Jimmy Porter’s lament for the loss of ‘good, brave causes;...’”

Archie’s pain and bitterness about his relationship with the audience is reflected in this. Archie’s “We’re just as dead as each other” (p.72) is, on a broader frame of reference is indeed like a dejected pronouncement on the modern day people, particularly on the post-war and Suez era society of England and not just the audience of music hall. It even suggests the identification of Archie’s character with the moral decay of the nation. The statement of Archie reminds us of “You! Hypocrite lecteur!-mon semblable,-mon frere!”, which means, “You hypocrite you are like me. You are my brother” which T.S.Eliot in his *The Waste Land* uses to make the poet (or Tiresias) address his friend Stetson. In other words, Eliot meant that all are equally dead spiritually in the modern waste land. Both these statements are statements of grand disillusionment over the mutual incapacities and impotencies to display enthusiasm to effect a change.

Osborne is a master not only in identifying the targets but also making his central characters attack them in a distinctive style, a mixture of anger, wit and satire. As an entertainer or as a comedian, Archie has much more freedom to liberally attack the targets and amuse himself by his wisecracks and ‘running gag’. This cynical exhibitionism of a frustrated soul, in fact runs throughout the play in several forms. He knows he is helpless and cannot win over the circumstances or the society. “Every running joke in *The Entertainer* has its dark underside, progressively revealed as the play proceeds. The income-tax man, an easy target for the professional performer, becomes a shadowy symbol of the material insecurity that haunts Archie.” On seeing his daughter Jean at home, Archie says, “I haven’t got my glasses on. I thought you were the income-tax

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man sitting there. I thought we had shaken him off.” (p.34) It may be indeed true that he might not have been wearing his glasses, but it is too weird to think that his vision would have got so blurred so as not to distinguish a girl from a man, his daughter from an income-tax man.

It is then a sheer sarcasm that has been employed indicating the kind of life being led by middle class people in the most cherished ‘Welfare State’. The burden of paying taxes even when it is difficult for them to survive is a savage, satirical critique on the then prevailing state of affairs. This haunted imagery of material insecurity in the form of an income-tax man keeps on recurring in the play at several stages. When Archie says, quite boastfully that he is going to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of his successful evasion of income tax after 1936, and when his daughter wonders and asks him for how come he paid it in 1936, Archie goes on to say, “Bad luck that’s all. I was trapped in hospital with a double hernia….when two men in bowlers and rain-coats sprang at me from behind the screens. That was Archie’s downfall.” (p.38) It was his shameful, painful, helpless ailment, capitalizing on which the Income-tax people pinned him down.

This innate fear springs up again when Phoebe informs that there is a policeman at the door downstairs. The policeman had actually come to inform Mick’s death, but Archie begins to say, “It’s the income-tax man. It’s the income-tax man. Tell him I’ve been expecting him. I’ve been expecting him for twenty years.” (p.73) Archie, even as he speaks to his audience for the last time, perhaps as he is waiting for his arrest or even for a final stroke which will put an end to his professional career, is seen saying, “There’s a bloke at the side here with a hook, you know that, don’t you? He is, he’s standing there. I can see him. Must be the income-tax man.” (p.87) Osborne, through this deliberate recurring reference to the shadowy income-tax man, who actually does not figure out in the play at all, skillfully presents the apprehensions, the imaginary burdens that middle class people are bound to carry through out their life without any respite.
Archie knows he is a second-rate artist but he is not reconciled to it. Even his audiences are to be blamed for it since they do not respond. If they would have showed any vigour and vitality, he might have rose to glory as an artist like his father during whose Edwardian times, the audience were electrifyingly responsive. “What a place London was then for having a good time. Best place in the world for a laugh. People were always ready to laugh, to give you a welcome. Best audience in the world.” (p.75) This was how his father Billy cherishingly broods over the London ‘that was’ and so also the capacity of reception of the people. Billy also knew about his and his generation entertainers whose exceptional ability to communicate with the genteel audience with an intense passion,

We all had our own style, our own songs-and we were all English. What’s more, we spoke English. It was different. We all knew what the rules were. We knew what the rules were, and even if we spent half our time making people laugh at ‘em we never seriously suggested that anyone should break them. A real pro is a real man, all he needs is an old backcloth behind him and he can hold them on his own for half an hour. He’s like the general run of people, only he’s a lot more like them than they are themselves, if you understand me. (p.81)

If Look Back in Anger offers an unexpected scene in which Osborne pays a reluctant but genuine tribute to the past, represented by the figure of Colonel Redfern, in The Entertainer, as Billy continually rhapsodizes about his youth, his infatuation with the Edwardian past, Osborne, however, moves from an air kiss to a mash note. Osborne’s nostalgia was a subject which got entangled with most of his reviewers who felt that it was only the old generation who talked sense.

John Raymond thought that they were the only people to bring memory of significant life to the madhouse, the play for him was a
genuine piece of twentieth-century folk-art, 'a grotesque cry of rage and pain at the bad hand history is dealing out what was once the largest most prosperous empire in the world'. Archie was blamed for being 'a shabby, shallow song and dance man, a blasphemous, lecherous, self-centered heel'. Perhaps he had got too close to the nerve-centre of the Establishment...14

Phoebe feels that all of that has been lost and says, "You can’t help giving Archie his own way. Not really. No, all they’re out for is a cheap thrill." (p.45) and again, "He’s too good for them, that’s his trouble. People don’t appreciate you properly.” (p.45) Archie is made to present burlesques on the stage because the audiences look for a cheap kind of entertainment. The veracity of the words spoken by Phoebe may not be vehemently challenged as there is a great deal of an element of truth in it but at the same time, Archie himself was not original and creative. He failed to maintain a high profile like his father and his demeanor was low. He does nothing to lift their sagging spirits.

