CHAPTER VI

THE OSBORNE DRAMA:
CONTENT, CRAFT & CONTRIBUTION
Osborne, to express his ideas and thematic concerns based on the situation and the words uttered, chooses most of the time finely drawn central characters and to a small extent other characters in general. The heroes of Osborne are not oblivious of the sordid, stifling realities of life. They are also increasingly aware that they lack the power, though not the ‘will’, to alter the scheme of things. They have widely experienced the travails of human life. Through their vibrant and lengthy monologues they caution others of a similar fate. They, at times admonish others for not listening to them. Irrespective of the play, Osborne, through the hero’s “Public voice”, reminds us of the obsessions, quirks, beliefs, disappointments, encouragement and warning. The voice remains the same:

... whether the scene is a provincial attic or a stately home, whether the mask is that of an ageing music-hall comic, or a German monk, the voice is the voice of the dramatist. The text is both the imprint of Mr Osborne’s own obsessions and angers, his personal fantasies and his public commitments. His men are all maimed in some way—beat up veterans of the sex war or the class war—and the best they hope for is to escape the final horror of emasculation. It is this identification with the self-punishing martyr which makes John Osborne’s work unique in the modern theatre, at once embarrassing and exhilarating, simultaneously, a belch of defiance and a cry for help.¹

The heroes of Osborne are painfully lonely. Many are so. But, his heroes are distinct, because, they, unlike others, have the knowledge that they are lonely. This knowledge of being lonely, secluded, alienated is more painful and biting than just being lonely. Jimmy says:

The heaviest, strongest creatures in this world seem to be the loneliest.²
Bill Maitland sees his own life and problems in those of others. He mirrors his own feelings when he says to his client Marples:

...let's be quite honest about it, and you feel you are gradually being deserted and isolated...³

One can also find the same kind of dreadful, helpless picture of loneliness in the family when Frank Rice says to his sister Jean:

You'd better start thinking about number one, Jeannie, because nobody else is going to do it for you.⁴

The scores of songs of Archie in The Entertainer testify this insecurity-driven loneliness. It is the admirable sentiments and adherence to values which make them isolated. Sometimes, this 'isolation' is self-imposed and deliberately caused. Luther seeks to satisfy his individual conscience before that of society and hence senses the painful suffering of loneliness:

I am alone. I am alone, and against myself.⁵

Even George Holyoake's words emphasise his awareness of his "difference":

If you think it right to differ from the times and to make a stand for any valuable points of morals, do it, however rustic, however antiquated it may appear. Do it not for insolence, but seriously. As a man who wore the soul of his own in his bosom-and did not wait 'til it was breathed into him by the breath of fashion.⁶

Quite contrary to this, one can also find attempts to extricate oneself from this loneliness. Alfred Redl seeks to cure his personal loneliness by becoming a practicing homosexual, even though being fully aware of getting condemned in the eyes of the public. Advocate Kunz describes their mutual plight when he talks of the drag-ball as:
Leonido, renounces his bond to all that which normally governs life: family, church, society. Revelling in his ability to inflict pain, he reaches to the depths of depravity, triumphantly claiming:

A bastard’s common too, but a bastard you see’s separate, a weed, often strong, quite powerful.

The ‘theme of isolation’ is revealed throughout the plays at great length. Society isolates those who want to establish their own self by negating its dictates. Look Back in Anger is not a play just about anger, though anger is a predominant emotion in the play. It is as much a play of a sense of despair, the resultant of ‘isolation’. Jimmy says:

You see, I learnt at an early age what it was to be angry - angry and helpless. And I can never forget it.

Osborne portrays anger in all its varied forms in his plays. Anger is not always loathsome and malicious. It is the natural outburst at the insensitivity and injustice caused by society. Bill Maitland also makes a last stand against society, against insensitivity. His anger is not entirely sincere and hence lacks the force as that seen in the case of Jimmy’s. Maitland lashes out in real anger only when his own position is menaced:

….Look at this dozy bastard: Britain’s position in the world. Screw that. What about my position?

Maitland’s anger is justified given the tepid response to him by those around. Archie Rice’s anger is not as aggressive as Jimmy’s. It is transformed into soft cynicism. As if to compensate this, Osborne chooses Jean to express disgust, another form of anger at our self-complacency and helplessness:
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.  

Archie’s anger degenerated or subdued into cynicism is the result of the supposed burden he bears of not only the British theatre and British nation but the entire human race which is on the verge of decay as epitomized in him. George Dillon’s anger is one of care and concern and is not a petulant anger. It is one of impotent protest. He is terrifyingly aware of how horrifying life could turn out to be if he does not resist the forces that attempt to subdue him. He asks Ruth:

Have you looked at them? Have you listened to them? They don’t merely act and talk like caricatures, they are caricatures! That’s what’s so terrifying…. They think in clichés, they talk in them, they even feel in them….  

This description of the Elliot family is his way of warning himself not to accept their standards. It is also a warning to us not to get cast in the moulds of others.

