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John Osborne in Vienna”

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Hiermit bestätige ich diese Arbeit nach bestem Wissen und Gewissen selbständig verfasst und die Regeln der wissenschaftlichen Praxis eingehalten zu haben.



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## 1 Introduction

There is hardly a book of assessment of the British theatre that does not credit *Look Back in Anger* and the year 1956 with the start of a theatrical revolution in this country. Only yesterday in *The Times*, Philip Howard claimed it “changed the agenda of the theatre for its generation”. (Shulman, 11.6.1992)

The plays of John Osborne have been performed in many countries and had a considerable effect on theatre tradition. In 1956 *Look Back in Anger*, his first major success, both shocked and fascinated critics and audiences. It soon became clear that John Osborne had started a theatre revolution and the sprouting of the *Angry Young Men* movement can be identified as the aftermath of his success.

Milton Shulman, a theatre critic, who accompanied Osborne from the very beginning of his career (and also reviewed the premiere of *Look Back in Anger*) wrote about him in 1992:

[He] never has sought to be politically correct. But one does not have to subscribe to his outrageous diatribes against proselytizing homosexuals, aggressive feminists and intolerant idealists to recognize the witty quality of his idiosyncratic pen. (ibid.)

John Osborne was a writer with edges and definitely not a majority taste. When *Look Back in Anger* was staged in Vienna for the first time the audience and the theatre critics were overwhelmed, positively and negatively. In order to analyze these generally mixed receptions of John Osbornes work in Vienna it is important to take different factors into account: On the one hand it is essential to examine *who* staged and acted in his plays: Which theatres, directors and actors were involved in the productions? Which translation was used as basis for the stage text?

On the other hand further factors that have to be taken into consideration are the recent situation in Austria at the time of staging and the consequential *Zeitgeist*. As Osbornes plays have been staged in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1990s and after the year 2000 one can expect that the attitude of people towards the plays changed over the decades.

Finally, it is the theatre critics with their more or less opinion-leading function and their reviews that have to be taken into account, as it is their view that is spread all over Austria through the newspapers.

The aim of this paper is to examine possible reasons for John Osborne's success or failure in Vienna. In order to provide a methodical examination of the subject it will be based on the *theory of cultural transfer*. The main sources of material that will be used to analyze Osborne's "career" in Vienna are reviews from newspapers, original stage texts and also theatre programs.

## 2 Cultural transfer theory<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1 *The concept of cultural transfer*

The concept of cultural transfer was developed in the 1980s. Cultural transfer deals with the relationship between different cultures. Unlike other associated concepts it aims at investigating processes which are responsible for the circulation of cultural artefacts between cultural spaces.

Es dient also nicht der Analyse von kulturellen Kontakt- und Interferenzzonen, sondern der Untersuchung der transkulturellen Zirkulationsweisen von kulturellen Phänomenen. (Lüsebrink 2005a, 27)

Lüsebrink states that the term culture may here be understood in its anthropological sense and thus refers to the definition by Geert Hofstede who describes

Culture as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others (Hofstede, 4)

Processes of cultural transfer are able to affect all different dimensions of this understanding of culture.

Kulturtransfer [...] betrifft also nicht einen bestimmten kulturellen Sektor, sondern die Übertragung von Ideen, kulturellen Artefakte, Praktiken und Institutionen aus einem spezifischen System gesellschaftlicher Handlungs-, Verhaltens- und Deutungsmuster in ein anderes. (Lüsebrink 2005b, 129)

In order to analyze processes of cultural transfer it is important to work with parameters of comparison. Processes of cultural transfer are characterized through temporal and regional distances which allow us to compare different "forms of asymmetry"<sup>2</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lüsebrink 2005a in Mitterbauer „Ent-grenzte Räume“.

Cf. Lüsebrink „Interkulturelle Kommunikation“ Ch. 5 „Kulturtransfer“.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Werner cited in Lüsebrink 2005b p.131.

- *the temporal asymmetry*: the gap between the appearance of an artefact and its transfer into another cultural space
- *the regional-geographical asymmetry*: constitutes the “Kulturgefälle” within one cultural system (“higher” cultures exerting influence on “lower” cultures)
- *the multidimensional asymmetry*: a combination of temporal and regional asymmetry.