Archie, just before the news of the murder of Mick is seen telling Jean that while he served in the army in Canada, he happened to slip over the border. One night, he heard a poor, lonely and oppressed negress singing her heart out to the whole world about Jesus or something like that. He was so impressed and touched by the way in which she could ‘feel’, the way in which she could involve herself and the audience that he bemoans his inadequacy and wishes to God to give him what she has. “There’s nobody who can feel like that. I wish to God I could, I wish to God I could feel like that old black bitch with her fat cheeks, and sing. If I’d done one thing as good as that in my whole life, I’d have been all right.” (p.71)

Osborne, by making Archie reminiscence, was not alone in his fondness for the Edwardian period which was just before World War I. The writers ranging from J.B. Priestly to George Orwell joined it. Osborne’s nostalgia really
trips him up here as Archie recalls hearing a black blues singer in an American nightclub. His memorable line about wishing “to God I could feel like that old black bitch with her fat cheeks, and sing” is not embarrassing for its racial content so much as for its mawkish sentimentality.

This clearly is a sort of confession of his deficiency and his supplication to God to grant him that artistic gift of emotional capacity to feel and make others feel. His vision of understanding the basic problem with him strikes him but it is momentary. If he would have passionately and incessantly involved himself and had involved others with an emotional perspective, he would have secured a place in the echelons of glory. Phoebe, with an insight into the reason for the failure of Archie feels that his expectations are far-fetched and excessive. He gets pumped up and constructs castles in the air without a firm grip on the ground realities or understanding the practical intricacies at the grass root level.

It is natural then that such impractical expectations do not turn out to be as desired eventually leading to frustration. Phoebe says, “You shouldn’t build things up. You’re always disappointed really. That’s Archie’s trouble. He always builds everything up. And it never turns out.” (p.45) Gassner views, “Archie is the whole of tawdry, bumbling, and persistent humanity; this slouching, slithering, grimly merrymaking comic’s apologetic eyes and hunched-up shoulders spoke for all bankrupt mankind.”15. He, thus, sees Archie’s failure on a broader canvas and relates it to the general failure of the entire human race to evoke response and be responsive at the same time. In short, it is the reckoning of the ‘inability to feel’ which constitutes one of the paramount concerns of Osborne’s plays.

Archie does not like to get involved very deeply in anything concerning his family because he knows that he cannot do anything to better their lives. Archie’s remarks, “I’ve never solved a problem in my life.” (p.77) and “All my children think I’m a bum. I’ve never bothered to hide it,....” (p.70) testify this.
Phoebe feels that Archie did not have luck on his side. He was naïve too. He did not know how to get on with the things and all his acts have boomeranged giving the impression that his failure is also partly a handmade misery, “He hasn’t got an enemy in the world who’s done him the harm he’s done himself.” (p.46) All that Archie could do is to plead his family members pathetically in vain hope to muster up courage, come closer and stand together with the spirit of ‘Espirit de Corps’, “Come on love, pull yourself together. That’s what we should have done years ago. Pulled ourselves together. Let’s pull ourselves together. Let’s pull ourselves together, together, together. Let’s pull ourselves together, and the happier we’ll be!” (p.58)

His despair speaks about the irremediable poignancy that the middle class families which constitute a major section of the population were subjected to by the Government, which was inert as the nation itself was getting reduced to insignificance. It is very interesting to see that Osborne makes the family to be seen as a metaphor for the nation. In part Seven, Archie has a verse in his song,

Some people say we’re finished
Some people say we’re done.
But if we all stand
By this dear old land,
The battle will be won (pp.60-61)

The appeal that Archie makes to his fellow countrymen is the same as the appeal that he makes to his family members to pull themselves together. It may be a pseudo-patriotic appeal or may appear to be ironical, given the nature of Archie but still it contains an urge, an element of spirit, at least momentary in it. Even when he tells his audience in the last part, “Don’t clap too hard, we’re all in a very old building. Yes, very old. Old. What about that?” (p.86) he is actually referring to the English nation which has become too old, too frail, too vulnerable to retain or even to regain any strength and as such ready to collapse.
Osborne, here, employs the antiquity of the music hall which is at the verge of dilapidation as a metaphor for the decadence of the glory and imperialism of England.

This idea replicates several times throughout the play. Billy asks Jean after she has attended a protest march at Trafalgar Square in the Suez issue, "What d'you make of all this business out in the Middle East? People seem to be able to do what they like to us. Just what they like. I don't understand it. I really don't." (p.17) This speaks of the reverses faced by Anglo-French forces at the hands of Egypt in the Suez canal issue, with the entire world shunning down Britain. On the other hand, The United States of America successfully wielded its power and compelled Britain to withdraw its forces, thus, enabling Egypt retrieve its authority over the canal. This was a death blow for Britain's vested interests to remain a colonial power by controlling the Suez passage. Britain was no longer considered a potent power capable to control the other countries and it was reduced to ignominy. This was an immense heart break for all its citizens who felt humiliated and disillusioned seeing what has become to their nation, whose Sun of glory was thought never to set.