Osborne has created his own style of expression of anger. He has glorified ‘anger’ and has made everyone realize that even the expression of it gives the testimony that we are still capable of ‘feeling’. He used various methods of expression of anger like repetitive curses as can be seen in the shouts of the Elliot household in the play Epitaph for George Dillon – “Slut! Slut! Slut!” or the single cutting remarks which replete in a play like Look Back in Anger, particularly reserved for Jimmy. On hearing Alison say that she is going along with Helena for the question asked where she is going, Jimmy quickly makes a piercing single cut remark:

That’s not a direction - that’s an affliction.
The ‘language of anger’ further is best illustrated in the rambling monologues of Jimmy and Luther. But, underlying the theme of anger, there is an unending concern to suggest the idea of something better, a dream of a more perfect existence which is not being fulfilled owing to the lack of concern in human beings. Osborne is aware that there cannot be a bigger punishment than isolation. Hence through his characters he likes to thrust the curse of isolation on the wicked. Laurie, in the play *The Hotel in Amsterdam* bitterly condemns his boss K.L. from whose unwelcome presence he and his friends escape for a weekend of rest. Laurie’s anger is bitter and his invective burst is damning on K.L. His tirade reminds us of that of Jimmy’s:

Where does he get the damned energy and duplicity? Where? He’s tried to split us up but here we are in Amsterdam. He has made himself the endless object of speculation. Useful to him but humiliating for us. Well, no more, my friend. We will no longer be useful to you and be put up and be put down. We deserve a little better, not much but better. We have been your friends. Your stock in trade is marked down and your blackmailing sneering, your callousness, your malingery, your emotional gun slinging, your shooting in the dark places of affection. You trade on the forbearance, kindliness and talent of your friends. Go on, go on playing the big market of all those meretricious ambition hankers, plodding hirelings, grafters and intriguers. I simply hope tonight that you are alone- I know you won’t be. But I hope, at least, you will feel alone, alone as I feel it, as we all in our time feel it, without burdening our friends. I hope the G.P.O. telephone system is collapsed, that your chauffeur is dead, and the housekeeper drunk and that there isn’t one con-man, camp follower, eunuch, pimp, mercenary, or procurer of all things possible or one globe
trotting bum boy at your side to pour you a drink on this dark January evening….\textsuperscript{14}

One of the choicest themes and targets of attack of Osborne has been the press. He always found them quite nefarious, debased and irritable. His repugnance towards them was so much that he exclusively reserved a play \textit{The World of Paul Slickey} for them. In his ‘dedication’ notes to the play, he writes:

No one has ever dedicated a string quartet to a donkey although books have been dedicated to critics. I dedicate this play to the liars and self-deceivers; to those who daily deal out treachery; to those who handle their professions as instruments of debasement; to those who, for a salary cheque and less, successfully betray my country, and those who will do it for no inducement at all.\textsuperscript{15}

Osborne has the same kind of antagonism towards the critics. Wyatt’s ironical remarks in \textit{West of Suez} reflect this:

Critics are sacrosanct. You must make it clear to your readers that they are simply and obviously more important than poets or writers. That’s why you should always get in with them. You see, what we chaps do may be all right in its little way but what really counts is the fact that if it weren’t for the existence of critics, we shouldn’t be around at all or would just be on the dole or running chicken farms. Never make cheap jokes about critics. You’ve got to remember this: the critic is above criticism because he has the good sense never to do anything. He’s up there helping us poor little guys to understand what the hell we’re doing, which is a jolly helpful thing, you must agree. And if he stops you from writing at all then he’s done the best job possible. After all, who wants to read or listen to what some poor old writer has pumped out of his diseased heart when he can read a balanced and reasoned
judgement about life, love and literature from an aloof and informed commentator.\textsuperscript{16}

The theme of ‘Class’ is the basis for ‘Proletariat Plays’. It is vividly presented in \textit{Look Back in Anger}. Jimmy is described as a “young man without money, background or even looks”. He himself admits this, calling his university white tile rather than red brick! His spirit of comradeship and fraternity for his own class people is reflected when he defends Hugh’s mother and speaks against the neglect she has met owing to her class:

\textit{...that because Hugh’s mother was a deprived and ignorant old woman, who said all the wrong things in all the wrong places, she couldn’t be taken seriously.}\textsuperscript{17}

Jimmy considers Helena as his “natural enemy” and as one of Alison’s “posh girl friends with lots of money and no brains.” Even Archie in \textit{The Entertainer} does not want to accept the offer that his rich brother Bill gives and move to Canada, eventually to prosper there and join the neo-rich middle classes as he owes his allegiance to the lower middle class and does not want to betray it. Archie even ridicules his wife Phoebe’s upper class tastes like the liking for gin and Dubonnet. Michael, a prospective Conservative M.P., and Slickey’s brother-in-law in the play \textit{The World of Paul Slickey}, is the very epitome of what Osborne conceives as the upper class moron and is portrayed with humour.

