CHAPTER V

LUTHER

*Heroic Reformer or Heretic Revolutionary?*
LUTHER
John Osborne borrows extracts from the life of Martin Luther, the father of Protestantism, and also from the historical and religious milieu of Europe in the early sixteenth century to serve as a texture, as a backdrop, for his play 
_Luther_. In an interview, he had said:

...I wanted to write a play about religious experience and various other things, and this happened to be the vehicle for it. Historical plays are usually anathema to me, but this isn’t a costume drama. I hope that it won’t make any difference if you don’t know anything about Luther himself, and I suspect that most people don’t. In fact the historical character is almost incidental....

Osborne, however, blows the fire of passion into the bones of dead times and summons the historical personage of Luther back to life in all his rebellious grandeur and deports the spectators to those times where religion and politics dominated the thoughts of people. Art, Science, and even Literature were relegated and were made subordinate to religion. Philosophers, even if there were, were actually quacks and conjurers. Astronomy was confused with astrology. The physicians medicines were supposed to be powerless, unless the priests said prayers over them. “The disturbers of settled beliefs were regarded as public enemies who had placed themselves beyond the pale of humanity, and were considered fit only to be destroyed like wild beasts, or trampled out like the seed of a contagion.”

The King was not a lawful sovereign until the crown was placed by the Church upon his head and the Church had the right to take away what it bestowed. That the emperor of Germany had to hold the stirrup for Pope Gregory VII to enable him to mount his mule was a testimony, enough for the undeniable supremacy of the Church. The Church exercised and wielded so much authority on people’s lives that any attempt to go astray from the existing unscrupulous religious precepts or even to express an idea not approved by the Church was considered blasphemous.
The atonement of sin was made a monetary affair. James Anthony Froude states:

Religion, in the minds of ordinary people, meant that the keys of the other world were held by the clergy. If a man confessed regularly to his priest, received the sacrament, and was absolved, then all was well with him. His duties consisted in going to confession and to mass. If he committed sins, he was prescribed penances, which could be commuted for money. If he was sick or ill at ease in his mind, he was recommended a pilgrimage - a pilgrimage to a shrine or a holy well, or to some wonder-working image....At a chapel in Saxony there was an image of a Virgin and Child. If the worshipper came to it with a good handsome offering, the child bowed and was gracious: if the present was unsatisfactory, it turned away its head, and withheld its favours till the purse-strings were untied again....When the Reformation came, and the police looked into the matter, the images were found to be worked with wires and pulleys.3

‘The Letters of Indulgences’ issued under the authority of the Pope of Roman Catholic Church further degraded religion to the basest and meanest levels. Religion began to lose its sanctity and became ridiculous. In such promiscuity, a voice emanated in Germany whose loudness, solemnity and indignance rang throughout Europe and it proliferated to challenge the rudimental structures on which the authority of the Pope rested. This voice was of Martin Luther, an Eremite of St. Augustinian order who was absorbed into the order in 1506, much against the wishes of his father Hans, a miner who dreamt of making him a lawyer. Osborne tried to balance the idea of man as an individual with that of man as part of society. The entire play is about a man who wants to emerge larger than the world on the flights of ‘truth’ and ‘faith’
and the society which wants to confine him into its own narrow limits by imposing on him infinite limits.

The play opens with the sacred proceedings of Martin’s absorption into the order. The Convent becomes the workshop of Luther and he is relentlessly engaged in it with the ‘Tools of Good Work’. Even during the Communal Confession, Martin is too conscious or rather over conscious of his sins and he develops the habit of magnifying his sins, which are not at all sins. Luther’s fellow monks compromise by making up for their petty sins—“I confess I did leave my cell for the Night Office without Scapular and had to return for it” (p.19), “I confess I have three times made mistakes in the Oratory, in psalm singing and Antiphon”(p.19), “Twice in my sloth, I have omitted to shave....” (p.21 ) whilst Luther is seen crying:

I am a worm and no man, a byword and a laughing stock. Crush out the worminess in me, stamp on me. (p.19)

He feels that he is a worm and is always soaking in devil’s sweat. The convent becomes a battle ground for him as he is engaged in a spiritual conflict for redemption and the devil is perpetually trying to frustrate his win in it. He knows that Satan had prognosticated that he, unlike others will grow up to proclaim, profess and practice the Word of God and seek salvation. Hence, Satan, on the other hand seeks to impede his way,

Somewhere, in the body of a child, Satan foresaw in me what I’m suffering now.(p.30)

He again goes on to say that Satan is constantly trying to hook and net him down by employing several tricks and creating a suspicion in him as to what is ‘faith’ and what is the ‘Word and Will of God’. It is something of an inextricable entanglement, a bondage of doubt, yoke of confusion to which he is subjected:
That’s why he prepares open pits for me, and all kinds of tricks to bring me down, so that I keep wondering if I’m the only man living who’s baited, and surrounded by dreams, and afraid to move. (p.30)

This state of mind of getting entrapped is also a characteristic feature of the Osbornian heroes. Jimmy too in the end is found to be saying to Alison that ‘there are cruel, steel traps laid about everywhere, just waiting for rather mad, slightly satanic and very timid little animals...’ One can find the existential overtones in the revelation of such state of mind as a perpetual feeling haunts them that man is being engulfed and endangered in this cruel Universe as he is left alone to himself. Martin, paradoxically speaking, is the most unsure when he is the most sure. An evidence of this paradox is later known when, before standing in the Diet of Worms, he, instead of instantaneously replying asks a day’s time to resolve on the question whether he means to defend them or retract any of them. Martin feels too insecure and says,

I am alone. I am alone, and against myself. (p.20)

Martin, thus has ambivalent attitude to God. He has a sense of desperate need for Him and at the same time a sense of being left out, a sense of being singled out for special victimization. He feels that God, instead of being a torch-bearer for him has left him in a lurch to combat and contain within himself the conflicting forces of belief and disbelief. This kind of feeling of being alone, tormented by a sense of alienation is central to all the plays of Osborne. The central characters of Osborne are all like islands surrounded by grief unfathomable. They are alone and worse is they are conscious that they are alone.

They also know that they are not like the rest and there is a difference and this difference is deliberately designed, something like a self-entombment as we see in the case of Martin who is bent upon satisfying his individual conscience first, placing it before that of the society’s. “It is this “soul of their own” which
has caused trouble to the heroes, they are not prepared to accept second best, or other people's values, and search for their own levels of satisfaction, in doing so they become "different", apart from the herd. It is an incredible reflexion about life that these sentiments, which can only be regarded as admirable, should lead to such despair and to such isolation."4

Martin feels that he has broken the oath of humility by harbouring grudge while cleaning the latrines. Even all his penances done with utmost severity cannot redeem his guilt. The scene ends dramatically with Martin throwing a frightening epileptic fit, jerking frenetically and shrieking, "Not! Me! I am not!" (p.23) This perhaps reveals his realization of God's task for him and his helpless protest at being selected for special victimization. He feels that he is not capable, as he himself is troubled and torn out with uncertainty and limitless doubts to fulfill the mission awaiting to be entrusted to him.

The next scene opens a year later in 1507 when Martin is about to perform his first Mass. An equally vivid, visual image confronts us when Martin's anguish is symbolically represented by the torso of a naked man across the gleaming cutting edge of a gigantic butcher's knife. He is always subjected to hallucinations and there is a reference to his holding his stomach as if suffering from constipation and this is more particular during spiritual disquisitions. A sort of spiritual crisis takes place in his belly and he feels that he can be relieved from it if and only if he excretes it in the world's lavatory. Even on the day of performing his first Mass, he says to brother Weinand,

My bowels won't move, that's all. (p.26)

Alan Carter says:

...Osborne embraced certain Brechtian alienation techniques in this production. The back-cloth, a minimal gaunt tree, allows us to see Martin from the outside, a position which is further supported by the use of an interlocutor who announces time and place for
each scene. The whole emphasis on fleshly torment is Brechtian in its very nature, and while we can clearly see the individual rebel, we are not entirely convinced about the religious reformer. Have we seen an indomitable conscience battling with the consecrated rottenness of the established Church? Probably not, if we consider religion as an entirely intellectual attitude: but if we hold that it should take account of all human suffering, mental and physical, then Martin’s “pain in the bowels” is at once significant and symbolic....

This symbolic representation is also employed by Osborne to suggest the commonness of Luther, as is also observed thus, “To show Martin’s constipation, his indigestion, his excessive perspiration, is to show him as an ordinary human being. A man who would appeal to the earthy German peasantry, and who would be able to incite them to action. He is a direct contrast to the effeminate, sophisticated Latin churchmen of the Period...” Osborne also wanted to depict that man is as frail spiritually as he is physically. “…Luther’s obsession with his bowels and his painful constipation being given full play by Osborne, showing a man as vulnerable physically as spiritually, a hypochondriac in body and soul.”