The play also has an existential streak in it which does not go unnoticed. There is a perpetual feeling underlying that no one is listening to anyone, nobody is caring, and everybody is engulfed in one's own emotional void. It is felt that they are 'being acted upon' than 'acting' and some mechanism is playing foul on their lives and thus not permitting them to do anything substantial. They are just helpless creatures, trapped, alienated and left to themselves. They are shrouded in complexities, uncertainties and perplexities. This is reflected when Jean says, "Everybody's tired all right. Everybody's tired, everybody's standing about, loitering without any intent whatsoever, waiting to be picked up by whatever they may allow to happen to us next." (p.75) A less subtle and more explicit element of existentialism can be seen in the conclusion of the penultimate part of the play when Jean says,
Here we are, we’re along in the universe, there’s no God, it just seems that it all began by something as simple as sunlight striking on a piece of rock. And here we are. We’ve only got ourselves. Somehow, we’ve just got to make a go of it. *We’ve only ourselves.* (p.85)

Alan Carter makes an observation:

Archie Rice is...beyond anger in the aggressive “Porter” sense. He leaves that kind of feeling to the young, to his children. Jean is the mouthpiece Osborne uses in *The Entertainer* to express his disgust with our self-complacency...Archie, by way of contrast, is angry because of his supposed burden. The British theatre is epitomized in his person, he is a symbol of its state of decay, and of our decay. When he protests it is a sarcastic note in the margin, that is all, for he knows his effort is useless.¹⁶

Archie had successfully evaded paying Income Tax for twenty long years but he is afraid that the Income Tax Officer will certainly get him down that year. The threat of getting imprisoned looms large on him and hence to overcome his financial crunch, he decides to further his prospects by marrying a young girl of twenty, hiding his credentials, expecting the girl’s parents would fund for him. However, Billy scotches it all by disclosing all the facts regarding Archie. Archie feels that since Billy foiled his prospects, he has to see him get bailed out of his problems. He wants to capitalise on the reputation of Billy, “People may not come to see Archie but they may still remember Billy Rice. It’s worth a try anyway.” (p.82) and hence plans to bring him on to the stage once again.

Jean is distressed for she knows that Archie, her father may not be a man of worth and self-respect but it is not the case with Billy, her grand father. She abhors and is aggrieved of the very idea of bringing Billy back to the stage just
for some mercenary motives. Her anguish is wonderfully presented when she bursts out, “Are you going to destroy that too? He’s the only one of us who has any dignity or respect for himself, he’s the only one of us who has anything at all, and you’re going to murder him,....What are you letting yourself in for now, how on earth did you ever get him to do such a thing? What’s happened to him? What’s happened to his sense of self preservation?” (p.82) However, the idea of Archie does not get materialised as Billy Rice passes away before the day comes. The death of Billy indicates a kind of noble resignation from life before it got tarnished. As a mark of ceremonial honour, his coffin is draped over with a Union Jack.

The part Twelve of the play is an experimentation of Osborne with two duologues which are actually independent of each other are made to run together. This technique is an exceptional creative ingenuity displayed by Osborne. These duologues are related to two sets of characters - Archie and Brother Bill on left side of the stage and Jean and Graham on the right side. Conversation is carried within each set and the dialogues said are independent, in the sense that they do not have any bearing on the conversation carried over between the other two members in another set. The distinct feature of this duologue is that they happen intermittently or there is interspersing of the dialogues of one character belonging to one set with that of other belonging to another set.

Osborne did not employ this theatrical device just to fancy his ideas. He had a justifying and rational purpose behind it. This part of the play has lot of gravity since it involves a ‘resolution’ or ‘decision taking’ situation. The people who have to take the decision of either ‘staying back’ or ‘moving away’ are Archie in one set and Jean in the other. The people who appeal or probably even counsel Archie and Jean to opt for ‘moving away’ from the existing place are Brother Bill and Graham Dodd respectively. Brother Bill assures Archie that he will settle everything by paying up all the debts but they should move away to
Canada to manage the hotel there and start life afresh. Similarly, Graham tries to persuade Jean to move away from there and come to him assuring her that he has got a decent career lined up and they would have everything they want.

Archie turns down the offer given by Brother Bill and says that he is prepared to go to prison than going to Canada. Archie gives a trivial, ludicrous reason for it by way of saying that he cannot get draught Bass in Toronto and hence he is not inclined to go to Canada. It is true that he is addicted to draught Bass and is seen earlier saying, “...all my life I’ve been searching for something. I’ve been searching for a draught Bass you can drink all the evening without running off every ten minutes, that you can get drunk on without feeling sick, and all for four pence.” (p.76) It is also equally true that it was he himself who had earlier said to Phoebe regarding the new enterprising offer, “I just think it’s a bloody pointless idea.” (p.67)

Archie basically has not still given up though he may ask, “You think I’m gone, don’t you? Go on, say it, you think I’m gone. You think I’m gone, don’t you? Well, I am.” (p. 87) He may not appear to be optimistic but he has that flickering though not impetuous spirit that may not expect things to turn out entirely in favour or to make miracles happen but which can still keep the dreams afloat. His last public utterance, as he waits for the income tax man is, “Let me know where you’re working tomorrow night-and I’ll come and see YOU.” (p.89) speaks of that spirit. He decides, though in vain to wrestle with the situation. “One feels respect and admiration, mingled with the utter pity of the situation for his obstinate refusal to accept defeat and for his attachments to his consuming dream.”