Even in a historical play like \textit{Luther}, ‘class’ as an undercurrent theme prevails. Martin’s father Hans, who is a miner and thus comes from the working class, makes several significant remarks about class:

\textit{But then that’s because we’ve got to be, people like Lucas and me. Because if we aren’t strong, it won’t take any time at all before we’re knocked flat on our backs, or flat on our knees, or flat on something or other. Flat on our backs and finished, and we can’t}
afford to be finished because if we’re finished, that’s it, that’s the end, so we just have to stand up to it as best we can.\textsuperscript{18}

The Knight points out to the dead body of the peasant lying before Luther and goes on to criticize the cut-rate nobility and rich layabouts who squeezed every penny out of the peasants:

\ldots weren’t we all redeemed by Christ’s blood? 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 - \textsuperscript{19}

It was not just sixteenth century Germany which had its class divisions but also the nineteenth century Austria, as Osborne in his play \textit{A Patriot for Me} has depicted the army as a place of class privilege, full of short cuts for those who apparently do not deserve it.

Osborne’s plays are concerned with religion, its conscience and the nature of belief. \textit{Luther} and \textit{A Subject of Scandal and Concern} are the best examples for this. Even in a play like \textit{The Entertainer}, the irrelevance of the dogma in today’s environment is presented through Jean who rebuffs her fiancé’s claims for a good life by asking him:

Have you ever got on a railway train here, got on a train from Birmingham to West Hartlepool? Or gone from Manchester to Warrington or Widnes. And you get out, 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?  

This clearly suggests that Church and Religion have miserably failed to solve the contemporary problems. Alan Carter observes, “For Osborne religious bodies are shirking the issue; they do not face the moral questions of today, but are content to rest quietly in the past. He is not questioning the need for faith, but rather suggesting that we have been let down by the “instruments” of that faith.”

Osborne ridicules royalty more cruelly than he does religion because he finds a monarchic system in a socialist country a real paradox, blatantly absurd and unpalatable. His satire is directed against those who support such nonsense, against the glibness of the smooth television commentator who says:

...we shall be privileged to watch the most solemn occasion in our national life - a royal wedding.

This is the pathetic idolatry that Osborne likes to expose, lash out at and condemn. It is really absurd to consider one privileged to watch a royal wedding. It is debasing the individuality and self-respect of the people. There should be something nobler and more patriotic. One may feel privileged by watching the scenes which are the reminiscences of the sacrifices made by soldiers or national leaders. That would stir and make one proud rather than watching the flimsy royal weddings. Osborne is certainly against the fuss and glorification of trivialities connected with the rich and the royal.

Jean in The Entertainer lashes out quite painfully at the royalty which has done no good to the common lot and on the other hand has created a feeling of ‘they’ and ‘us’ in a democratic, socialistic set up:

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?  

It is here that Osborne appears to be well ahead of his times. He, then itself could assess the frailty and frivolousness of the importance attached to the events associated with the royal personages and so-called celebrities of the twentieth century. One can find such things happening even today:

The wedding of Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, and Catherine Middleton took place on 29 April 2011 at Westminster Abbey in London. Over 5000 street parties were held to mark the Royal wedding throughout the United Kingdom and one million people lined the route between Westminster Abbey and Buckingham Palace. In the United Kingdom TV audiences peaked at 26.3 million viewers with a total of 36.7 million watching part of the coverage.

The ceremony was viewed live by tens of millions more around the world including 72 million on the You Tube Royal Channel. Early estimates following the ceremony indicated an estimated 24.5 million people in the United Kingdom watched the wedding on either BBC One or ITV1, giving those channels a 99.4% share of the terrestrial television audience as the service began, with the BBC's Live royal wedding website having 9 million hits, estimating over half the British population watched the wedding.  

Osborne had an intense yearning to see commoners occupy the centre stage. His private views regarding royalty are clear enough:

I have called Royalty religion the "national swill" because it is poisonous, what an old vegetarian I used to know would call "foodless food", or, as Orwell might have put it, the leader writers
and the bribed gossip mongers have only to rattle their sticks in the royalty bucket for most of their readers to put their heads down in this trough of Queen worship, their tails turned against the world.
It doesn’t seem as funny anymore!25

The Government is subjected to the same critical scrutiny as that of royalty. In the play *The Blood of the Bambergs*, Osborne overstates his point about triviality by equating the cost of a year’s royal occasions to the lost opportunity for the Government to build 27 secondary modern schools and 1,200,000 houses! This anti-Government theme is common to all his contemporary plays; from Jimmy Porter’s “Platitudes from Outer Space” to Bill Maitland’s “Naylor Report, failure report...” and Pamela’s “striding into the seventies. I haven’t got used to hobbling about in the sixties yet.” Osborne is against the obstacles the society has created in the form of aristocracy, royalty, the Church, the Press and politicians all of which obstruct the fullest expression of life.

Another theme recurrent in the plays of Osborne is ‘nostalgia’. He has a longing for the past not because the values then were better than those of the present but because at least they were not questioned and they had a dignity of their own. This nostalgia is represented through the characters of ‘older generation’. Colonel Redfern broods and paraphrases this sentimentality:

The England I remembered was the one I left in 1914, and I was happy to go on remembering it that way. Beside, I had the Maharajah’s army to command—that was my world, and I loved it, all of it. At the time, it looked like going on for ever. When I think of it now, it seems like a dream. If only it could have gone on for ever.26

Osborne is most sympathetic in his treatment of the “remnants” or what one can crudely say “left-overs”. His stage instructions for the portrayal of Billy
Rice in *The Entertainer* are suggestive of this nostalgia; “When he (Billy) speaks it is with a dignified Edwardian diction....Indeed it is not an accent of class but of period. One does not hear it often now.” Billy Rice is constantly critical of the present day and even reminds the younger generation:

> 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.27

Gideon Orme’s theatre has long since died but throughout the play *Time Present* his presence is with us through his actress daughter Pamela, who has derived from him a strict code of behaviour and self-sufficiency. In a way, Osborne’s heroes are envious of this ‘comfortable and secure zone’ which their predecessors enjoyed, as unfortunately they did not have that ‘sense of belonging’.

