



THE
ENTERTAINER
BY
JOHN
OSBORNE

THE ENTERTAINER

by the same author

LOOK BACK IN ANGER

THE ENTERTAINER

EPITAPH FOR GEORGE DILLON

(with Anthony Creighton)

THE WORLD OF PAUL SLICKEY

A SUBJECT OF SCANDAL AND CONCERN

A play for television

LUTHER

PLAYS FOR ENGLAND

The Blood of the Bambergs and Under Plain Cover

UNDER PLAIN COVER

INADMISSIBLE EVIDENCE

A PATRIOT FOR ME

A BOND HONOURED

TIME PRESENT and THE HOTEL IN AMSTERDAM

TOM JONES

A film script

THE RIGHT PROSPECTUS

play for television

VERY LIKE A WHALE

A play for television

WEST OF SUEZ

HEDDA GABLER

(adapted from Henrik Ibsen)

THE GIFT OF FRIENDSHIP

A play for television

A SENSE OF DETACHMENT

A PLACE CALLING ITSELF ROME

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

(adapted from Oscar Wilde)

The Entertainer

A Play

by

JOHN OSBORNE



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To A.C.

who remembers what it was like, and will not
forget it; who, I hope, will never let me forget
it—not while there is still a Paradise Street and
Claypit Lane to go back to

NOTE

The music hall is dying, and, with it, a significant part of England. Some of the heart of England has gone; something that once belonged to everyone, for this was truly a folk art. In writing this play, I have not used some of the techniques of the music hall in order to exploit an effective trick, but because I believe that these can solve some of the eternal problems of time and space that face the dramatist, and, also, it has been relevant to the story and setting. Not only has this technique its own traditions, its own convention and symbol, its own mystique, it cuts right across the restrictions of the so-called naturalistic stage. Its contact is immediate, vital, and direct.

CAST

BILLY RICE

JEAN RICE

ARCHIE RICE

PHOEBE RICE

FRANK RICE

WILLIAM (BROTHER BILL) RICE

GRAHAM DODD

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The first performance in Great Britain of **THE ENTERTAINER** was given at the Royal Court Theatre, Sloane Square, London, on 10th April 1957 by the English Stage Company. It was directed by Tony Richardson and the decor was by Alan Tagg. The cast was as follows:

BILLY RICE	George Relf
JEAN RICE	Dorothy Tutin
PHOEBE RICE	Brenda de Banzie
ARCHIE RICE	Laurence Olivier
FRANK RICE	Richard Pasco
GORGEOUS GLADYS	Vivienne Drummond
WILLIAM (BROTHER BILL) RICE	Aubrey Dexter
GRAHAM	Stanley Meadows

SETTING: The action takes place in a large coastal resort. The house where the Rice family live is one of those tall ugly monuments built by a prosperous business man at the beginning of the century. Only twenty-five minutes in the brougham to the front. Now, trolley buses hum past the front drive, full of workers from the small factories that have grown up round about. This is a part of the town the holiday makers never see—or, if they do, they decide to turn back to the pleasure gardens. This is what they have spent two or three hours in a train to escape. They don't even have to pass it on their way in from the central station, for this is a town on its own, and it has its own station, quite a large one, with acres of goods sheds and shunting yards. However, the main line trains don't stop there. It is not residential, it is hardly industrial. It is full of dirty blank spaces, high black walls, a gas holder, a tall chimney, a main road that shakes with dust and lorries. The shops are scattered at the corners of narrow streets. A newsagent's, a general grocer's, a fish-and-chip shop.

OVERTURE

During the Intermissions, an advertising sheet
is lowered.