It is this spirit that makes him reject the proposal of prospects that are offered to him. He may sing several cynical patriotic jingles and criticise the nation but still he wants to cling to it though he knows pretty well that everything has been done with it. Trussler complains that Archie’s songs do not
convey the purpose for which they were meant and that they “never relate his own failure to the national decadence they parody and proclaim”\textsuperscript{18}

It is to be reckoned, however, that in the Prefatory Note to the play, Osborne has clearly stated that he had written the play not to simply illustrate the psychology of an interesting individual but to draw parallels between his own frail morality with that of the general decaying and dilapidation of the state of affairs within and outside the country. Archie indicating the figure of Britannia says, “I reckon she’s sagging a bit, if you ask me.” (p.86) “Archie’s road show, with its nude Britannia and its tawdry appeal to patriotic sentiment, reflects Britain’s tarnished grandeur after the Suez debacle as clearly as Billy Rice’s nostalgic memories of the music hall in its heyday recall the certainties of an imperial past.”\textsuperscript{19} He knows that his Nation is done along with the music hall, as is done with himself and with his family.

Jean, on the other hand also turns down the plea and persuasion of Graham, her fiancée on the grounds that she has to stay with Phoebe as there is no one to look after her. Her rejection of Graham is also because she feels that her attitudes, perceptions and pursuits are entirely different from that of his. She had earlier said to Phoebe, “He doesn’t want me to try something for myself. He doesn’t want me to threaten him or his world, he doesn’t want me to succeed. I refused him.” (p.29) The same reason reinforced her decision of rejecting Graham. Jean, as observed by Archie is a ‘Sentimentalist’ (p.71) and she would like to get steamed up with the way things were going.

Jean cannot be a spectator and would always love to involve, participate and lead. She knows that Graham is well dressed, assured and well educated but also knows that he has not got a ‘feel’ for the things. He is not only oblivious of the miseries, sufferings and squalor of the people but also is obstinate not to become conscious of it. He is ego-centric, self-centric and Jean does not like it as
she is diametrically opposite to him. It is for this reason that the aggrieved and bereaved Jean, asks him in the end:

Have you ever got on a railway train here, got on a train from Birmingham to West Hartlepool?...you go down the street, and on one side may be is a chemical works, and on the other side is the railway goods yard. Some kids are playing in the street, and you walk up to some woman standing on her doorstep. It isn’t a doorstep really because you can walk straight from the street into her front room. What can you say to her? What real piece of information, what message can you give to her? Do you say: “Madam, d’you know that Jesus died on the Cross for you?” (pp.84-85)

This glimpse, if interpreted at deeper levels signifies the sufferings and miseries of the lower class living in the affluent society. Jean has got a sensitive mind and she can identify her own anguish and humiliation with that of many in the society. It is this attitude that has goaded her to be in the middle of Trafalgar Square. Graham is far too snobbish, far too conceited to be influenced by all this as he is having a cloistered, callous, cultural existence remote from the travails of the common lot. He is staid and conservative. Graham cannot respond alike to the things around him as Jean does. To make matters worse, he does not at least like Jean responding the way she does.

In Jean’s rebuffing of her fiance’s claims for a good life, one can also find overtures of the impotency of religion in acting as a positive force to set right the world that has ceased to provide happiness or welfare to the people. Critics like Alan Carter feels that religion is integral to the Establishment theme than emerging as a subject in itself in some of the plays of Osborne. “The Entertainer provides the most telling expression of Osborne’s attitude to this subject and stresses the irrelevance of dogma in today’s environment....this is a damning
criticism of our social system and of the Church. What attempt, it asks, has the Church made to answer the problems of today, or even to “belong” to this world?...

Osborne himself has written about Jean, that when his *The Entertainer* was produced, critics complained about one of the characters being “vaguely antiqueen”:

I should have been delighted if she could have been more explicit…. The bigger point that this character was trying to make was something like: What kind of symbols do we live by? Are they truthful and worthwhile?

This technique of making the characters ask questions, explicitly or implicitly so as to make the audience stay alive, alert and answerable; eliciting an opinion from them is a Brechtian technique. Kenneth Tynan, however, viewed in his review of the original production, that “Mr Osborne cannot yet write convincing parts for women.”, and that, as far as Jean was concerned, he had “watered the girl down to a nullity…”

We get another such glimpse of Jean’s apparently being an antqueen, ranting and raging at the honour given to monarchy even in the face of death and destruction of its innocent common lots, when she says, “…I’ve lost a brother too. Why do people like us sit here, and just lap it all up, why do boys die, or stoke boilers, why do we pick up these things, what are we hoping to get out of it, what’s it all in aid of - is it really just for the sake of a gloved hand waving at you from a golden coach?” (p.78) This provocative words of Jean offer a substantial freight of social criticism. She does, in fact, appear to be another finely drawn character of Osborne. She has in herself that Jimmian fury, with the exception that it is moderated and restrained. She can be seen as the feminine form of being an ‘Angry Young Man.’ She has successfully ascertained herself. “Her rejection of Graham Dodd is really a rejection of the gross materialistic..."
values of the consumer society. She decides to stay with family rather than Marry Graham.”23