Osborne also presents the underlying ‘boredom’ in modern human life. The Sunday afternoon in the household of Porters is an explicit reference to it. Jimmy cries:

> God, how I hate Sundays! It’s always so depressing, always the same. We never seem to get any further, do we? Always the same ritual. Reading the papers, drinking tea, ironing. A few more hours, and another week gone. Our youth is slipping away. Do you know that?28

In the play *The Entertainer*, Billy is so bored that he makes pointless walks and Phoebe seeks solace in her repeated visits to the cinema. The same atmosphere of claustrophobia envelopes other characters in other plays. Pamela in *Time Present* drowns herself in champagne, Laurie in *The Hotel in Amsterdam* remains in an inebriated state with his whiskey and soda, Russell in *The Blood of the Bambergs* is prepared to sacrifice his freedom for his newly
found riches, undaunted by his deadening prospects, the banality of life forces Bill Maitland in *Inadmissible Evidence* seek escape in numerous sordid affairs with young secretaries.

Osborne is of the conviction that a life without a worthy set of values can only be one of boredom as that kind of life engages itself in needless trivia. This is what Jimmy in *Look Back in Anger* abhors though he himself cannot come out of that sloth:

Nobody thinks, nobody cares. No beliefs, no convictions and no enthusiasm.\(^{29}\)

He particularly despairs against the mini-mind of the masses who could have made the things better by joining in the crusade against incapacity and injustice but they recoil. Bill Maitland mouths Osborne’s view of the masses:

They're the ones who go out on Bank Holidays in the car! And have mascots in the rear window.

He again goes on to say:

They: are the people who go up every year like it was holy communion to have a look at the Christmas decorations in Regent Street. They're the ones who drive the family fifty miles into the countryside and then park their cars beside the main road with a few dozen others, get out their thermos flasks, camp stools and primuses and do you know what they do? They sit and watch the long distance lorry drivers rattling past, and old people's coaches and all the other idiots like themselves about to do the same thing.\(^{30}\)

Osborne uses plot, characters and language, torrents of language, to establish and maintain his fundamental belief that man is basically good but he
needs to be freed to be 'himself'. The later plays of Osborne like *The Hotel in Amsterdam* and *West of Suez* do not develop as far as time and characterization are concerned. Situation and language is more rational and the plots are not so overburdened. Both the plays contain exceptional people. The characters of Laurie and Wyatt Gillman have the rationalized nostalgia of Porter and Maitland. They have no desire to return to the past; yet from them all we sense a regret at the way they live.

Language has been the strong forte of Osborne's plays. The criticism, if any, should be directed against the idea expressed and never the expression as it is finely chiselled and perfectly carved. He uses a contemporary idiom, a vocabulary which could be heard in the street, in shops, at football matches, in the cinema and in the home. Osborne himself acknowledges:

...one can find different ways of breaking out without using different stages. Although *Look Back in Anger* was a formal, rather old fashioned play, I think that it broke out by its use of language....

He gives long monologues for his principal characters to deliver. He does not approve of these speeches being called monologues which he thinks is a rather 'scornful term'. These long, well articulated speeches impress people as they achieve a lyric effect and every day phrases and words take on new meaning.

The long, desperate speech of Bill Maitland before his daughter Jane, accusing the society after having lost his grip on life in the play *Inadmissible Evidence* is the example for the kind of excessive emotional outburst of despair that one finds in a defeated man who senses the threat of alienation in day to day life:

They're all pretending to ignore me. No they're not pretending, they are!....I always used to think then that when you're the age
you are now. I'd take you out to restaurants for dinner, big restaurants like I used to think posh restaurants were like, with marble columns and glass and orchestras....Do you want to get rid of me? Do you? Um? Because I want to get rid of you...the reason for that is because I know: that when I see you, I cause you little else but distaste or distress, or, at the least, your own vintage, swinging, indifference....I hear what you say, the sounds you make, the few jokes you make, the wounds you inflict without even longing to hurt, there is no lather or fear in you, all cool, dreamy, young, cool and not a proper blemish, forthright, unimpressed, contemptuous of ambition but good and pushy all the same....if you should one day start to shrink slowly into an unremarkable, gummy little whole into a world outside the care and consciousness of anyone, you'll have no rattlings of shame or death, there'll be no little sweating, eruptions of blood, no fevers or clots of flesh splitting anywhere or haemorrhage....God said, He said: "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth. And Subdue it. It seems to me Jane, little Jane, you don't look little any longer, you are on your way at last, all, to doing all four of them. For the first time. Go on now."32

This “speech” moves through a whole range of moods, and in effect, circumscribes a complete life time. Topical modern idioms abound in the above speech like “swinging indifference”, “good and pushy” which are all direct from normal daily existence. The organization of speech more than its length or content appeals. Osborne alone could use language in such a fashion so as to take the mood from tenderness to cold fury and finally to a resigned tone.