Weinand tells Martin that he is suffering from few ‘imaginary sins’ and that other brothers of the Order sneer at his ‘over-stimulated conscience’. It is because of this that Martin is constantly trying to make up for the sins that he has not committed at all. But Martin goes on to say,

What’s the use of all this talk of penitence if I can’t feel it. (p.26)

It is this ‘experience of feeling’ that is central to the plays of Osborne. Jimmy rants at Alison for she has not experienced the sordid feeling of pain when some one dear dies or when something we hold to be dear is lost. Even Osborne, through his plays wanted to give ‘lessons in feeling’ to the audience. It
is a proposition that unless one realizes the things for oneself by feeling, one cannot experience the true essence and truth behind anything.

Martin’s problem is that he begins to have a growing sense of isolation and exorbitant guilt which cannot be redeemed by confession, penitence, communal religious practices or submission to the path enunciated by the church authorities. He knows that his perpetual quest for salvation has to be sought within himself and not outside. He cannot deceive himself by merely thinking that he has been redeemed. Salvation is a rigorous spiritual process which can be attained only by staunch ‘faith’. This actually sets the ground for Martin taking cudgels against the authority, the very crux of the play itself being the ‘justification of faith’ rather than by works. Martin discovers that the convent is a petty place of compromises and complacencies. He knows that he knows what others do not. He is also aware that even this feeling of being aware will create a sense of pride which is undesirable. He wants to humiliate his pride but his hubristically independent thinking comes into conflict with it. In order to resolve this and dissatisfied with all the alternatives provided, he wanted to have an unmediated contact with God,

Receive, oh Holy Father, almighty and eternal God, this spotless host....When I entered the monastery, I wanted to speak to God directly, you see. Without any embarrassment, I wanted to speak to him myself, but when it came to it, I dried up - as I always have. (p.38)

He knows that there cannot be any intermediary between God and man claiming on behalf of him the right to give salvation as that man has confessed his sins. When he himself, with all the self-inflicting rigours is unable to seek the contact of God and get his guilt redeemed owing to his failure in upholding ‘faith’, he finds it naturally quite ridiculous that the papal authorities providing salvation to people so effortlessly by the sale of indulgences. He desists any kind of liaisoning between men and God as the Church authorities had begun to
claim. Weinand tries hard to convince him that he is expected to master the evils and not be obsessed by them. Martin is unable to accept that the sacred Order can bring a change in him. He asks Weinand,

...What have I gained from coming into this sacred Order? Aren’t I still the same? I’m still envious, I’m still impatient, I’m still passionate? (p.27)

Martin finds it extremely difficult to have the ‘Willing Suspension of doubts’ as done by other eremites. He, all the while is unconvinced in being a protégé of God. He feels that God is against him and is angry with him. Weinand persuades him saying that God is all merciful and that it is actually Martin who is angry with God. Martin, with the assistance of brother Weinand performs the mass with great difficulty. Martin says, “I wish my bowels would open. I’m blocked up like an old crypt.” (p.29) Once again, a symbolic representation of the struggle of Martin is depicted in his comparison of getting stuck up in a crypt, an underground room of a Church used for burials.

Osborne, as a dramatist had the firm conviction that dramas based on contemporary issues should have contemporary language, that is, the language corresponding to the times to which it belongs to:

He translates the vocabulary and idioms of common conversation into the rhetorical power of his heroes. He does not lift the talk of the street directly on to the stage as Pinter does, but recreates that speech so that his heroes speak as we ourselves would wish to. They use the same words, the same colloquialisms, but to much greater effect. There is nothing remarkable about Luther’s simile—“I’m blocked up like an old crypt”—but who amongst us would use such effective figuratives? With visual word pictures like these, Osborne gains an immediacy of thought and a compression of language which is unknown in everyday life.
Osborne aptly contrives a conversation between Weinand and Martin’s father Hans, who has come along with Lucas and several other co-workers of his to see his son perform his first Mass. Hans has even donated twenty guilden for the Order. Hans is quite distressed to see his son become an eremite and he is against monkery. He knows that his son Martin has not only a troubled tummy but also a troubled conscience and it is the latter one which can create a furore so incredible that it will be nothing short of a devastation as he will never recoil unless he is satisfied with the result of the cause that he has undertaken. Hans sarcastically asks, as if having a prophetic vision of what is going to happen in future,

...wouldn’t you say that one bad monk, say for instance, one really monster sized, roaring great bitch of a monk, if he really got going, really going, couldn’t he get his order such a reputation that eventually, it might even have to go into-what do they call it now-liquidation. (pp.31-32)

Weinand is certain about the strength and solidarity of the Church as against those who try to discredit it and Osborne establishes brother Weinand’s unswerving confidence in the institution of Church by making him say,

I think my opinion would be that the Church is bigger than those who are in her (p.32)

Osborne has regard for the old institutions as they are the symbolic representations of cultural and spiritual heredity. However, he is certainly against the evils that have desecrated its sanctity. He desists its manipulation for the vested interests of the so-called custodians of it.

Martin comes to the Convent refectory where his father Hans is waiting and is asked about his ‘troubling tummy’. A conversation between him and his father ensues in private. This scene is another illustration of how deftly Osborne handles the filial relationship or father and son relationship which exists
explicitly, sometimes implicitly in most of his plays. Martin asks his father the reason for why he hates his being in the monastery. Hans feels that it is suicidal to give up and lead a life of emptiness unlike that of others. He reiterates the dreams he had for Martin which have been thwarted and goes on to say,

I think a man murders himself in these places. (p.41)

Martin repudiates even the very source of his birth and says that the Gospels are the only mother he has ever had. Hans asks Martin whether it is not written in the Gospels that one shall honour one’s father and one’s mother and one is made by the body of a woman and a man and one cannot make oneself and Martin is wrong if he thinks that he is a self-made man. Martin is distressed at his being cornered and severely asks-

Churches, kings, and fathers-why do they ask so much, and why do they all of them get so much more than they deserve? (p.41)

This question, in a way is an indication of the revolt that Martin is going to have against the institutions which, he feels have unjustifyingly and unreasonably got benefited by extracting several things from the individuals. This questioning mode and making the audience take a stand by forcing them to think and say “Yes” or “No”, “agree” or “disagree”, “for” or “against” is actually a Brechtian technique which Osborne has employed. Hans is aggrieved for the lack of reciprocation and tells his son that a father deserves more than what Martin has given him. Martin scornfully remarks,

I’ve given you! I don’t have to give you! I am-that’s all I need give you…. All you want is me to justify you! Well, I can’t, and, what’s more, I won’t. I can’t even justify myself. (pp.41-42)

Martin, thus, does not want to justify his identity as envisioned dearly by his father. He says that he is not blaming his father. Only the thing is that he is not grateful, that’s all. He feels that he need not be grateful to anyone except
God as he alone is the ultimate giver. It is perhaps this conviction that makes him come into a dispute with the Church authorities as he believes that it is only God who has the merit of adjudicating on the people and decide on the questions of providing salvation. The conversation turns interesting as Hans levies a charge against his son saying that he is an escapist and is running away. He is abusing his youth with fear and humiliation.

Martin, says, on the contrary, he is confronting problems boldly in a monastery and asks his father that if had it been so easy in a monastery as per the conception of his father, then there would have been more people in monasteries than outside, thus darting on the fact that it is actually those outside who are escapists as they are immersing themselves in mundane things and are unable to realise that it is all transient. Hans still wonderfully exclaims that it is because people outside the monastery have not given up. Hans feels that Martin was different from all the other men. He says,

You were stubborn, you were always stubborn, you’ve always had to resist, haven’t you? (p.43)

The resistance against the established dogmas of the society is one of the most cherished themes of Osborne. His heroes know that they are right and the world around them is wrong. They cannot be still and live in a world that antagonizes them and stifles them with all its faults. Hence, they rage with rancour. They protest. This in itself is an achievement. The result of the protest is secondary. Whether they succeed or fail, is a matter of secondary importance. Alan Carter acclaims the heroes of Osborne by saying:

In a world where men no longer live cooperatively together but are reduced to negative conformity, he pleads that whilst his heroes may fail to change the world, at least their protest is valuable. The man in the street knows he cannot change the world so he accepts it. Osborne’s extraordinary heroes believe they can alter it; when
they realise they can't, should we condemn them for trying? There is surely a positive function in standing against the tide if one thinks that the current of events is moving in the wrong direction.⁹

It is also known that Martin, once while returning from Erfurt, had the vision of St. Anne during a thunderstorm and he had prostrated in fear saying that if he was saved, he will become a monk. This scene is intensely personal as we find the exploration of the relationship between father and the son and though we get to know that they admire each other, there is a gulf between them that is hard to be bridged. There is some sort of estrangement in their relations. Martin encompasses this personal wreckage in a broader, general failure by saying:

I suppose fathers and sons always disappoint each other. (p.43)

It is to be understood that this sort of love-hate relationship that prevails in the relationship between Hans, the father and Martin, the son also extends itself to the relationship between the Great Father, the God and the Son Martin, who is caught between the desperate need for love and his fear of rejection. Luther has superior intelligence and believes quite rigidly that everything done by man is sinful and that it is only faith in God that will save him, not forgiveness of sins or even penance.