## 2.2 Structural elements of cultural transfer

Cultural transfer distinguishes three main areas of investigation: the cultural system of the source culture, the cultural system of the target culture and the cultural objects, discourses, texts and practices that are being transferred.

It is possible to differentiate the dynamic of cultural transfer into three processes:

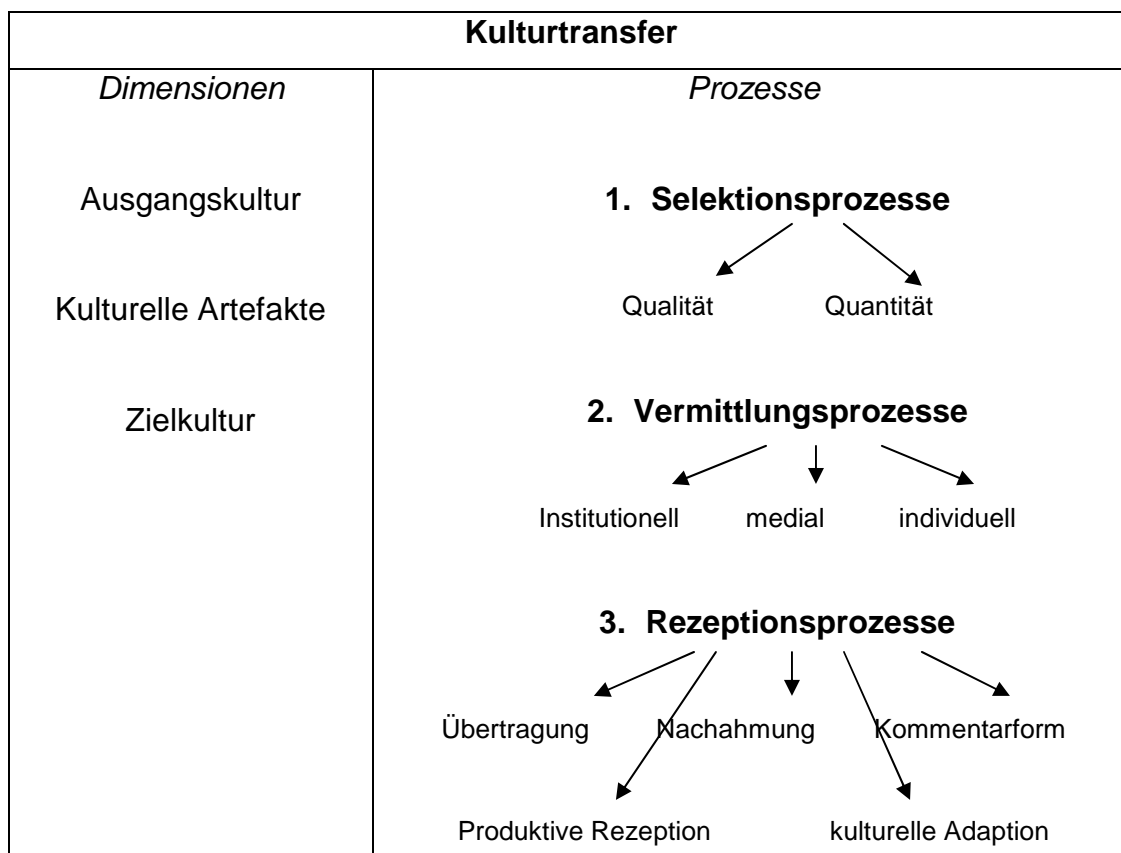


Illustration 1: structural elements of cultural transfer (ibid, 132)

First of all, there are different ways in which cultural artefacts are being **selected** by the source culture to get transferred into the target culture. In this case cultural transfer theory analyzes why certain texts, behaviors and media discourses are chosen for a transfer into another language- and culture space.

The second area of investigation deals with different kinds of **mediation processes**. Three different kinds of mediators can be distinguished:

To start with, there are the *personal mediators*, such as journalists, teachers from other countries, translators and many more. Subsequently there are also *institutions* which occupy themselves with the agency of culture, for instance governmental cultural departments or the cultural political bureaus of ministries of foreign affairs. But also publishers, bilingual TV-stations and institutions belong to this group of mediators. The third form of mediation is provided by the media as *intermediary instance*. Newspapers, radio broadcasts and audio-visual media transfer information and pictures into other cultural spaces.