The plays of Osborne are quite unique. One reason for that is the excessive, incredible importance accorded to the lead characters. The rest of the characters who do not have the same level of emotional awareness as that of the
Central characters exist only to pass some ‘holding’ remark here and there. This happens not just in his earlier plays where the heroes were all towering persons but even in his later plays. Even in his “group” plays, Laurie in *A Hotel in Amsterdam* and Wyatt Gilmann in *West of Suez* dominate any conversation. Hence, if it is aspired to analyse the aspects of language used, it has to be searched in the rhetoric of the central character only. Jimmy’s power of rhetoric is exemplary:

> Jimmy: That old bitch should be dead. Well? Aren’t I right? I said she’s an old bitch, and should be dead! What’s the matter with you? Why don’t you leap to her defence?
> Cliff: Jimmy don’t!
> Jimmy: If someone said something like that about me, she’d react soon enough-she’d spring into her well known lethargy, and say nothing! I say she ought to be dead.33

The language above is full of rhetoric and the words are reiterated and this is quite natural as real life conversation is repetitive. Osborne translated half-phrases and abrupt transitions, the constant repetition and patterns of common speech into reference to their monologues, that they use the same words, the same colloquial phrases and idioms. Mary McCarthy in her controversial article “Verdict on Osborne” says:

> Reiteration is the basic mode of the Osborne harangue and repetition is the basic plot of the Osborne plays: the last-act curtain rises on a new girl at the ironing-board and everything will start over again.34

Osborne never uses ‘sophisticated vocabulary’ that would pose a problem to the ‘man in the street’. Even if he does, he takes care to explain it as he does through Jimmy who explains an adjective applicable to his wife Alison:
Pusillanimous. Adjective. Wanting of firmness of mind, of small courage, having a little mind, mean spirited, cowardly, timid of mind. From the Latin pusillus, very little, and animus, the mind. That’s my wife!  

Even George Dillon explains a “high-brow” word used as thus:

It’s rather like calling bad breath “halitosis” don’t you think?  

It is to be observed,  

Kenneth Tynan in a review of *Epitaph for George Dillon* remarked on the very common use of the word “little” by Osborne in a plethora of phrases beginning “nasty little”, “sordid little”, etc. The playwright’s fondness for “little” is matched by that for “old”, “poor” and “a bit”, and all four are used in both the pejorative and literal sense; combinations of them are particularly frequent, as in “Poor old Mum”. Osborne’s most usual expletives are bloody, damn, and bastard, though in this area he has a fairly wide range, from the “I said you bloody well wait, you horrible little skivvy” of *Under Plain Cover* to the more volatile language of Jed in *West of Suez*: “That’s what you’ll all go down in. One blissful, God-like shit. You think we’re mother-fucking, stinking, yelling, shouting shits. Well that’s what we all are, babies.” The playwright is also particularly fond of phrases such as: “Good Heavens!”, “Like Hell!”, “Oh, my God!”, well over two hundred and fifty of these occur in his plays.  

He makes use of substantial number of slang words and phrases like “who went bonkers”; “a lot of wogs”; “every tart and pansy boy”; “we are going posh”; “the big old gob”; “niffy dormouse”; “gives me the creeps” and integrates these into the dialogue to add some kind of sinewy strength. The real force
behind his language is primarily due to its imagery. His characters rarely grope for words or parallels and instantly pick them up.

The play *Look Back in Anger* is full of animal imagery. Jimmy is identified with a jolly Super Bear and Alison with a beautiful great-eyed Squirrel. If Cliff is a randy little Mouse, Alison's mother Mrs.Redfern is a female Rhinoceros. Alison, in a negative sense is also referred to as a Python whereas Helena to a Cow. Even in the play *Luther*, "animal" imagery is used to give a really vivid expression to Martin's agony, both physical and spiritual, as he contemplates the nature of faith:

> ....And seated there, my head down, on that privy just as when I was a little boy, I couldn’t reach down to my breath for the sickness in my bowels, as I seemed to sense beneath me a large rat, a heavy, wet, plague rat, slashing at my privates with its death's teeth.\(^{38}\)

Osborne bases much of his imagery on war or the hunt. It involves some sort of violence and savagery. The vocabulary of battle is constantly before us: kill, death, butcher, beat, destroy, enemy, slaughter, murder, agony, trap, snare, wound, stab, rage. This reveals the agitated, aggressive, insecure mind of Osborne who imparts the same to his characters as well. However, most of the time he makes use of these serious words in non-serious situations or non-violent scenes in his plays which sounds more interesting. Laurie in *Hotel in Amsterdam* says:

> Someone always wants to be useful or flattered or gulled or just plain whipped to death or cast out into the knackers yard by King Sham. Well let him go ahead and get himself crucified this time. I know him not.\(^{39}\)