It is considered by critics like Martin Banham that “The act is, in this sense, fairly static, with Luther’s struggle against himself at its centre and the inherent difficulties this presents in terms of stage action often slowing down the movement of the play in the mire of Luther’s torment. Dramatically, however, the first act is essential, as Osborne has to establish Luther’s psychological make-up if he is to develop the play into something more than a documentary record of historical events”¹⁰ There are critics who differ on the grounds that Osborne was not able to effectively present the difference of opinion he had with Rome, “…Martin’s sermons in Luther throw more light upon the personality of the priest than upon the details of his dispute with Rome.”¹¹ He, however feels
that though Luther has got its own blemishes by deviating from the ‘epic’
structure as conceived along Brechtian lines owing to the emphasis on the
psychology of the individual, “…the virtues of Luther far outweigh its faults and
the portrait of the tormented priest obsessed with his sluggish bowels as he
struggles with his faith, however ludicrous it may sound, is expressed by
Osborne in memorably cloacal imagery.”¹²

However, critics like J.R.Taylor view that Brecht’s Galileo seemed to be
a model for Luther as far as balancing the idea of man as an individual and man
in society are concerned to arrest the attention of the spectator. Brecht could
succeed in managing to establish a balance very effectively between the inner
forces which had driven Galileo to propitiate his convictions with that of the
outer forces of society (Church and State) which held him down. “In Osborne
the balance is less satisfactory, since so much time is spent on the
‘psychological’ material early on - Martin’s obsession with his own sinfulness,
with the sinfulness of merely being alive, and his relations with his father, whom
he loved, and his mother, who beat him - that by the time this all bears fruit in
his rebellion and heresy, and he moves out (like Galileo) into the world of
repressive social forces (emanating, like those that opposed Galileo, from the
Vatican), there is not enough room left to deal with them properly.”¹³

It is not to be forgotten that Osborne himself had been influenced by the
Erikson’s psycho-biography Young Man Luther and hence he wanted to
delineate before the audience the personality of Luther, his tormenting
conscience, the trials and tribulations within. It was also that it was this personal
conscientious obstinacy which could not be contented with anything less than
absolute truth and absolute perfection that kindled the spark into fire when the
papal authorities began to mislead.

While we may fault Luther on the grounds of its inconsistency, or
its lack of profound thought, its aim is to be a dramatic portrait of a
human being who had a great effect upon the Christian world. A
man in fact who split this world in two. Perhaps too much has been included and some ideas fall flat because there is not sufficient time to develop them, but it cannot be easy, when using realistic methods, to show on stage a man wrestling more with his own conscience than with personal enemies. Neither can we criticize the playwright for leaning too heavily on borrowed sources, for he has himself admitted that the play is meant to be half chronicle, half interpretation.14

If Act One provides a psychological interpretation of the private world of Martin Luther, then the second act unfolds the public world, giving an ostentatious chronicle of the period. The scene is set in a market place, Juterbog in 1517. Tetzel, Dominican, inquisitor, sub-commissioner to the Archbishop of Mainz, successful vendor of indulgences of his day, an ecclesiastical huckster, a trained orator and a dedicated professional knowing all the tricks of the trade and with an uncanny perception of the people of his times comes out with a red cross with the arms of the Pope suspended. The glamour of the Church, the riches, the undisputable power it wielded add to the sheer spectacle and pageantry. "The effect in the theatre of the arrival of this procession and Tetzel’s oratory against such a background is electric, and the play is lifted from the narrow chronicle of the torment of one man’s mind, to an uncompromising display of the struggle against the Church in action."15

Osborne's strength of skillfully reserving monologues has come to his aid in presenting the caricature of Tetzel, which he has done exceptionally well and it proved to be theatrically wonderful. It is in fact, one of Osborne’s finest writing for the stage. This scene is a savage parody of the selling of indulgences by Church officials and the language that Osborne makes Tetzel speak is not only memorable but also thought-provoking and tells the entire story of the basest and the meanest levels to which the Church of Rome had degraded.
"I am John Tetzel, Dominican, inquisitor, sub-commissioner to the Archbishop of Mainz, and what I bring you is indulgences. Indulgences made possible by the red blood of Jesus Christ, and the red cross you see standing up here behind me is the standard of those who carry them.... Yes, my friend, the Pope himself has sent me with indulgences for you!...They're only the most precious and noble of God's gifts to men, that's all they are!... I tell you I wouldn't swap my privilege at this moment with that of St.Peter in Heaven because I've already saved more souls with my indulgences than he could ever have done with all his sermons...For every mortal sin you commit, the Church says that after confession and contrition, you've got to penance-either in this life or in purgatory...There isn't any one sin so big that one of these letters can't remit it...Not only am I empowered to give you these letters of pardon for the sins you've already committed, I can give you pardon for those sins you haven't even committed but, which, however you intend to commit!...It's so that we can restore the ruined church of St.Peter and St.Paul in Rome!...Will anyone dare to say that the cause is not a good one?...buy yourself one of these letters, so that in the hour of death, the gate through which sinners enter the world of torment shall be closed against you, and the gate leading to the joy of paradise be flung open for you? And, remember this, these letters aren't just for the living but for the dead too. There can't be one amongst you who hasn't at least one dear one who has departed-and to who knows what? Why, these letters are for them too...As soon as your money rattles in the box and the cash bell rings, the soul flies out of purgatory and sings!...Get your money out!....I shall take down the cross, shut the gates of heaven...The Lord our God reigns no longer. He has resigned all power to the Pope.... (pp.48-51)
This scene, according to Alan Carter, "...is so well constructed that the following scenes seem to be anticlimatic: yet we do, in fact, get the most detailed explanation of the nature of Martin's rebellion in them, an important ingredient, for one of the weaknesses of the play is that we learn little of the inner compulsion which drove Martin to his final rejection of ecclesiastical doctrine. If anything, the effect of these scenes is to make us think that the Reformation stemmed from the single issue of indulgences."16 A far more sarcastic criticism can be found in the words of Banham, "Tetzel's sale of indulgences is wholly reminiscent of the approach of the life insurance salesman, the same picture of doom for the man without it, the same exploitation of man's responsibility to his family, the same easy answer to these fears that the salesman himself has invented."17 The Insurance Policy is not for body and life but for souls!

Martin, in the next scene is seen conversing with Johann Von Staupitz, Vicar General of the Augustinian Order who is very sympathetic towards him and has profound respect towards his scholarship. Staupitz views that Martin is obsessed with the 'Rule' as it serves very nicely as a protection against the demands of his own instincts and that he may think that he admires authority but unfortunately he cannot submit to it. Hence, by paying exaggerated attention to the Rule, he makes the authority ridiculous. There is a great deal of element of reality in what Staupitz says as it was unscrupulous authority itself which was the cause that made Martin rebel.

Martin, however says that he cannot feel secure. Staupitz says that all this problem is because Martin is demanding an impossible standard of perfection which is unattainable. Staupitz says that he himself has given up making solemn promises because he knows that he is not able to keep them. However, he admires Martin for the pain that he is taking as a large man is worth the pains he takes. Martin is unable to get consoled and asks Staupitz whether he feels humiliated to belong to a world that is dying. Martin's despair for humanity and frustration is expressed as he continues:
...this must be the last age we're living in. There can't be any more left but the black bottom of the bucket. (p.54)

Osborne is always at his very best while expressing his deepest awareness of engulfing despair through the usage of language and symbolism. This also reminds us of Jimmy's "There are no noble causes left worth fighting for." There is again a symbolic interpretation to the condition of Martin. The Spiritual maturity that he has attained is being alluded to the physical predicament when he says:

I'm like a ripe stool in the world's straining anus, and at any moment we're about to let each other go. (p.55)

In fact, through out the play, we can find that his Spiritual struggle is linked with the Physical as if both of them have become inextricable. Even when Martin says that he has allegorized going to the lavatory, Staupitz is quick to quote the verse and says:

Are ye so foolish, that ye have begun in the spirit, you would now end in the flesh. (p.52)

This can be interpreted at a different level. Staupitz appears to be having an insight into the nature of Martin, the nature of the contemporary Church and the nature of the society. He opines that what was a one man's personal quest for 'faith' turns out to be a bloody revolution in flesh and blood claiming the lives of several. Staupitz says to Martin that he is never going to be a spectator and he will always take part reminding us of what Hans had earlier said of Martin that he was always stubborn and he had always something to resist. Osborne has portrayed Martin as an instinctual rebel. Staupitz affectionately enquires about his violent speeches against the letters of indulgences and chides him for the embarrassment he is causing. He also cautions him that the Duke himself is going to come to listen to the next sermon of his on the eve of All Saint's Day.
Martin, however, is steadfast and hints at the enormous misleading that the people are being subjected to when they are told that eighteen of Christ’s apostles are buried in Germany whereas Christ had only twelve of them. He also hints at someone foolishly claiming that he has a feather from the wing of the angel Gabriel or even the Archbishop of Mainz supposedly claiming to have a flame from Moses’ burning bush. He also tells Staupitz that he has said that one cannot strike bargains with God and no one can sanction redemption for one’s sins on behalf of God.