NUMBER ONE

At the back a gauze. Behind it, a part of the town. In front of it, a high rostrum with steps leading to it. Knee-high flats and a door frame will serve for a wall. The sight-lines are preserved by swagging. Different swags can be lowered for various scenes to break up the acting areas. Also, ordinary, tatty backcloth and

draw-tabs. There are two doors L. and R. of the apron. The lighting is the kind you expect to see in the local Empire—everything bang-on, bright and hard, or a simple follow-spot. The scenes and interludes must, in fact, be lit as if they were simply turns on the bill. Furniture and props are as basic as they would be for a short sketch. On both sides of the proscenium is a square in which numbers—the turn numbers—appear. The problems involved are basically the same as those that confront any resident stage-manager on the twice nightly circuit every Monday morning of his working-life.

Music. The latest, the loudest, the worst. A gauzed front-cloth. On it are painted enormous naked young ladies, waving brightly coloured fans, and kicking out gaily. Written across it in large letters are the words "ROCK'N ROLL NEW'D LOOK".

Behind the up-stage gauze, light picks out an old man. He walks across the stage from L. to R. As he reaches C. he pauses and looks up. There are shouts and screams. The noise of a woman trying to separate two men—her son and her lover perhaps. Cries of "Oh leave him alone! Don't! Please don't! Leave him *alone*". He walks off R. and reappears beside the swagging, walking in C. There is a crash and the sounds of blows. He pauses again, then goes on. The woman screams, loudly this time. He pauses again, turns back, and shouts down over the banister rail "Do you mind being quiet down there, please." He pauses, but there is no response. "*Will you kindly stop making all that noise!*" He manages to sound dignified, but he has a powerful voice and the noise stops for a moment. He nods and starts moving. A voice shouts "Why don't you shut your great big old gob, you poor, bloody old fool!" A woman's sob stabs the end of the sentence and the old man hesitates, turns back and calls over the stairs "Are you all right, Mrs. —?" A man's voice is heard, urgent and heated. A door bangs, and the noise is

muffled. The sobbing is still audible but the situation seems to be more controlled. The old man returns C. and enters through the door-frame.

BILLY RICE is a spruce man in his seventies. He has great physical pride, the result of a life-time of being admired as a "fine figure of a man". He is slim, upright, athletic. He glows with scrubbed well-being. His hair is just grey, thick and silky from its vigorous daily brush. His clothes are probably twenty-five years old—including his pointed patent leather shoes—but well-pressed and smart. His watch chain gleams, his collar is fixed with a tie-pin beneath the tightly knotted black tie, his brown homburg is worn at a very slight angle. When he speaks it is with a dignified Edwardian diction—a kind of repudiation of both Oxford and cockney that still rhymes "cross" with "force", and yet manages to avoid being exactly upper-class or effete. Indeed, it is not an accent of class but of period. One does not hear it often now.

Take up front gauze.

He walks down C, laying down a folded newspaper, two quart bottles of beer, and a telegram, which he glances at quickly. He crosses to the fore-stage door R., and goes through it singing sonorously but cheerfully:

"Rock of Ages cleft for me

Let me hide myself in thee!"

He reappears in his shirt sleeves pulling on a heavy woollen cardigan over his waistcoat. Still singing, he sits down, pours himself out a glass of beer, and starts to unlace his shoes. He puts these in a box with tissue paper up-stage C. The noise starts up again from downstairs. He drinks from his glass of beer, takes out a nail file and stands cleaning his nails expertly. This is like flicking off the old, imaginary speck of dust. There is a yell from downstairs. BILLY speaks, gravely, with forethought.

BILLY Bloody Poles and Irish

He sits down and puts on his carpet slippers. Front door

slams, he takes spectacles from his case and puts them on.
I hate the bastards.
He unfolds his newspaper, the doorbell is still ringing. He looks irritated, but he has his feet up and is too comfortable to move. He sings cheerfully, as if to drown the noise of the doorbell.

BILLY: Nearer my God to Thee

Nearer to Thee!

He listens and then goes on.

Even though it be a cross

That raiseth me

He picks up the newspaper and peers at it gravely.

Still all my song would be

Nearer my God to Thee,

Nearer to Thee!

He puts down his paper.