He uses historical and literary analogies which are comprehensible, unlike that used by T.S.Eliot:
Edward: Perhaps you should have a go at observing them, whatever they are. Like try charity for a bit. Give that a whirl.
Frederica: Don’t start giving me St.Paul. That’s the prig’s first.40

George Dillon too uses war imagery when he protests against his audiences:

I’ve got to fight almost everyone of those people in the auditorium. Right from the stalls to the gallery, to the Vestal Virgins in the boxes! My God, it’s a gladiatorial combat! Me against Them! Me and mighty Them!41

Osborne’s metaphors are the best figurative ones he employs. They are emotive and evocative. They give effect and vitality to the long speeches of the central characters. Alan Carter says, “It is part of Osborne’s talent that they never jar or obtrude, but take their place within the flow of speech, adding light and shade to the effect. These metaphors are never decorative, they are organic and express a complex of thought and feeling which is so subtle and precise that it could not be expressed in any other way.”42 George Holyoake, the blasphemer of A Subject of Scandal and Concern uses an extended metaphor to show how society has always obstructed innovation:

What threats there were of Hell and flames, what splashing about of fire and brimstone, what judgement on these men choked with their beefsteak on a Friday. Such frying, such barbecuing and everyone dripping in a flood of sin and gravy and not the smallest notion of a red herring anyway.43

Alison tells her father Colonel Redfern that Jimmy describes “Poor old Daddy” as:

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Just one of those sturdy plants left over from the Edwardian wilderness that Can’t understand why the sun isn’t shining any more.44

The lyric imagery found in Luther is quite captivating. Martin says:

They’re trying to turn me into a fixed star, Father, but I’m a shifting planet.45

Osborne displays the figurative command of language to represent the physical trivia when Luther struggling for spiritual redemption says:

…I awoke in my cell, all soaking in the devil’s bath.46

Osborne uses similes with more ease and quickness than metaphors. Sometimes they are derogatory, sometimes they are emotional, sometimes drawn from history and myths. The following are some of them:

Pamela: No wonder she’s so solemn! Why she’s got tits like old ski-socks filled with sand.47

Luther pleads with God to instill in him the faith and knowledge he so desperately needs:

Breathe into me, like a lion into the mouth of a stillborn cub.48

George Dillon admits to his own state of feeling with the words:

At this moment I feel about as empty and as thread-bare as my pockets.49

Jimmy’s romantic nostalgia with his ex-girl friend Madeline is expressed as:

Even to sit on top of a bus with her was like setting out with Ulysses.50
It does not require scholastic knowledge and by mere reading the expression ‘setting out with Ulysses’ makes one understand that Jimmy was actually trying to suggest that her company was quite adventurous and exciting.

Osborne’s imagery received endearing receptiveness from the audience. Alan Carter states:

Its compressiveness is provoking and its power is clear for all to see, yet we should remember that much of it is also tender and lyrical. It is used emotionally and descriptively, to heighten our sense of what is happening, to straighten our appreciation of the situation, to let us understand the foibles of character more easily, and above all, to quicken our interest.

It is found that Osborne’s unsuccessful plays like *The World of Paul Slickey*, *The Blood of the Bambersgs*, *The Right Prospectus*, and *Very Like A Whale* have employed less imagery.

Osborne knows the importance of using the most relevant figurative expressions for the situation. He has skillfully employed impetuous hyperbolic condemning statements as only they can match with the indignation of Luther when he has been served by a paper from the Pope stating that he will be excommunicated in case he does not retract:

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 decretals 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!\textsuperscript{52}

Osborne loves to manipulate and play with words and sometimes he even invents. Some of them are “fanfuckingtastik” in The Hotel in Amsterdam, “vote-wheedling catch-fart” in Inadmissible Evidence, “clever dickdyke’s thirty bob’s worth” in Time Present. In A Bond Honoured, the following play on words is seen:

Gerardo: Bell. Wedding bell?
Leonido: Bedding well. Yes.\textsuperscript{53}

A pleonasm (which usually consists of two concepts or two words that are redundant; it is needless repetition of an idea in different words) is used above. A similar pattern of repetition and rhyming slang is to be found in Luther when Martin is received into the Order and his father Hans turns to Lucas:

Hans: …what do you think?
Lucas: Think? Of what?
Hans: Yes, think man, think, what do you think, pen and ink, think of all that?\textsuperscript{54}

Osborne has a marked quirk for creating “funny” names. It is “George what’s-his-name”, “Georgie Porgie-puddeny-pie” in Epitaph for George Dillon; In The Entertainer, it is Sir Somebody Pearson, Mr.Graham Thing, Captain Charlie Double-back-Action-hyphen-breech loading Gore of Elm Lodge; in The World of Paul Slickey, the characters masquerade under the names of Father Evilgreene, Mrs Giltedge-Whyte and Teddy Maroon. The language in his plays
is direct, frank and open. There are no hidden jibes and no implicit criticism. This is one of the reasons that accounts for the enduring nature of his plays.