Martin even delineates a dreadful picture of the very fundamental fabric of Christianity getting torn off as people have begun to swerve even from the customary Mass intended to repose the souls of the dead on the pretext that they have purchased the indulgences and as such the souls are already out of purgatory. They have begun to logically question that if Mass is still held necessary, it means that they have been swindled by either their holy father the Pope or by the Priest who sold the indulgences. Martin is certainly distressed and alarms every one concerned regarding the adverse effects that indulgences are leading to.

Martin also shares the story of a Saxon nobleman whom the court had to acquit though it was proved that he had seriously beaten up Tetzel as he himself had sold the indulgences to the nobleman remitting him of the sins that he even intends to commit. Martin, thus, expresses all his concern for the damage that is going to occur to all the institutions - Spiritual and Secular due to the indulgences. Staupitz is shrewd enough to understand the logic and sense of proposition in what Martin is saying but asks him to be prudent like Erasmus, a reputed scholar of that time who never gets into any serious trouble but manages to drive his point home. Staupitz’s personal concern for Martin gets reflected when he asks him to remember that he began his battle in the name of Jesus Christ and hence should do anything only as God commands. Martin Luther’s reply for this again hints at the future:
I will. Who knows? If I break wind in Wittenberg, they might smell it in Rome. (p.60)

A stage is thus set for Martin, the one who resisted the defects in anything. One can also find a bit of revelation of Luther’s inner self. The next scene is prominent so far as it sets the action of the play on All Saints’ Day in the Castle Church of Wittenberg on October 31st, 1517. Osborne, with utmost dexterity makes Luther reach the pulpit to speak directly to the crowd to establish the reasons for his opposing the indulgences. Making the central characters, in particular, address the audience is another Brechtian technique that Osborne has employed. If the humbug Tetzel, the Vendor of Indulgences, in the beginning scene of the Act exploits the gross ignorance of the masses on ecclesiastical issues, this scene is in sharp contrast to it as Dr. Luther enlightens the same masses on the truths written in Scriptures. Thus, some sort of dramatic balance is achieved between dark and light, bad and good, vice and virtue. Luther says:

We are living in a dangerous time....We Christians seem to be wise outwardly and mad inwardly...A man is not a good Christian because he understand Greek and Hebrew...A man without Christ becomes his own shell. We are content with shells...Today is the eve of All Saints, and the holy relics will be on show to you all...Your emptiness will be frothing over at the sight of a strand of Jesus’ beard, at one of the nails driven into His hands, and at the remains of the loaf at the Last Supper. Shells for shells, empty things for empty men. There are some who complain of these things, but they write in Latin for scholars. Who’ll speak out in rough German? Someone’s got to bell the cat!... “For therein is the righteousness of God revealed, from faith to faith; as it is written, the just shall live by faith.”...No man is just because he does just works. The works are just if the man is just...I need no more than
my sweet redeemer and mediator, Jesus Christ.... If we are going to be deserted, let’s follow the deserted Christ (pp.61-63)

Luther’s earlier attempts to humiliate his pride have vanished. He knows that someone has to take the Spirit of Scriptures to the common lot in an idiom that they are familiar with. He is aware that he is going to be the one who has to take up that cause. Luther refers to the sickness in his bowels again as once during his childhood he couldn’t reach down to his breath and he seemed to sense beneath him a large rat, a heavy, wet, plague rat, slashing at his privates with its death’s teeth. He had sat in his heap of pain until the words emerged and opened out, “The just shall live by faith.” His pain vanished, his bowels flushed, he could get up and see the life he had lost. Osborne succeeds in showing that spiritual struggle takes place inside the belly of Luther and here he employs ‘animal imagery’ to give a really vivid expression to his agony, both physical and spiritual, as he contemplates the nature of faith.

Luther nails his ninety-five theses to the Church door and leaves to create the beginning of an uproar. He is eventually summoned to Fugger Palace before Thomas De Vio, known as Cajetan, Cardinal of San Sisto, General of the Dominican Order and Rome’s highest representative in Germany. Osborne suggests that for this particular scene, the designer might use as a backcloth, “a satirical contemporary woodcut, showing, for example, the Pope portrayed as an ass playing the bagpipes, or a cardinal dressed up as a court fool. Or perhaps Holbein’s cartoon of Luther with the Pope suspended from his nose.” (p.64) “This willingness to take sides, as it were, to direct the interpretation of character and action, is to the advantage of the play, giving it a free moving but positive commitment that avoids the risk of turning historical chronicle into mere documentary....”

The Cardinal is smoothly cunning and knows the sensitivity of the issue, the nationalistic fervour of Germany and tries to tackle Luther very diplomatically by refusing to get into a discussion with him and at the same time
trying to persuade him to retract. Cajetan laments on Luther’s decision of asking the Emperor for safe conduct, thus implicitly suggesting of having a low opinion on the representatives of the Church and lack of trust in mother Church. He also says that the entire Order of Luther has been brought into disgrace and the hopes of Duke Frederick of Saxony to have the Golden Rose of Virtue to be awarded by the Holy Roman Catholic Church have got frustrated due to the unpleasantness created by Luther as he has spoken against the indulgences.

Cajetan says to Luther that he knows that he is a learned doctor of the Holy Scriptures and he has managed to arouse some supporters too. This has made not only him, but the duke and above all his holiness, Pope Leo, the Tenth unhappy. The Pope has sent three orders to Luther, one asking him to admit his faults and to retract all his errors and sermons, second, to promise to abstain from propagating his opinions at any time in the future and third to behave generally with greater moderation, and avoid anything which might cause offence or grieve and disturb the Church.

Luther instantaneously asks Cajetan where he has erred and his preaching that the treasure of indulgence do not consist of the sufferings and torments of Lord Christ so as to redress the sins of human beings and that the man who receives the holy sacraments must have faith in the grace of God are indisputably correct. He says that he rests his case entirely on ‘Holy Scriptures’ and vehemently goes on to say that even the Pope cannot be above the Scripture and amend it and the final authority in interpreting the Scriptures does not vest in him.

Cajetan, on hearing Luther say that Tetzel has broken the ‘oath of poverty’, without any surprise agrees to it and says that in fact Tetzel earns eighty guilden a month and has also managed to father two children surreptitiously. Thus, he has broken not only the ‘vow of poverty’ but also the ‘vow of celibacy’ but they cannot punish him as such despite his violation of monkery code as he is an important source for raising huge amount by the sale
of indulgences. These words of Cajetan show the callousness and the height of corruption in the institution of Church and the concept of monkship getting corrupted beyond repair.