The duologue, like a matrix actually juxtaposes two sets of people and in each set, there is one 'Assured' and one 'Insecured'. The 'Assured' are Brother Bill and Graham Dodd and the 'Insecured' are Archie and Jean Rice. The 'assurance' is a product of 'affluence' and 'insensitiveness' and the 'insecurity' is the resultant of 'poverty' and 'sensitiveness'. In the end, we find that both these 'insecured' people present in two different sets conversing with their own 'assured' partners in two entirely different situations win, in the sense they have not given way for the 'assured' to dictate their minds and rule their lives. Archie could have comfortably accepted Brother Bill's counsel and could have emigrated to Canada and prospered in the hotel business or Jean could have embraced Graham and led a blissful marital life but they turn it down because they are not actually looking for 'Success' in the way the society conceives.

Archie, of course, needs money to come out of his financial crunch. He also needs the 'feeling' that his audiences respond to him in the theatre so that he can artistically become successful. Jean's success lies in her ability to fight for noble cause and make others feel happy by wiping out their miseries. “Both Archie and Jean are sympathetic people. Archie, beneath the professional mask, is a man of emotions. But they differ in their ideas of how feeling should be expressed.”24 Archie, inspite of all his alleged callousness and frivolity is still not a hard hearted monster. He himself is found to be saying, “I am humble! I am very humble, in fact. I still have a little dried pea of humility rattling around inside me.”(p.77)

Osborne clearly intends Archie as a symbol of Suez-era England, a nation whose “act” is hopelessly outdated, reduced to a shabby second-rate status. In the play, England is now living off its past, as Archie tries to live off Billy, while at the same time sacrificing its future in the form of his son Mick, who is
murdered not really in one sense by his captivators of another country but by his own, in a pathetic attempt to maintain the illusion of its imperial power and the mask of stiff upper-lip impregnability. There are certain intimations to support this. Mick who is a British soldier en route to the Suez to represent the Queen and the country is captured and killed. He becomes a martyr sacrificing himself at the altar of the fading imperialism and false prestige. The silence that Archie dreads closes in at the end. He is aware that he is finished. After praising the audience humbly for being very good and promising them to see them the next day, he is seen slowly walking away with Phoebe, "...the little world of light snaps out, the stage is bare and dark. ARCHIE RICE has gone." (p.89)

The emptiness of the stage and its darkness give a remorseful feeling that it is all over with Archie on the music hall stage and simultaneously with England on the political stage. "This is a superbly theatrical moment, rich in implications which are sensed intermittently throughout the play, here brought together. Unquestioningly the large poetic imagination is at work in such a scene using resources which belong only to the theatre to create images that reach out far beyond it."25 By the time of the 1974 revival, The Times was agreeing with Tynan: "Everyone remembers The Entertainer for its brilliant equation between Britain and a dilapidated old music hall" but added that the play is also "one of the best family plays in our repertory."26

The play also hints at leading a value-based life and being more humane:

...in the play it is Archie's plight which captures our attention. He mirrors the situation we have reached, his reflection might frighten us into a reconsideration of our values, lest we should end as he does. The play shows the need for a standard of behaviour which would allow people to function properly as human beings in a world of common shared belief. Our final impression of the play is
The memory of this lonely man, his genuine pain, and his weary acceptance of a deadening existence. The play is considered to be influenced by Brecht's 'Epic Theatre' style. It is then essential to understand the 'Epic Theatre'. Aristotle's *Poetics* gives precedence to plot over character. It also emphasized on the play abiding the sequence of time. Bertolt Brecht, in the notes of his *Rise and Fall of the Town of Mahagonny* stated, "narrative" is to replace "plot." Instead of being "a part of the whole" each scene is to be "an entity in itself", moving in "jerks" rather than in the "evolutionary necessity by which one follows from the other" (evolutionare Zwanslaufigkeit). Hence plot is not supreme. Aristotle had actually defined epic as a narrative form in which "many events simultaneously transacted can be represented." Brecht viewed that since there were 'many events', 'many heroes' and 'each having his own story' in an epic, it was impossible and unnecessary too to have a 'plot' as such and hence it can be conveniently discarded. Eric Bentley considered that 'Epic Theatre' is a "misnomer". It should actually be called non-Aristotelian in so far as it upsets the sequence of time which Aristotle presupposed as one of the constituents of tragedy.

The Aristotelian definition of epic, particularly, the 'many events' part connected with it and his emphasis on plot at the same time appeared contradictory so much so that both cannot go hand in hand. If that were the case, then it implies that 'epics are plotless'. It should, however, be understood that Aristotle's definition of 'epic' did not exclude coherence and consistency. The epic, Aristotle notes, "should have for its subject a single action, whole and complete, with a beginning, middle and an end." The 'single action' that he is referring to implies that though there may be many events in an epic and hence many plots, all of them finally have to converge on to one main plot that actually runs the entire action. Brecht, yet attacked this precisely in the notes to *The Round Heads and the Pointed Heads* (1931-34), where he demanded that
"certain incidents in the play should be treated as self-contained scenes and raised - by means of inscriptions, music, and sound effects, and the actor's way of playing - above the level of the everyday, the obvious, the expected."32