Osborne is commonly regarded as an innovator, but this is hardly true as far as his plots are concerned. He uses many kinds of plots, ranging from "unified" to "episodic". *A Patriot for Me* and *West of Suez* have definite climaxes while *Inadmissible Evidence* just stops in mid-stream, its climax in effect is the opening nightmare scene. *Luther* is the most episodic of his play and parallels the style of Brecht’s *Galileo*. The first two Acts portray the inner struggle of Luther and the effective vigour of his attack on a corrupt Church while the third Act shows his dismissal of the Peasant’s rebellion. Osborne’s *The Hotel in Amsterdam* has virtually no plot at all.

The play *The Entertainer* seems Brechtian in structure but Osborne has never whole heartedly adopted its technique for his plots. If Brecht wanted that his spectators should be detached and have an objective rational approach through his ‘alienation effect’, Osborne sought to create emotional awareness and response among the audience and this could not be possible without involving them subjectively which was contrary to the Brechtian idea. Osborne believes that unity can only be given to the sequence by an emotional concentration on one character. Alan Carter observes, “Osborne’s attachment to the episodic form is due less to Brecht’s influence, than to the greater scope and freedom it affords.” Even if he chose to address the audience directly as it happens in a Brechtian theatre, it is not through technique but through characterization. He depicted dramatic realism not through plot but through people.

His first three plays, *Look Back in Anger*, *The Entertainer* and *Epitaph for George Dillon* possess strong situations but they could not be called situation drama as they are much more concerned with people than with plot. There is no real situation drama in any of Osborne’s work, and even plays like *A Subject of*
Scandal and Concern and A Patriot for Me, which imply situation drama with the hero facing a moral crisis in his own times, this is tackled from the human viewpoint.

Three plays have been historical reconstructions, relying heavily on documentary sources, A Bond Honoured, is an adaptation of Lope de Vega's La Fianza Satisfecha, and the For the Meantime plays seem essentially to have no plot at all. The content of the play is more important to Osborne than its form. His heroes are larger than life and they become the undivided and undisputed focal point so that the craftsmanship of Osborne is ignored.

Osborne's plays are realistic interpretation of life. His drama is full of conflict between the 'self' and 'society'. He succeeds in establishing the intimate connection between life and art. The central characters rant and rage at their tormentors in times of crisis. This is evident in Jimmy Porter's tirade against the upper classes or Church or Government, Bill Maitland's fulmination of the callousness of the society which ignores him, Alfred Redl's denouncement of the Spaniards, Laurie's condemnation of K.L. or Jed's warning to the Gillmans of approaching doom.

One of the significant achievements of Osborne is the portrayal of emotionally alive heroes who feel they are never wrong and hence rarely apologize and seldom admit their faults. It is through them that he exposes evil and injustice. However, they do not make an attempt to have an organized effort. Even Osborne did not intend them to make such an effort. Even in a historical play on Reformation like Luther, Martin Luther is not shown organizing a movement to ransack the Churches and consign all Papal symbols to flames. "Osborne's major interest will never be the movement of society as a whole, but rather the plight of the individual caught up in the machinations of society - the man who refuses "to be a good chap and play the game"."
The sufferings of Osborne’s heroes never go inarticulate, more so in their distress. Jimmy, on finding his wife’s parting note, reads it aloud and then bursts out:

Oh, how could she be so bloody wet! Deep loving need! That makes me puke! She couldn’t say “You rotten bastard! I hate your guts, I’m clearing out, and I hope you rot!” No, she has to make a polite, emotional mess out of it! Deep, loving need! I never thought she was capable of being as phoney as that.\(^{57}\)

If Alison uses a polite, subtle, genteel language of drawing-room, Jimmy’s language is rustic, caustic and absolutely real. This is the best illustration of the way in which Osborne wants the things to be presented.

The heroes are unable to alter society as the impediments against them are too great and hence their residual energies are aimed at dominating those around them which is quite natural given the nature of circumstances. He aims at the public through the private world of his heroes. Jimmy’s incredulity at Alison’s departure, Archie’s breakdown during his nun’s story, Luther’s personal quest for salvation turning to reform the society, Bill Maitland’s panic when legal contacts refuse to speak to him, Pamela’s avoidance of an emotional scene with Murray and Constance - in each of them, the private apprehensions, anxieties, pains become something like an indictment on society.

His heroes are never portrayed as superhumans and even in the end, they are not victorious. To a large extent, they represent ‘frustrated idealism’. They fail because society crushes them badly as they are non-conformists. This is what happens in real life too and it is exactly this which makes the audience connect well with his plays and partly this accounts for their success. The people sympathise with the heroes and express antipathy towards the hostile forces that damned them. The traditional existentialism of Kierkegaard stresses that man’s freedom is to be found in God and Sartre’s existentialism stresses the atheistic
belief that man is alone in a Godless universe and hence he has the right of free
determination. Osborne has a sentimental longing for the traditional past and that
is reflected in his plays and at the same time he combines it with the
imperativeness of individual freedom.