Cajetan reminds Luther that the Roman Church is the apex of the World and one who has received faith should not go astray and hence he should retract. Martin remains firm on his ground and says,

Some interests are furthered by finding truth, others by destroying it. I don’t care—what pleases or displeases the Pope. He is a man. (p.71)

Cajetan tries to make another attempt to placate Luther by asking him about the final result or effect of his ideas and disdainfully asks him,

...Oh, it’s fine for someone like you to criticize and start tearing down Christendom, but tell me this, just tell me this: what will you build in its place?” (p.72)

Martin feels that Christendom has been deadeningly affected by the pathogenical discrepancies and infiltration of indulgences so much so that a withered arm is best amputated, an infected place is best scoured out. This causes Cajetan to taunt him by asking him what will happen to him if he did succeed in destroying the Pope. When Luther says that he does not know, Cajetan is encouraged to say that Luther does not know what to do because he needs him and that he is not a good old revolutionary and he is just a common rebel, a very different animal. Cajetan hits at Luther’s nerve centre, his debilitating domain and says that he has read some of his sermons on faith:

They say: I am a man struggling for certainty, struggling insanely like a man in a fit, an animal trapped to the bone with doubt. (p.73)

Cajetan feels that Luther himself is uncertain about his preachings and faith and as such cannot convince either the authorities of the Church or even the
masses that what he professes is right, leading to a stage where he will have to condemn himself. If that be so, then it is real foolhardy on his part to talk about anything that is in contradiction with the interests of the Pope. Cajetan is self-indulgent, callous about the sufferings of people, corrupt to the core, indifferent to what is right and what is wrong as long as he and people of his class are provided with all the niceties of life. Osborne portrays him as another self-centric personality who really finds no point of his interest or his concern in guiding people aright,

Allow them their sins, their petty indulgences, my son, they're unimportant to the comfort we receive- (p.73)

In stark contrast to him, Osborne portrays Luther as the one who has renounced the earthly glory and is deeply concerned and committed to the cause of establishing the ‘faith’, ‘creed’ on the basis of the Holy Scriptures. He is certainly a hermit, not a heretic. He steadfasts the oaths that he had taken when he was received into the order. He replies to Cajetan:

Comfort! It-doesn’t concern me! (p.73)

Martin has so much affinity with the rigours of life that the mundane comforts are mere trifles and in no way lure him. Cajetan feels that there should be a common institution which can keep the people bound together, lest men will never find God if they are left to themselves, each man abandoned and only to know himself and that is what Martin is attempting to do. Cajetan, in a way, tries to make Martin understand that the Church has always been the haven for people in all their insecurities and apprehensions and the Pope is the ultimate authority to adjudicate on anything. In the absence of this, there will be nothing but vacuum and people will be unable to seek redemption and salvation.

To this, Martin says, “They’ll have to try” (p.74). These words, in fact, sum up the entire solution for the problem of exploitation and the beginning of the Reformation. The people should not abjectly believe that it is so easy to get
salvation or that either the Church, the Pope, the indulgences or even penances can help them get deliverance. These according to Luther are merely make-believe things. Every one has to suffer, struggle and seek within oneself to find it by illuminating one’s conscience and discovering it through ‘faith’. Cajetan finally asks him to retract and Luther refuses and leaves. When Martin leaves, Cajetan says to Tetzel about him,

...that man hates himself. And if he goes to the stake, Tetzel, you can have the pleasure of inscribing it: he could only love others.

(p.74)

A kind of conflict of different ideologies can be seen here though it is not so much elaborated. Speaking on this scene, Meenal Agrawal says, “Luther is the first of Osborne’s protagonists to be shown in conflict with his intellectual equals.”19 In most of the plays of Osborne, the Central Character or his hero holds the stage for the most part of the time and he keeps on speaking untiringly leaving the rest of the characters to just watch. But, in this play, though not in entirety, the other characters steal a faint scope and make an attempt to measure up the size of the all pervading hero with that of their own self.

However, we find an exact contradictory observation made by John Russell Taylor, who opines:

From Act 2, Scene 4, at the end of which Luther nails his theses to the church door at Wittenburg, the issues involved are scurried over in unseemly haste, with a rather feeble scene of disputation between Luther and Cajetan, the papal legate (which again demonstrates Osborne’s deficiencies when a conflict of equals rather than a tirade to a captive audience is called for, since, though apparently engaging in a discussion, Luther and Cajetan never really interlock so that one answers the other; their
‘dialogue’ turns out, in fact, to be two monologues skillfully intercut)...  

A parallel is drawn on the basis of mutinous indignation between Luther and Jimmy Porter, “...Osborne gives fluency and strength once more in his plays to a rebel against established authority. Martin Luther, in the play, has several moments of close relationship to Jimmy Porter, apart from speaking with much the same language, and much the same disregard for privilege and authority. Like Jimmy he is constantly inviting his opponents to speak back at him, and to explain their attitudes: but in both cases conversations are basically monologues, with neither speaker comprehending the feelings or logic of the other.”

In any case, it can be conveniently said that Osborne was trying to avoid a dramatic conflict. The reason for it can be found in the fact that Osborne always made his central characters quite imposing. “To a great extent this may be explained by the fact that Osborne’s plays are so often centred upon one character who confronts the rest, not with a desire to converse, but a need to lecture.” Hence, his protagonists are there to lecture and not to listen.

The next scene is set in a hunting lodge at Magliana in Northern Italy, 1519 where Karl Von Miltitz, a young Chamberlain of the Pope’s household is waiting and Pope Leo, the Tenth enters after hunting. He is richly dressed and is indolent, cultured, intelligent, extremely restless, apparently distracted as revealed in his playing with a live bird or shoot at a board with a cross bow or fidget while listening but quick enough to assimilate everything. Miltitz reads an epistle, a kind of monologue, addressed to Pope by Luther.

In the letter, Luther had begun by wishing eternal salvation to the Sovereign bishop and comes straight to the point by saying that his name is in bad odour and he is called a heretic, apostate, traitor but he has got a pure and peaceful conscience. He elaborates further that there were complaints and grumbling in the taverns about the avarice of the priests and attacks on the power
of the keys and this aroused a zeal for him to protect the glory of the Christ and he had warned several princes of the Church about this, in vain as either they sneered at him or ignored him.

He was thus compelled to publish his disputation and nail it to the Church door of Wittenberg which has been the cause for the prevailing antagonism against him and that he cannot retract. He, however, says that he has respect to the power of the keys and hence he is humbly submitting before his holiness and he should be declared right or wrong, take away his life or give it back to him. Luther, further had written, ‘I shall acknowledge your voice as the voice of Jesus Christ.’ (p.76) and that if he deserves death, he shall not refuse to die as the earth is God’s and all within it.

It is interesting to note that Luther has softened and become a bit submissive but yet retains his original self. However, it is strange when he says that he shall acknowledge the voice of the Pope as the voice of Jesus Christ because he himself had earlier resolutely stated that even Pope has got no authority to amend the Scripture as he likes. When he believed that the Pope cannot be considered as reflection of God on earth, curious enough is why his voice has mellowed down.

Luther, perhaps, is uncertain of what he is professing and is struggling for certainty like an animal, as observed by Cajetan or it may be a watch-and-go policy as we find that there may be a strategy of safe play as Pope Leo quickly assimilates the intentions behind and says about Luther, “Double faced German bastard! Why can’t he say what he means?....” (p.77)

When Miltitz further reads that Luther is willing to be judged by any of the Universities of Germany, with the exception of Leipzig, Erfurt and Frankfurt on the grounds that they are impartial and that he cannot appear in Rome in person as his health would not stand up to the rigours of the journey, Leo, as if discerning his nature calls him, “Cunning! Cunning German bastard!....” (p.77).
The Pope is fully aware that the Teutonic peasant can upset his elegant world and his control and command of his own sophisticated Latins over the Christian hegemony.

Pope Leo decides to give his indictment and asks Milititz to take down a letter to Cajetan wherein he is asked to summon Martin Luther in the presence of Maximilian, and all the other princes in Germany, together with all communities, Universities, potentates- ecclesiastic and secular and to receive Luther into the perfect unity of Holy Mother, the Church if he begs forgiveness or to banish and excommunicate him in case of his persistent obstinacy. He is also empowered to bestow the same fate on every other prelate, religious orders, universities, counts and dukes who assist Luther and laymen, and in the event of their disobedience should be deprived of Christian burial.

The Pope’s intensity of animosity towards Luther is best reflected when he says, “There’s a wild pig in our vineyard, and it must be hunted down and shot.” (p.78) It was not strange for such kind of indictments in those days when the Church was at its summit of power. In fact, those who professed a faith not in sync with the one practiced by the Church were burnt down to cinders after getting branded as heretics. Osborne succeeds in depicting a faithful picture of religious bigotry that was prevalent during those times.