(Standing). Why don't they answer the bloody door!

He leans his arms on the chair, wondering whether he will have to go after all.

Ought to be locked up, some of these people.

It looks as though he won't have to go after all, and he settles back cheerfully,

Dirty, filthy lot. *(Picks up paper. Pushes paper down suddenly.)*

My God, there's a draught!

Gets up and goes to door and looks out.

I'll bet they've left the front door open. Born in fields, they are.

Takes a rug and arranges it against the door.

Probably were born in fields. Animals. *(Back to chair and sits down).* Like animals. Wild animals.

He settles down. Across from up L. comes a young girl.

Billy pours himself out some more beer. The girl knocks on the door. He listens.

Who is it?

The girl knocks again.

Who is it? Can't get any peace in this damned house.

GIRL: Is that you, Grandad?

BILLY: What?

GIRL: It's Jean.

BILLY: (*rising*). Who is it?

JEAN: It's me—Jean.

BILLY: (*goes to door and stands behind it*). Can't even read the paper in peace. Who?

JEAN: It's your granddaughter.

Jean tries to push the door open but the rug prevents it.

BILLY: Just a minute! Just a minute! Hold your horses! (*He bends down*).

JEAN: Sorry.

BILLY: Hold your horses!

He releases the rug and opens the door, revealing Jean Rice. She is about twenty-two, dark, with slightly protruding teeth and bad eyesight. She is what most people would call plain, but already humour and tenderness have begun to stake their small claims around her nose and eyes. Her mouth is large, generous.

JEAN: Hello, Grandad.

BILLY: I wondered who the hell it was.

JEAN: I'm sorry.

BILLY: I thought it was some of that mad lot carrying on.

Well, come in if you're coming, it's draughty standing about in the doorway. I've only just sat down.

JEAN: (*coming in*). Did I disturb you, I am sorry.

BILLY: I'd just sat down to read the evening paper. It's a bloody farm-yard this place.

JEAN: Well, how are you?

BILLY: Bloody farm-yard. They want locking up. And you know what now, don't you? You know who she's got upstairs, in Mick's old room, don't you? Some black fellow. It's true. I tell you, you've come to a mad-house this time.

JEAN: You're looking very well. How do you feel?

BILLY: I'm all right. You expect a few aches and pains when you get to my age. Phoebe's at the pictures, I think. She didn't tell me you were coming.

JEAN: I didn't tell her.

BILLY: No, well she didn't say anything. So I wasn't expecting a knock on the door.

JEAN: I only decided to come up this morning.

BILLY: I'd only just sat down to read the evening paper.

JEAN: I'm sorry. I disturbed you.

She has picked up her cue neatly. The fact that his evening has been disturbed is established. His air of distracted irritation relaxes and he smiles a little. He is pleased to see her anyway.

BILLY: Well, give your Grandad a kiss, come on.

She does so.

JEAN: It's good to see you.

BILLY: Well, it's nice to see you, my darling. Bit of a surprise.

Go on, take your things off.

Jean undoes her coat, and throws a packet of cigarettes on the table.

JEAN: Got you those.

BILLY: Phoebe won't be long. What she went out for, I don't know.

JEAN: Gone to the pictures has she?

BILLY: She's mad. Oh, that's very kind of you. Very kind.

Thank you. Yes, she said she was going early. I don't know why she can't stay in.

JEAN: Well, you know—she's always been like that. She enjoys it.

BILLY: Well, she'll have to learn. She's not a youngster any more. When she gets to my age, she won't want to do it.

He unwraps the cigarettes and takes out an ivory holder from his waistcoat.

Oh, this is nice of you. Thank you. Still, if she stays in she only gets irritable. And I can't stand rows. Not any more. *(He stares in front of him)*. No use arguing with Phoebe anyway. Would you like some beer?

She shakes her head.

She just won't listen to you. Are you sure you won't? There's a damn great crate out in the kitchen, Frank brought it in this morning.