Finally the **process of reception** builds a major area of cultural transfer theory.

Rezeptionsprozesse betreffen die Integration und dynamische Aneignung transferierter Diskurse, Texte, Objekte und Praktiken im sozialen und kulturellen Horizont der Zielkultur und im Kontext spezifischer Rezeptionsgruppen. (ibid., 133)

Lüsebrink distinguishes five forms of reception:

*Übertragung* (transmission) is aiming at the most accurate transfer (translation) of a cultural artefact. Through *Nachahmung* (imitation) it is provided that both, the foreign language and the foreign cultural pattern, are still clearly recognisable in a production of the artefact in the target culture. *Formen kultureller Adaption* (forms of cultural adaptation) apply to cultural changes of artefacts with regard to specifics of the target culture. This happens when - for example - the moral concepts or the registers of aesthetics vary. The term *Kommentarformen* (forms of comments) refers to the “discursive[n] Bedeutungsgebung und –interpretation”(ibid. p.134) that accompanies the transferred artefacts.

Finally the term *Produktive Rezeption* (productive reception) stands for forms of creative acquisition (not imitation!) and transformation of cultural artefacts. The process of productive reception often includes the integration and transformation of cultural artefacts in order to blur the boundaries between the foreign and one's own culture.

Additionally the reception of a literary artefact may also be influenced by its *paratext*.

Unter Paratext werden alle Textelemente verstanden, die einem literarischen Werk [...] von seinen Produzenten (Autor, Übersetzer, Verleger) beigefügt werden, um es den LeserInnen zu präsentieren und ihnen hierdurch gezielt eine bestimmte Bedeutung zu geben. (ibid, 144f)

The paratext consists of a "*peritext*", which includes all elements that are substantially connected with the literary piece, such as the title, the preface or headlines, and an "*epitext*" which is situated outside the literary work. A model for an epitext is for example an official comment, on the literary work in question, in an interview given by the author, translator or director.

In this paper the transferred artefacts which are being analyzed are the plays of John Osborne on their way from Great Britain to Austria. In order to examine their process of transfer it is of importance to adapt the theory of cultural transfer to our needs.

### ***2.3 Drama and cultural transfer***

The concept of cultural transfer is a useful tool in order to describe the transfer of John Osborne's dramatic works from the British into the Austrian culture, from an English speaking to a German-speaking society.

First of all the *process of selection* needs to be discussed. John Osborne wrote more than twenty plays for the stage but only five of them made it onto the Viennese stages. Which plays were staged in Vienna and which were not? Who, which person or institution, decided to stage Osborne's work, and why did they decide to stage those particular plays?



Furthermore it is important to take a look at the *process of mediation*. Who were the mediators that transferred the plays from England to Austria? Was a new play presented to the audience by a prestigious national theatre, as the Burgtheater, or by a small, private stage which probably did not have the resources to produce an appropriate performance? Which director was responsible for the staging? Who did he cast for this production and which translation of the original text did he use? All these issues need to be considered.

At last the *process of reception* necessitates examination. How were the plays and their staging received by the audience and in which way? Is it possible to identify reasons for a potential blockage or canonizations of Osborne's work? The most important source of research is provided by a wide range of newspaper reviews on the productions in question. Additionally an analysis of the stage texts might shed light on the positive and/or negative receptions of Osborne's plays.

### 3 John Osborne in Vienna

#### 3.1 Overview

From the late 1950s to the present a total of five plays by John Osborne were staged in Vienna. Compared to the list of all his dramatic achievements it is very significant to see how little of his plays have actually been produced in Vienna:

<b>Title</b>	<b>1st performance</b>
<b>The Devil Inside</b>	1950
<b>The Great Bear</b>	1951 (never produced)
<b>Personal Enemy</b>	1955
<b>Look Back in Anger</b>	1956
<b>The Entertainer</b>	1957
<b>Epitaph for George Dillon</b>	1958
<b>The World Of Paul Slickey</b>	1959
<b>Luther</b>	1961
<b>Plays for England</b>	1962
<b>Inadmissible Evidence</b>	1964
<b>A Patriot For Me</b>	1965
<b>A Bond Honoured</b>	1966
<b>The Hotel In Amsterdam</b>	1968
<b>Time Present</b>	1968
<b>West Of Suez</b>	1971
<b>A Sense Of Detachment</b>	1972
<b>Hedda Gabler</b>	1972
<b>A Place Calling Itself Rome</b>	(1973)
<b>The End Of Me Old Cigar</b>	1975
<b>The Picture Of Dorian Gray</b>	1975
<b>Watch It Come Down</b>	1976
<b>Try A Little Tenderness</b>	(1978)
<b>The Father</b>	1989
<b>Déjàvu</b>	1992

All the plays staged in Vienna were written within the first ten years after Osborne's first success *Look Back in Anger*. Those five plays that were eventually transferred from England to Austria led to eight separate productions:

Year	Play	Stage
1958	Blick zurück im Zorn	Volkstheater
1959	Epitaph für George Dillon	Kleines Theater der Josefstadt im Konzerthauskeller
1965	Richter in eigener Sache	Akademietheater
1970	Ein Patriot für mich – Der Fall Redl	Volkstheater
1973	Blick zurück im Zorn	Kleines Theater in der Josefstadt im Konzerthauskeller
1994	Blick zurück im Zorn	Ensemble Theater
1994	Der Entertainer	Theater in der Josefstadt
2003	Der Entertainer	Burgtheater

Produced three times, *Look Back in Anger* was the most popular play of Viennese theatre-directors. Its first staging in 1958 took place at the Volkstheater, which belongs to one of the major stages in Vienna. The second and third stagings were produced on smaller stages, both of which resemble “Kellerbühnen”.

*Epitaph for George Dillon*, *Inadmissible Evidence* and *A Patriot for Me* were put on stage only once. While *Epitaph for George Dillon* could be seen on the small stage of a cellar theatre, *Inadmissible Evidence* and *A Patriot for me* seemed to be promising enough to fill the bigger auditoriums of Akademietheater and Volkstheater.

Finally, 37 years after its world premiere, *The Entertainer* was staged at the Theater in der Josefstadt in 1994 and then again at the Burgtheater in 2003. Possible reasons for this delayed transfer will be discussed later.

### 3.2 Austrian theatre tradition vs. John Osborne

For a long time Vienna has been the most important theatrical center of German-speaking Europe. This changed after World War I and II afflicted the

country. But still the Austrian theatre tradition remained. Yates describes the Viennese theatre convention as the following:

Theatre there has always meant not 'literary' drama but entertainment genuinely founded in the practical theatre, with vivid stage effects and often with music.(Yates 1996, 9)

The Viennese theatre landscape was coined by artists like Ferdinand Raimund and Johann Nepomuk Nestroy who wrote comedies and farces rather than socio-critical drama. It was not before the beginning of the twentieth century that beside "the large self-consciously 'bourgeois' theatres [...], smaller and more intimate theaters, suited for smaller forms, now began to be in vogue." (ibid, 17) In these theatres the focus was to create atmospheres rather than to develop dramatic actions. After World War II the tradition of the *Kellertheater*<sup>3</sup> was revived. They were often founded by young actors who could not get work at the big theatres or simply were not satisfied with the repertoire these theatres had to offer. The *Kellertheater* became a platform for those who did not want to play conventional drama but experiment with contemporary plays. Despite this progressive development comedies and farces continued to be the majority taste of the audiences. John Osborne's work did not meet the taste of most of Austrian theatre-goers. His plays were definitely far from being comedies or farces and seemed to be rather hard to digest for the Viennese audience.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. <http://aeiou.iicm.tugraz.at/aeiou.encyclp.k/k281423.htm> Kellertheater.

## 4 Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*

Osborne's breakthrough-play *Look Back in Anger* was fated to become his flagship. It was *the* play that made him famous over night and would accompany him for the rest of his life. "An older, reminiscing Osborne would put it far less grandly: it 'fixed me like a butterfly in a glass cage.'" (Gilleman, 45)

*Look Back in Anger* was also responsible for the term "Angry Young Men" that subsequently was used to describe Osborne and other young British dramatists who gave vent to their displeasure with the establishment.