A storm of protest is raised in response to the indictment of the Pope with the papal decretals, books and documents consigned to furious flames at the Elster Gate, Wittenberg, 1520. Martin reacts sternly after reading a piece of paper served to him through Cajetan by Pope that if he does not retract, he will be ostracized from all institutions. Martin is shown ascending the pulpit and addressing the gathering. Osborne has got at his hands again what he loves to do the most with his central character with even the situation owing its allegiance to the temperament. The resentment, the ranting, the tirade, the unobstructed diatribe are all available and Luther reminds of Jimmy Porter, though of course, in a regulated aggression.
Osborne is a master of rhetoric and calls into picture his free verbal vigour, "Certainly Osborne lashes out if he thinks it necessary, but in doing so he ensures that his language is full of imaginative life. When something is evil he makes it sound evil. Martin Luther’s condemnation of the papal bull illustrates this impetuous hyperbolic force."23

I have been served with a piece of paper. Let me tell you about it. It has come to me from a latrine called Rome, that capital of the devil’s own sweet empire. It is called the papal bull and it claims to excommunicate me, Dr. Martin Luther… papal decretsals are the devil’s excretals. I’ll hold it up for you to see properly. You see the signature? Signed beneath the seal of the Fisherman’s Ring by once certain midden cock called Leo, an over-indulged jakes’ attendant to Satan himself, a glittering worm in excrement, known to you as his holiness the Pope. You may know him as the head of the Church. Which he may still be: like a fish is the head of a cat’s dinner; eyes without sight clutched to a stick of sucked bones. God has told me: there can be no dealings between this cat’s dinner and me. And, as for this bull, it’s going to roast, it’s going to roast and so are the balls of the Medici!” (p.79)

Luther after descending the pulpit and casting the bull into flames begins to shake, as if he were unable to breathe and as if he were about to have another fit. “Osborne, as is well known, was attracted to the figure of Luther after reading Erik H. Erikson’s psychoanalytical study Young Man Luther,”24 Michael Anderson says, “…the play is strongly influenced by the view that Luther’s career has its basis in personal neurosis. Martin’s relationship with his father, and above all the psychosomatic state of his bowels, are presented by Osborne as issues at least as important as the religious and intellectual premises which led to his break with Rome.”25 Osborne has his own perceptions and his own style of presentation. He deviates here from Brecht who always wanted to sacrifice the
psychological aspects of an individual so as to focus on higher realms of social and political concerns. Osborne, on the other hand dwells into the psychological study of Luther.

Osborne lays dramatic emphasis on those aspects of Luther's life where he gets into a state of neurotic anxiety, particularly when he has to decide on something with certainty. His physical disabilities, sweating, constipation, reference to locked bowels are all indications of his own tensions and fears. However, his thoughts and actions are not destructive but aim at the real well being of the society, which he feels should be based on truth and the Word of God. His neurosis ushers a positive response. "In an essay some years before, Osborne had written that a neurotic person need not necessarily be revealed by examination of his thoughts or withdrawn behaviour - it can also be revealed by the intense productive activity of apparently normal people." Osborne kneels and almost has a fierce invocation:

Oh, God! Oh, God!...help me against the reason and wisdom of the world....Breathe into me. Breathe into me, like a lion into the mouth of a stillborn cub. This cause is not mine but yours. For myself, I've no business to be dealing with the great lords of this world. I want to be still, in peace, and alone...Are you dead? Are you dead? No, you can't die, you can only hide yourself, can't you? Lord, I'm afraid. I am a child, the lost body of a child. I am stillborn. Breathe into me, in the name of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, who shall be my protector and defender....(p.80)

This passionate and painful invocation of Luther reveals all his inner uncertainties, apprehensions, incapabilities, inadequacies. His refusal to admit that he is fighting for the appeasement of his own conscience, is, in a way, his repudiation of the burden of blame on his shoulders. He expresses that he has waged the war in the name of God and he should henceforth give him strength and incase, his life is at stake, he should be safeguarded by God. This fervent
appeal of Luther has a melodramatic element. There appears to be two battles, one external of that of Luther versus the infiltrators of the Church and the other within himself. The real battle is apparently in Martin’s own conscience. “If the undercurrent of the play is interpreted, it is personal faith rather than institutional dogma which is the way to salvation. But all this remains extra-theatrical speculation and no theory, no matter how valid, seems to make the necessary circuit which links the mind of the playwright to the imagination of the audience.”

The third and final act begins with the scene set in the Diet of Worms on April 18th, 1521. There is a unique gathering of princes, electors, dukes, ambassadors, bishops, counts, barons, etc. There is a table with about twenty books on it and from all corners of the auditorium comes a fanfare of massed trumpets. The Emperor Charles The Fifth, Aleander, the Papal Nuncio; Ulrich Von Hutten, the Knight; The Archbishop of Trier and his Secretary, Johan Von Eck; The Chancellor of Ingolstadt are present.

The day on which Luther made his presence in the Diet of Worms was decisive in the history of human civilization as has been gloriously observed in the words, “No more notable spectacle had been witnessed in this planet for many a century - not, perhaps, since a greater than Luther stood before the Roman Procurator.” It is said that “As Luther passed up the hall, a steel baron touched him on the shoulder with his gauntlet. ‘Pluck up thy spirit, little monk,’ he said; ‘some of us here have seen warm work in our time, but, by my troth, nor I nor any knight in this company ever needed a stout heart more than thou needest it now. If thou hast faith in these doctrines of thine, little monk, go on, in the name of God.’ ‘Yes, in the name of God,’ said Luther, throwing back his head, ‘In the name of God, forward!’” This once again makes it evident of the cause of God that Luther has taken on him.

The proceedings are carried on by Eck who says to Martin Luther that he has been brought there by the Imperial Majesty so as to make him answer two
questions - one whether he publicly acknowledges being the author of the books that he can see there for which he had answered in the affirmative one day before but for the next question whether he means to defend all the books, or will he retract any of them, he has asked for time which is completed and now he is supposed to speak out and defend himself.

Luther speaking quietly and conversationally says that all the books displayed there are his and as for the next question, he should say that not all the books are of the same kind. There are three group of books - the first which quite simply deal with the values of faith and morality and even his enemies have agreed them to be harmless and even the bull against him admits that they are offensive to none and hence there is no need for him to condemn them. There is a second group of books he has written which attack the power of the keys, which has ravaged Christendom and no one can deny this as the evidence is everywhere and everyone complains of it. No one has suffered more from this tyranny than the Germans who have been plundered without mercy and he cannot retract. He says, ‘If I were to retract those books now, I should be issuing a licence for more tyranny, and it is too much to ask of me’. (p.83) He feels that he is not convinced where he has actually erred as neither the scripture nor any evident logic or reason contradicts his works.

Luther further says that he has written a third kind of book against certain, private, distinguished, and apparently - highly established individuals who are all defenders of Rome and enemies of his religion. He agrees that he has been violent in these books which is strange for a monk like him but that he has never set out to be a saint and he has not been defending his own life, but the teaching of Christ and hence he cannot retract on his own. He says that he is going to employ the same method used by his Saviour Christ, when he was being questioned by Annas, the high priest about His teaching. When He had been struck in the face by one of the servants, He replied: “If I have spoken lies tell me what the lie is.” (p.83)
Luther wants that someone should expose his errors in the light of the gospels as he can still think of nothing better than the Word of God being the cause of all the dissension among them. He reminds them of what Christ had said, “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. I have come to set a man against his father.” (p.84) He hopes that the reign of the noble young Prince Charles, so full of promise, should not end in the misery of Europe and they all should fear God alone.

Eck, unconvinced, says to Luther that he should cut out those passages which are blasphemous or those which are heresies or those which are construed to be heresies and that he should delete any passage which might be considered hurtful to the Catholic faith. If he still is reluctant to do that, everything he has written, right or wrong, will be forgotten and all about him will be blotted out.

Eck goes on to tell that he should not throw doubt on the most holy, orthodox faith, the faith founded by the most perfect legislator known to them and spread by His apostles throughout the world, with their blood and miracles and that this faith has been defined by sacred councils, and confirmed by the Church. Eck demands Luther to answer sincerely, frankly and unambiguously whether he will retract his books and the errors contained in them or not. Martin is not moved and quite resolutely goes on to say:

Unless I am shown by the testimony of the Scriptures—for I don’t believe in popes or councils-unless I am refuted by Scripture and my conscience is captured by God’s own word, I cannot and will not recant, since to act against one’s conscience is neither safe nor honest. Here I Stand; God help me; I can do no more. Amen. (p.85)

In these words, lied the heart of the matter, conscience first, everything next, the whole meaning of the Reformation and that is whether men should go on to believe forever anything to be true just because it was said by Pope or were even
his decrees be judged like the words of other men - by the ordinary laws of evidence. There was a silent revolution in the minds of the younger laity. A generation had grown to manhood of whom the Church authorities knew nothing; and the whole air of Germany, unsuspected by pope or prelate, was charged with electric fervour of protest.

One thing for was sure, that it should have come to this at all, in days of such high-handed authority, was sufficiently remarkable. It indicated something growing in the minds of men, that the so-called Church was not to carry things any longer in the old style. It was inevitable for a Civil war to follow, with insurrection all over Germany, with no certain prospect except bloodshed and misery.

The next scene is set in the ransacked Wittenberg in the year 1525, four years after Luther defended himself in the Diet of Worms. The scene achieves its desired theatrical effect as it is quite dreadful with shouts of mutilated men, smoke, a shattered banner bearing the cross and wooden shoe of the Bundschuh, emblem of the Peasants’ Movement, a peasant’s corpse. A Knight stands fatigued, despondent, stained and dirty. Osborne has written a monologue of frustrated anger for the Knight and as thus, raises his position and role from that of a mere scene setter into an interlocutor, to even of that of a judge. The story of the uprising is related by the Knight, a symbolic figure and it is only through his long monologue, we get the revelation of the course of the movement, the result of it and the stand that Luther had taken in it.