Brecht, in this context mentions the "Verfremdungseffekt, or Alienation Effect, which propels the spectator from a merely passive - or, as Brecht was fond of saying "culinary"- attitude into one of genuine participation."33 Brooker writes, "One of Brecht's most important principles was what he called the Verfremdungseffekt (translated as "defamiliarization effect", "distancing effect", or "estrangement effect", and often mistranslated as "alienation effect". The term 'alienation' is an inadequate and even misleading translation of Brecht's Verfremdung. The terms 'de-familiarisation' or 'estrangement', when understood as more than purely formal devices, give a more accurate sense of Brecht's intentions. A better term still would be 'de-alienation'"34 Brecht's concept behind this effect was to make the spectator take a stand, both literally and figuratively, thus warding him off his slumbered couch in the theatre by being neutral. Heinz Politzer views, "...as Brecht put it, by the "culinary" theatre, 'the audience is entangled in the action on stage,' a process which is bound to 'exhaust their power of action.' The epic theatre, on the other hand, arouses their power of action and 'extorts decisions from them.'"35

Brecht, thus wanted his spectators to judge and pass decisions by putting on trial, his characters, their motives, their action and sometimes even the entire society. He knew that in order to make that happen, he had to make his spectators neutral. As such, he had to 'isolate' them. It was this that he was precisely working on to achieve. Brecht desired intently that the audience should distancing themselves from the drama and avoid becoming emotionally involved in it as it will hamper their thought process, their rational quest, their ability to question and even their need to negate with some of the things that were happening. Hence, they should judge the play quite objectively.
Alan Carter, speaking on the topical appeal and the technique of the play said:

The play had what might be called “incidental” impact, for with the Suez affair still in the air it was certainly topical, with Archie’s son Mick, murdered as a hostage. Further, interest was stimulated by the fact that Osborne has adopted some form of Brechtian frame-work for the play. The realistic “family” scenes were encased in the epic frame-work of Archie’s music-hall turns. Like Brecht, Osborne generalized his smaller parts, concentrating on the central figure of Archie. Yet it would be incorrect to think of *The Entertainer* as a “Brechtian” play, for Brecht was trying to encourage detached thinking by his alienation structure, whilst Osborne was probably seeking deeper emotional involvement.36

Brecht makes use of the shock techniques to achieve the desired result on the spectators.

He uses boards and streamers across the stage to indicate the time and place of the action, to give summaries of the action which is to follow (thus eliminating the “culinary” element of suspense), to contradict the action of stage (thus forcing the spectators to think for himself), or to address the audience in the way a street orator addresses a crowd. The dramatic action is suddenly and illogically interrupted by shrill songs, very often only tenuously relevant to the plot itself. Cruel gags alternate with practical jokes, which are occasionally rather sophisticated. The mechanics of the stage remain visible and function as a play outside the play.37

Brecht aims to redeem his spectators from dramatic illusion. He discourages them from empathising with the characters on the stage.

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Osborne, on the other hand, had a distinctive style. Alan Carter views:

Osborne has never whole-heartedly adopted a Brechtian technique for his plots, for Brecht was seeking a detached and objective approach by the use of his "verfremdung" effect, whilst Osborne uses it to increase our emotional awareness. The Entertainer seems Brechtian in structure, with Archie Rice’s routines commenting on the action of the realistic inner play: but whilst these jokes and songs are symbolic and comment made in them has universality, what they actually do is to involve us even more with Archie. When we see him on stage, when we listen to his pathetically unfunny jokes, we know him better, we accept him back into the family story more sympathetically - the alienation effect is reversed.\(^{38}\)

Brecht, in order to have his ‘distancing effect’, presents his characters to be unlikeable so that the audience did not sympathise with them even when terrible events befell them. However, Osborne cannot do the same thing with his central characters. The audience can never fail to sympathise with them or get intertwined emotionally with their very many predicaments inspite of their flaws. Even with all the shortcomings of Archie, they are remorsefully moved in the end when he fades away. Similarly, the audiences do have a soft corner for Jimmy in Look Back in Anger for the unprecedented, irremediable pain he suffers.

Osborne himself had stated the objective that he wished to give to his audiences, “I want to make people feel, to give them lessons in feeling. They can think afterwards.”\(^{39}\) This is exactly contradictory to one of the objectives of Brechtian theatre. If Brecht wanted to give his audience ‘lessons in thinking’, Osborne, on the other hand wanted to give ‘lessons in feeling.’ The way Osborne looked at some things radically differed from the way Brecht looked. "Osborne
is only Brechtian in the sense that he wants his spectator to be an active and not passive member of society. Where Brecht believed that the best form of play to encourage detached rational observation was the epic narrative with its loose sequence of scenes, Osborne believes that unity can only be given to this sequence by an emotional concentration on one character.\textsuperscript{40}

“Osborne himself, commenting on an entry about \textit{The Entertainer} in The \textit{Penguin Dictionary of the Theatre}, notes that ‘it says I drew ‘unsuccesfully’ on Brecht for The Entertainer at a time when Brecht was little more than a name to me. I had, however, been going to the music hall before the compiler was born.’\textsuperscript{41} \textit{The Entertainer}, following the format of the play within the play does not have the audience on the stage. Archie directly addresses the audience in the hall and the change of the scenes are shown through the mere rise and fall of the backcloth with the sequence indicated through the overt ‘scene’ numbers.