Alan Carter elaborating Osborne’s conception of individual and society
says:

Osborne is concerned with both the individual and society, he
wishes to protect the individual’s rights by urging society to adopt
worthy ends. In a world of debased commercial values and mass
standards, we can no longer rely on the old traditional integrated
community to pass on the best values. Saving those values and
society is a job for the minority, those with intelligence and
sensibility.58

The realists have had a much greater influence on British post-war drama
than the absurdists, for in general the British dramatists see themselves as artists
who have more than a passive role to play in the society unlike the absurdists
who feel that we should stop trying. One of the most cherished of Osborne’s
contributions to the theatre as well as to society is found in the words of Alan
Carter, “Osborne has created a compromise between the realist and the absurdist
schools by combining the rational communicative society of the former with the
concern for the individual of the latter.59

Osborne knows that the modern society has failed to provide a worthy
ideal to the human race. His heroes may fail to change the world but at least their
‘Protest’ remains valuable. Alfred Redl, Leonido, Pamela, Laurie assert their
right to be complete individuals, like all Osborne heroes. They, however, do not
attempt to exemplify their values. It is here that Osborne is criticized on the
grounds that he does not suggest how to achieve these value-based ends.
However, it should also be remembered that Osborne’s plays are not ‘discussion
dramas' of Bernard Shaw and he also does not intend to make them so either, for the reason that he does not like to overburden his plays with disquisitions, intellectual content, and sacrifice the emotional appeal in the process.

Osborne has indeed succeeded in stimulating the society through his plays. His plays are experiments and hence they aim at creating awareness and not for answering questions. Society, for its onward, progressive journey, always requires 'dissent', 'protest' and if this grows from a positive concern for values, it is worthwhile to be cherished and nurtured. Theatre for Osborne was perhaps meant for 'creation' and not for 'recreation'.

There is a marked influence of Osborne on several writers apart from the "angries". His humour is seen extended in the works of Jellicoe, Mortimer and Hampton, his political awareness is reflected in Bolt, Chilton and Whiting, his intellectual appeal was strengthened in the works of Arden and Cooper, his realism emphasized in the plays of Kops, Wesker and Storey, his absurd concern for the individual in the works of Saunders and Simpson. Even foreign playwrights like Claus, Gelber and Schisgal could not escape his influence. Alan Carter makes the following observation on contribution of his plays:

Osborne's plays cannot be divorced from their time, yet their message is universal, and in an amorphous society such as ours all the more significant. The emotional disease of England is apathy, and Osborne's real merit lies in his willingness to do battle with this deadening inertia. Osborne is in fact passionately devoted to England. By attempting to revive a tired population, he, and other writers of a like mind created a literary breakthrough in the 1950s. They added a special local note of protest to the general worldwide movement which sought a rational approach to human problems.60
Though passionately devoted to England and some of his plays are regarded as 'period pieces', in truth, Osborne's plays are universal and are for all ages. The themes of the 'threat of isolation', the 'revolt against authority', the 'inadequacies of the generation and society' are timeless and are also not confined to one specific nation. This is the reason for a historical play Luther set in sixteenth century Germany appealing to the audience of twentieth century worldwide. The themes of the plays of Osborne have been dealt with by other writers too before and after Osborne but the force of emotional protest which is so persuasive and the throbbing language used are the unique contribution of Osborne alone. Osborne was influenced by Oscar Wilde, Bernard Shaw, D.H.Lawrence, Jean Anouilh and the American playwrights, Tennessee Williams and Van Moody.

Osborne was the playwright who overnight brought the English theatre up-to-date. Martin Banham considers that his achievement was:

...Osborne put the theatre into the arena of controversy. No longer could the playwright or the critic expect to lead a quiet, sheltered, conventional existence....the theatre had once again laid claim to being an intelligent and influential forum where the serious and real issues of the day could be treated....The serious theatre had become a place of vigorous dispute, experiment, and endeavour. Above all else it has become relevant to its age, outspoken on social and moral issues. John Osborne's achievement must not be measured in terms of individual plays but in relation to this overall revolution.61

Alan Carter acclaims his greatness on the basis of his content and language:

The very nature of his subject matter makes it inevitable that he shocks some people by the language he uses, and by doing so, Osborne has helped push back the conventional boundaries of what
In 1957 Osborne wrote:

I do not like the kind of society in which I find myself. I like it less and less. I love the theatre more than ever because I know that it is what I always dreamed it might be: a weapon.

Osborne had the firm conviction that he could vehemently communicate with people and vent all his ideas through the medium of the theatre which he holds with a high degree of veneration. Staupitz, in the final scene of the play *Luther* lauds Martin Luther for his remarkable achievement, “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.” This can be very well applied even to Osborne if we were to appreciate him, “You’ve taken the English drama of the twentieth century away from the parlours and the drawing rooms of the aristocrats and the rich and put ‘It’ back where It belongs. In each common man’s soul. We owe so much to you.”

Osborne may not be a Shakespeare or a Bernard Shaw but the increased levels of awareness that he created about ‘humanness’ through the persuasive, and at times furious language in his passionate themes remain matchless. He is not a didactic writer. However, his plays are not just ‘lessons in feeling’ as he prefers to call them, they are also ‘lessons in failing’ as they seem to suggest that we should not live by the ‘rules’ that regiment us but instead we should live by the ‘values’ that will ennoble us and in our attempt to achieve this, even if we fail, it is our success. This is the philosophical legacy he has left behind for us.
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