The knight, almost in a ruminating voice says that there was so much excitement on that day in the Diet of Worms and everyone felt it. Luther had “...fizzed like a hot spark in a trail of gunpowder going off in us....” (p.86) They expected something to happen but something else had happened. The knight, like many other was ready to plunge his sword into whatever that Luther might have asked him to but he feels he has been swindled due to the complex
ambiguity in the psyche of Luther, “If one could only understand him. He baffles me, I just can’t make him out.” (p.87)

The knight, addressing the corpse says that no one had thought that they might end up on different sides, Luther on one and they on the other, thus making it clear that the stand of Luther was not on their side but on the side of those who wanted to crush the movement. There is some kind of discontentment regarding the class structure and there is an undeniable class consciousness in the undercurrent. “Curiously Osborne seems to have accepted the existence of those barriers, for in the hapless plight of most of his heroes he might well be saying, ‘there is the class wall, struggle as you may, you won’t scale it, so why not accept it?’” 30

The knight, with a cynical contempt mixed with a sense of growing frustration at his class defeat says, “They were all the same, all those big princes and archbishops, the cut rate nobility and rich layabouts, honourable this and that’s scrabbling like boars round a swill bucket for every penny those poor peasants never had.” (pp.87-88) This can also be reflected when he asks Luther, “…weren’t we all redeemed by Christ’s blood? (pointing to the peasant) Wasn’t he included when the scriptures were being dictated? Or was it just you who was made free, you and the princes you’ve taken up with, and the rich burghers and-” (p.89) The knight, is understandably aggrieved as it is the thought-provoking speeches of Luther that had instigated them to revolt. They felt betrayed seeing Luther opposing them once the revolt gained momentum. The knight feels that once Luther settled the problems and complexities he had within himself and with the authorities of the institution of Church, he became free and has ignored the cause of the poor peasants, workers and the common lot.

Luther washes off his hands from the bloody cause. He repudiates the blame on him and says that God is the butcher and the Knight should address all his abuses to Him. The Knight feels that Luther is nevertheless wearing His apron and deserves the blame for converting everything into peril but he could
have even brought freedom and order in at one and the same time. Luther, however, differs saying that there is never an orderly revolution and that, "...Christians are called to suffer, not fight." (p.89) Luther, thus, clarifies and justifies the reason for his shifting the side on the grounds that the Peasants' movement turned violent and he was against violence.

Luther had never claimed that he will lead them and the kind of image in which they saw him was not of his own making. "Osborne does not seek to portray Luther as any more certain of his role at this stage than he was as a novice monk. The fact that people came to see him as a leader was not of his choosing, yet he is left with the consequences." When the Knight smears the blood of the deceased Peasant on Martin's face holding him to be the cause of his death, Martin distressed to see that he has become the centre for accusation says, "The princes blame me, you blame me and the peasants blame me-"(p.89) The Knight, however, feels that it is all because of his own making for it was he who had put the water in the wine. He was the one who created ripples in the still water. Martin tries to convey to the Knight that a blood stained revolution can never be a desirable thing and it was exactly that which makes him shudder and swerve away from it as it is this hatredness that pleases Satan and displeases Christ, leading to the people to damnation,

When I see chaos, then I see the devil's organ and then I'm afraid. (p.89) Martin says that the world was conquered by the Word and the Church is maintained by the Word and if the peasants rebelled against that Word, that was worse than murder because it had laid the whole country waste. The Knight differs just striking it down saying that the Word, probably appears just like any other old relic or indulgence.

The Knight is confusingly depressed, feels betrayed for it was Luther who was the intellectual and moral force at the back of the movement, who made
people understand in vernacular German, the essence of the Scriptures, the noble life of Christ and it was he who had shrugged off. The Knight says:

Poetry! Martin, you’re a poet, there’s no doubt about that in anybody’s mind, your’re a poet, but do you know what most men believe in, in their hearts—because they don’t see in images like you do—they believe in their hearts that Christ was a man as we are, and that He was a prophet and a teacher, and they also believe in their hearts that His supper is a plain meal like their own—if they’re lucky enough to get it—a plain meal of bread and wine! A plain meal with no garnish and no word. And you helped them to begin to believe it! (pp.90-91)

Luther feels that the peasants deserved their death as they kicked against authority, they plundered and bargained and all in the name of Christ. Katherine Von Bora, a formerly nun and then the bride of Luther comes and both of them kneel down and their marriage is solemnized. The Knight, seeing this smashes the banner he has been holding, and tosses the remains on to the altar. The Knight’s:

...long monologue almost obscures the fact that Osborne has avoided the issue of stating Martin’s position concerning the peasant’s movement. To have embroiled Luther in the revolt would be to make him a political innovator, as well as a theological one, and although Martin sought to remodel the Church, he did try to find security via faith, and because of this, may well have not thought it worthwhile to cause greater chaos by supporting the peasants.32

The final scene is set in 1530 in the same Eremite Cloister of Wittenberg, where the play had begun. Luther, in his late thirties, is seen sitting at the refectory table and conversing with Staupitz, who has grown old and Katherine

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is seen serving them. The Cloister is then inhabited by only Luther and Katherine along with their small child Hans. Martin has resigned to a placid domestic life. He, as if has summed up the entire essence and vicissitudes of human life, says to Staupitz, “...there are three ways out of despair. One is faith in Christ, the second is to become enraged by the world and make its nose bleed for it, and the third is the love of a woman.” (pp.95-96) Martin has treaded on all these three ways.

Alan Carter views:

As such, Luther may be regarded as of more than strictly historical or theological appeal. Dante’s words: ‘In the middle of the journey of life, I came to myself in a dark wood where the straight way was lost’ apply no less forcibly to Martin Luther than they do to Jimmy Porter. The hero of Look Back In Anger retreats into a world of bears and squirrels, whilst Martin seeks salvation in the arms of his nun and their son’s love.33

It is interesting to recall the words of Cajetan, who, in a way had warned Martin for the conceited opinion that he himself may he unconsciously nurturing about his own capabilities as a leader and driving the same image of himself into others and making them believe that a saviour has come in his form. He cannot be an iconoclast because he himself is unsure about the course of the events that were to follow if he upholds the scriptures as they are and if he is going to demolish the papal image and his decrees. Cajetan had said:

...some deluded creature might even come to you as a leader of their revolution, but you don’t want to break rules, you want to make them. You’d be a master breaker and maker and no one would be able to stand up to you, you’d hope, or ever sufficiently repair the damage you did. (p.73)
This is what actually happens in the end when the Knight, a representative of all the peasants and workers who fought tooth and nail in a bloody war against the institution of Church becomes a deluded creature. He holds Martin responsible for pretending to be their leader and then betraying them by shifting the sides. In reality, however, Martin had never offered himself to be their leader. He was misread, misinterpreted, misjudged. It is worthwhile to understand the meaning of his words when he tells Staupitz,

They’re trying to turn me into a fixed star, Father, but I’m a shifting Planet. (p.99)

Luther tells Staupitz that he, while preaching his doctrines cannot be so subtle as Erasmus who likes to walk on eggs without breaking any and because of this, he is utterly incomprehensible and beyond the reach of minds. However, in a way, Luther himself was so subtle and esoteric in his theological arguments that the peasants were muddled and misunderstood that Luther wanted them to have an armed struggle to overthrow the institution of Church. Little were they aware that Luther was against the choir and not the hymn. He merely wanted the people to become aware of the spirit of Scriptures and not to fall a prey or be guiled by the discrepancies, including indulgences.

When Staupitz feels that Luther should not have encouraged the princes in butchering the rebels and curbing the movement which was based on a just cause, Luther, reminiscences that it was Staupitz who had told him to remember that he has started all this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and hence should never go astray but he could not. He unfolds the reasons as thus, “...the world can’t be ruled with a rosary. They were a mob, a mob, and if they hadn’t been held down and slaughtered, there’d have been a thousand more tyrants instead of half a dozen. It was a mob, and because it was a mob it was against Christ.” (p.99) To connect it to our own times, even Mahatma Gandhi was similarly distressed to see his Non Cooperation Movement going violent with Chauri
Chowrah incident and withdrew himself from it. The masses similarly had become disillusioned by his decision.

Staupitz acclaims the unprecedented noble work that none but Luther was able to do, “You’ve taken Christ away from the low mumblings and soft voices and jeweled gown and the tiaras and put Him back where He belongs. In each man’s soul. We owe so much to you.” (p.100) Staupitz also asks Martin the doubt that he had been holding for long for the reason which had made Martin ask for that extra day to think over his reply when he had known what his answer was going to be for months.