Osborne in his notes to the play has written, “In writing this play, I have not used some of the techniques of the music hall in order to exploit an effective trick, but because I believe that these can solve some of the eternal problems of time and space that face the dramatist, and, also, it has been relevant to the story and setting. Not only has this technique its own traditions, its own convention and symbol, its own mystique, it cuts right across the restrictions of the so-called naturalistic stage. Its contact is immediate, vital, and direct.”

Martin Banham, commenting on the technique of the play says:

Osborne’s comments in the prefatory note make it clear that he was led to experiment with this method as a result of his very intimate acquaintance with the music hall theatre, his awareness of the limitations that naturalistic fourth wall convention staging can place upon satisfying actor-audience contact, and an awareness of the “immediate” and “vital” relationship that the music-hall artist can so successfully achieve with his audience.\textsuperscript{42}
This, however, does not mean that he was not at all influenced by the Brechtian theatre. In the play *The Entertainer*, there are no scenes, in the conventional sense, as such. The entire action of the play is divided into three Acts of five, three and five parts respectively - altogether thirteen small parts and each part is numbered like an act on a music-hall stage, with electric numbers lighting up at the side of the stage to tell us which scene we are watching. During the intermissions, an advertising sheet is lowered. Archie’s music hall part alternates intermittently within after each part. That is the action alternates between Archie’s music-hall turn and the seaside lodging house where the family lives. It is viewed that the formal plot is less important and the development of the mood and tempo carried on in the form of Archie’s dialogues are more important. Simon Trussler, after observing Archie’s solo spots says that they “fail to connect with the family episodes.”

This statement is concurred by Michael Anderson only as far as the plot-structure is concerned but he views that there is a kind of progressive linkage between the jokes that he hurls at his audience and the evasive raillery with which he batters his own family. In his own words, “The sharp contrast between the naturalistic family portrait of the opening scene and Archie’s first ‘spot’ is clear cut and deliberate, but in the course of the play the alternating scenes complement each other in building up a composite picture of Archie’s personality at its moment of crisis.”

Osborne, once again tried to balance the idea of Man and the Milieu, the Man, as an individual and the Man, as a part of the society. The latter part, most of the time casts its inescapable influence on the former. Mary McCarthy, in an article “Verdict on Osborne”, published in the *Observer Weekend Review* of 4th July, 1965, classified Osborne’s plays into the “Public Voice” based on their objectivity and the “Private Voice” based on their subjectivity or the autobiographical influences and authorial imaginations. However, Alan Carter viewed it differently and based the division on their ‘essential nature’ and
'concern'. He felt that strictly speaking, the plays of "Public Voice" are those which are concerned with "a solitary figure, lost without purpose in an emotional void."45

This means, a certain group of people, predominantly the central characters in the plays, who were repressed, in one form or another by the society or the milieu around, are disturbed and turn hostile. The plays of 'public voice' give a jolt to the society. They have a universal contemporary validity in their plight. In The Entertainer as in Look Back in Anger and Luther, this feeling of 'isolation', 'bitterness' and craving for 'betterment', is pronounced as it is a play of 'public voice'. Osborne insists in his stage direction that "the scenes and interludes must, in fact, be lit as if they were simply turns on the bill. On both sides of the proscenium is a square in which...the turn numbers...appear" (a convention common in variety theatres)

Archie's stage patter makes suitable comment on the condition of his life and Britain's life. His stage monologues that are made before the audience of his music-hall are certainly more forceful than those made before his family. Osborne, perhaps, is happier talking directly to his audience than to one or two awkwardly "placed" family listeners. The audience getting addressed directly by the actor is a Brechtian technique. However, Osborne would not have agreed to this as he would have repeated saying that some of the techniques that he employed were not fanciful or experimental things but because of the needs of the story and stage. The theme of the story was that there is a music-hall artist who has to communicate and entertain the audience and speak to them directly and hence out of necessity, he had implemented it.

However, one Brechtian technique that is used which even Osborne cannot deny owing it to Brecht on the grounds that it was the requisite for the story or the stage is the technique adopted to contradict the action of stage (thus forcing the spectators to think for himself). "The characters are announced as
artistes about to perform their “turn”, or even puppets, to be knocked about in public, no-one caring, no-one taking them seriously, and there is an awful irony in the glib, thoughtless slogans that herald the acts, contrasting the grim reality of their content.46 In the play, when part Nine begins, the board displays, ‘Frank Rice-Singing For You’ where as in the action of the play, it is not a song of jubilation sung for others but it is actually a song of blues being played by Frank at Piano within himself and it is elegiac in tone over the death of Mick. Similarly when part Eleven begins, the board displays, ‘The Good Old Days Again’, whereas the action of the play is that Archie announces that Billy Rice will never appear again as he is no more.

This technique of written punch lines or even aphorisms contradicting or negating the actual action on the stage and thereby making the audience think and explore the reasons for the things or action not happening the way it is written or supposed to was an innovation of Brecht who employed it, for instance, where “Peachum, in his The Threepenny Opera, considers the organization of his army of beggars. During his monologue a large board comes down from the flies bearing the inscription, IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE,”47, while at the same time, Peachum’s real intentions, which are directed toward a personal profit, become more and more apparent.