Martin says that he was not certain and when asked was he certain afterwards, he says, “I listened for God’s voice, but all I could hear was my own.”(p.101) These words of Martin can be interpreted in two ways, one that he was struggling for certainty throughout as had been said previously by Cajetan. The other is that God’s voice and his own voice have become inseparable to that extent where he could hardly listen to God’s voice and at last his conscience has been captured by God. However, he still feels insecure and pleads God, “Oh, Lord, I believe. I believe. I do believe. Only help my unbelief.” (p.101)

One of Osborne’s fondest themes has been the grand disillusionment. He makes Luther say, “We monks were really no good to anyone, least of all to ourselves, every one of us rolled up like a louse in the Almighty’s overcoat.” (p.97) He also points out to the utter helplessness and incapacity of human will in shaping or reaching its destiny when he says, “No one does good, not anyone. God is true and one….A man’s will is like a horse standing between two riders. If God jumps on its back, it’ll go where God wants it to. But if Satan gets up there, it’ll go where he leads it. And not only that, the horse can’t choose its rider. That’s left up to them, to those two.” (p.98)

After Staupitz blesses him and leaves, he is seen speaking and cuddling his child Hans and once again we can find the seamy side of life experienced by
Luther getting reflected, this time mixed even with a bit of nostalgia in his words. Luther knows that no man is the father of himself but he is nobody’s son, the hard lesson, he must learn is that he is created by God but though he may learn it, he never can feel it. The same is hummed by him to his child who appears to have been troubled by his dreams,

What was the matter? Was it the devil bothering you?....You know, my father had a son, and he’d to learn a hard lesson, which is a human being is a helpless little animal, but he’s not created by his father, but by God. It’s hard to accept you’re anyone’s son, and you’re not the father of yourself. So, don’t have dreams so soon, my son....You should have seen me at Worms. I was almost like you that day, as if I’d learned to play again, to play, to play out in the world, like a naked child. I have come to set a man against his father....Christ said that, my son. I hope that’ll be the way of it again. I hope so. Let’s just hope so, eh? Eh? Let’s just hope so.

(p.102)

Martin Banham appraising the play says:

The achievement of Luther is that it leaves us with a stimulated curiosity about the man; that it shows, in a vivid and realistic way, the manner in which Luther’s private dispute with God had vast repercussions in the lives of people whom Luther neither knew nor cared for; and portrays the Church and its servants, and the religio/political scene in Europe at the beginning of the sixteenth century, with incisive wit and understanding. As a play Luther is a rigorous theatrical experience.34

Most critics agreed that Luther aimed at being epic drama along the lines of the work of German playwright Bertolt Brecht. Epic Theater is a form of drama that presents a series of loosely connected scenes. Often, a narrator figure
will address the audience with analysis or argument. As practiced by Brecht, Epic Theater sought to use "alienating" effects to cause the audience to think objectively, not emotionally, about the play and its characters. In technique, *Luther* shows a strong Brechtian influence, notably, that of his play *The Life of Galileo*. Like Brecht's drama, *Luther* is a series of short scenes, most of which could function as stand-alone units. Osborne, like Brecht, also wanted to portray contemporary social problems and realities on stage; in *Luther*, the title character should be deemed as an Angry Young Man of 1960s British society, a young man who rages at the established sociopolitical system in which he lives.

The stage decorations, which Osborne clearly describes, are evocative and imbued with symbolism and iconography. A choral figure, in this case, the Knight, announces the time and setting of each scene and narrates background details particularly concerning Luther's role in the Peasants' War. Osborne makes use of both Expressionistic and Epic devices in the play. Luther's internal agonies, anguish and self-doubt are expressionistically presented in Act I, scene ii. with a knife, like a butcher's, hanging aloft, the cutting edge of the blade pointing upwards, the torso of a naked man with his head hanging down, round cone, like the inside of a vast barrel, surrounded by darkness. In Act II, in order to depict Luther's external conflicts and his historical role, the backcloth with its satirical woodcloth is used.

In Act III, when Luther comes to the Diet of Worms to face the charges alleged against him and to justify his acts, a more elaborate 'medieval world dressed up for the Renaissance' (p.81) is presented. A gold front-cloth in the brightest sunshine of colour, with a bold, representation of the unique gathering of princes, electors, dukes, ambassadors, bishops, counts, barons etc.is depicted. The Movement is frozen and perspective served by the arrangement of figures, or scenes, one above the other. The epic devices are wonderfully used.
While many critics saw Luther as Epic Theater, Simon Trussler staunchly disagreed with this assessment. In his *The Plays of John Osborne*, he felt that Brechtian Theater appeals "'less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason,' he contended that the play is 'dramatic' rather than epic, for Luther's 'primary appeal is indeed emotional rather than rational.'" Though Luther is a historical personage, he, very well gets cast into the moulds of an Osbornian hero. He denounces the authorities for their gross exploitation of the ignorance of the masses and for manipulating the 'faith' and the 'scripture' of the God. He fulminates the false religion and false beliefs which have unabashedly replaced the real ones. He craves for 'real faith', 'real belief', 'real feel', very much similar to Jimmy Porter and Billy Rice who lament and torment themselves unable to find their 'ideal world'.

Luther, by any standards was a 'man of faith' which was not dogmatic. His cult, though he resisted to be termed it as such, was a 'belief in goodness', in 'justice', in 'righteousness', in 'peace' and above all in 'truth'. He believed that 'conscience', which is the silent whispers of God in man should gain precedence and which is more important than knowledge or rationality. It is conscience that should decide on the issues of what is 'just' and in spite of all the befalling hazards and consequences there of, it should be preferred. This 'conscience' will help people to consult it before initiating any action and thus will enable them to barricade themselves against the fear of doing a wrong thing. Bamber Gascoigne, in the *Spectator*, wrote:

*Luther* is the perfect antidote to Beckett! Where Anouilh prettified his tiny piece with endless irrelevant baubles, Osborne grasps his theme in the very first scene and follows it relentlessly through the play without the slightest deviation or distraction. The play offers no analysis of the causes of the Reformation, no explanation of Luther's magnetism, not even the picture of an age. It merely
shows one man’s rebellion against the world into which he was born, and his search for a personal understanding of life.\textsuperscript{36}

However, this view cannot be accepted in entirety. If done so, it will be an attempt to completely ignore the milieu which did influence Luther’s preachings. If he would have lived in an age which would have provided answers to the ecclesiastical questions that troubled him, he would not have rebelled. Far too away from providing answers, the ‘age’, on the other hand significantly contributed in creating more confusion in Luther’s conscience, the consequence of which, he sought to clarify. While the question keeps on raising from time to time whether he was a hero or a heretic, reformer or a revolutionary, Osborne’s \textit{Luther} is a saga of Martin Luther, the disillusioned monk whose personal quest for salvation, certainty and perfection set in motion the Protestant Reformation, a religious, impetuous upheaval that tore Europe apart in the sixteenth century.

Luther was not an anti-Christ. He, in fact, wanted to bring ‘real Christianity’, which was not tainted with frailties and imperfections. However, while following the historicity of Luther, Osborne also seeks to make a commentary on the unscrupulous religious authority and truth that is relevant even in the modern times where religion has ceased to become a binding force and remains as culpable as ever.

It is, like ceaselessly struggling within its own empty shell, with all the vices on the part of the so called custodians of the religion, banking on the ignorance of the people rather than making them conscious and with all the misbeliefs and mere ritualistic driven society unable to grapple with the truth of the real spirit behind the preachings of the religion. The Word of God and the Will of the God is sacrificed in a hurry to attain salvation and to secure a seat in heaven without really understanding its meaning and what it actually connotes. This reminds us of the aptness of Eliot’s own words in \textit{The Rock} as applied to our times,
Men have left God....this has never happened before....What have we to do But stand with empty hands and palms turned upwards. In an age which advances progressively backwards?

Osborne, like Ben Jonson, of course in his own style, through Luther, wanted to ‘strip the ragged follies of the time, Naked as at their birth — and with a whip of steel, Print wounding lashes in their iron ribs’. Osborne succeeded in offering a perspective to look at Luther from the view point of an ‘Angry Young Man’. Though it may appear to be an anachronism, Luther displays several characteristics of the ‘Angries’ and hence has become a forerunner of them and thus has also become the fondest personage for Osborne who has borrowed Luther’s flesh and added to the skeletal structure of his own ‘Angry Young Hero’. 
REFERENCES:


5. Alan Carter, John Osborne, p.82.


10. Martin Banham, Osborne, p.52.


15. Martin Banham, Osborne, p.55.


17. Martin Banham, Osborne, p.55.

18. Martin Banham, Osborne, p.57.


33. Alan Carter, *John Osborne*, p.82.