If Billy Rice is not going to appear on stage as stated in writing as he is dead and the funeral cortege is shown, the audience do ponder over the reason for the sudden death of Billy, which, as one thought suggests that his death might have been aggravated because of the psychological pressure to which Billy was subjected to by Archie, who for his vested interests wanted to bring Billy back on to stage. Billy could neither reject his son’s proposal, in which case he will become bankrupt and land in jail and Billy himself does not like this to happen, “I don’t relish the idea of another jail-bird in the family.” (p.37) nor Billy could afford to loose his individuality and dignity by going back to the
stage and standing before the audience who do not respond owing to their lack of spirit and generation gap.

In this struggle of conscience and unable to resolve this crisis, he might have strained his nerves bringing himself to a ‘State’ where no more decisions are expected. It is this sort of thought process that Brecht too wanted to be necessitated and elicited in the audience by the dramatist. Archie, in fact tells Brother Bill, “Jean thinks I killed him” and Brother Bill, quickly, satirically remarks, “You didn’t kill him, Archie. You don’t kill people that easily.” (p.84) thus suggestive that one can even kill people by subjecting them to psychological deadlock.

The significance of ‘Epic Theatre’ was that it was didactic. Brecht considered the theatre as a powerful mechanism to bring change. Hence, apart from entertaining the audience, he wanted to engage them in contemporary concerns, for example, the political. He wanted the audience to focus upon why things were happening the way they were and not on the process of things. In a way, he highlighted the problems, socio-political before the audience and made the audience to react and respond. He never offered any readymade solution. Osborne, though not a didactic writer created an awareness among the public regarding the imperative need to ‘feel’ for the problems around them.

However, this does not mean that he wrote the play only as a way of tribute to Brecht or under his inevitable influence. “It has been suggested that Osborne was influenced here by Brechtian method, but as Martin Esslin has pointed out, Brecht’s influence on the British theatre since 1956 has often been cited, though in fact there was ‘little genuine knowledge about Brecht, and hence little evidence of any influence of Brecht’s actual work and thought. The ‘Brechtian’ era in England stood under the aegis not of Brecht himself but of various second-hand ideas and concepts about Brecht, an image of Brecht created from misunderstandings and misconceptions.”
The last glimpse of Archie on the stage is stretched between two
musicals, “We’re All Out For Good Old Number One” and “Why Should I Care, Why Should I Let It Touch Me” both of which are distressing comments on life. His, “Life’s funny though, isn’t it? It is - life’s funny. It’s like sucking a sweet with the wrapper on” (p.87) tells quite remorsefully what life has been for him. Beneath the grinning façade of Archie, there is a broken soul which yearns for ‘acceptance’, ‘response’, ‘security’, and ‘understanding’.

There are three important thematic ideas, which, Osborne with utmost ingenuity makes them converge in the last scene - the dying music hall, when Archie tells the audience, “Don’t clap too hard, we’re all in a very old building. Yes, very old. Old. What about that?” (p.86), the decay of English Nation, when he, pointing to the Nude Britannia with helmet on, whom he has brought on to the stage, says, “What about her, eh-Madam with the helmet on? I reckon she’s sagging a bit, if you ask me. She needs some beef putting into her - the roast beef of old England.” (p.86) and finally his own fading away, “You think I’m gone, don’t you? Go on, say it, you think I’m gone. You think I’m gone, don’t you? Well, I am.” (p.87)

Meenal Agrawal makes a deep insight as follows:

The dying music hall provided John Osborne with both a framework and a symbol for a play about the decay of England. World War II reduced Britain from the position of a great imperial power to that of a second class power. Its impact on British society was extensive and deep. Britain lost an empire and did not quite know its fast changing world. When Archie in costume is revealed with a tallnude behind him, who wears the helmet of Britannia…the relation becomes real. His fading personal fortunes are identified with the fading of the Empire. His personal
hollowness echoes the present hollowness of the Empire idea, and
the proposed retreat to Canada signifies the shift of power.\textsuperscript{49}

Archie’s tragedy is partly handmade and partly imposed. Inspite of all his
vices and flaws, he is not a thing to be despised down and out. He still can have
that warmth for life and for his nation. His rejection of leaving for green pastures
in Canada is an ample testimony for it. “Archie has left anger long behind, only
ironic detachment remains, his professional mask hides his bitterness - he is
beyond reach….He also recognizes the need for passion in a cold world; his life
is an attempt to find such warmth. We sympathise with him when he is unable to
achieve this and the play comes to a final image which is quite frightening, with
Archie trooping off-stage towards Phoebe, accepting the comfort he is offered,
yet knowing it to be inadequate.”\textsuperscript{50}

Osborne’s intention was to have a ruthless and dismal expose of a fading
figure in a fast-declining pastime to be reflective of the position of Britain of
Suez-era, and its trailing of the tattered glories of vaudeville to suggest a greater
passing of prestige. The charms and likes of the play \textit{The Entertainer} stand up
nicely even today as the story’s poignancy resonates, thanks to the frightening
similarity between Britain’s end-of-empire gamble in the Middle East then, and
America’s grandeur half a century later challenged as America’s colossal hubris
image of wax has begun to melt down in the eyes of the world.
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34. Peter Brooker, "Key Words in Brecht's Theory and Practice of Theatre". In Thomson and Sacks, 1994, p.193.