On the following pages the reception of the London premiere and the Viennese productions of the play will be described and examined.

### 4.1 *Look Back in Anger* (1956)

*Look Back in Anger* premiered on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May in 1956 at the Royal Court Theatre in London. It was produced by the English Stage Company and directed by Tony Richardson. The cast comprised the following actors:

Kenneth Haigh	<i>Jimmy Porter</i>
Alan Bates	<i>Cliff Lewis</i>
Mary Ure	<i>Alison Porter</i>
Helena Hughes	<i>Helena Charles</i>
John Welsh	<i>Colonel Redfern</i>

The success of the play had not been guaranteed from the very beginning. At first the play drew little critical attention. Osborne himself said about the first night:

The first night audience, if they were conscious, seemed transfixed by a tone of voice that was quite alien to them. They were ill at ease; they had not rules of conduct as to how to respond. The obvious one was to walk out, which some did, but with only a vague idea why. Boredom and anger may have contributed, but mostly they were adrift, like Eskimos watching a Restoration Comedy. (Heilpern, 168)

*Look Back in Anger* was something entirely new to the audience and also for the English theatre landscape. The immediate response of the press was not encouraging at all.

The theatre reviews of the first night show that the play itself has not been approved. The critics were taken aback by what they had seen. They too were “ill at ease” and “had no rules of conduct as to how to respond”. Most of them therefore decided to condemn the play. However, some of the critics seemed to have been fascinated by Osborne and his technique of drama-writing. Hence most of the reviews contained negative comments on the play but also very positive ones on John Osborne as a promising playwright:

They [the management of the royal court theatre] have not discovered a masterpiece, but they have discovered a dramatist of outstanding promise. (Cecil Wilson, Daily Mail)

Look Back in Anger by John Osborne at the Royal Court Theatre sets up a wailing wall for the latest post-war generation of under-thirties. It aims at being a despairing cry but achieves only the stature of a self-pitying snivel.

[...] But beneath the rasping, negative whine of this play one can distinguish the considerable promise of its author. Mr. John Osborne has a dazzling aptitude for provoking and stimulating dialogue, and he draws characters with firm, convincing strokes. When he stops being angry – or when he lets us in on what he is angry about – he may write a very good play. (Milton Shulman, Evening Standard)

[Jimmy Porter], perhaps, should have gone to a psychiatrist rather than a dramatist – not at any rate to one writing a first play. (Patrick Gibbs, The Daily Telegraph)

One positive review was written by John Barber from the *Daily Express*. As he was still very young and not influential enough to conquer the entire negative critiques that have been quoted so far he did not seem to be able to convince the public. His review was a very enthusiastic one:

[Look Back in Anger] is intense, angry feverish, undisciplined. It is even crazy. But it is young, young, young.

Why is he so angry? He is young, frustrated, unhappy. In fact, he is like thousands of young Londoners today... (John Barber, Daily Express)

After those reviews *Look Back in Anger* seemed to be fated to close down after only a few performances. Fortunately, the Sunday newspapers saved the play. Kenneth Tynan, who was already a very influential theatre critic at the time, expressed his enthusiasm for the play as follows: "I doubt if I could love anyone who did not wish to see *Look Back in Anger*. It is the best young play of this decade." (Kenneth Tynan, Observer)

Tynan found another supporter in Harold Hobson who wrote about John Osborne that "he is a writer of outstanding promise, and the English Stage Company is to be congratulated on discovering him." (Harold Hobson, Sunday Times)

Those two reviews seemed to be able to turn the wheel around. Afterwards John Osborne was even interviewed and photographed by the *Picture Post*. Although the play was now critically celebrated it still played to disappointing business.

A possible reason for that can be found in the review of Tynan who writes:

I agree that *Look Back in Anger* is likely to remain a minority taste. What matters, however, is the size of the minority. I estimate it a roughly 6,733,000, which is the number of people in this country between the ages of twenty and thirty. (Kenneth Tynan, Observer)

The problem was that the people of this younger age group were not a generation of theatre-goers, they preferred to watch TV. For that reason it was decided to show an eighteen-minute excerpt from the play on BBC TV. The plan worked out and soon the theatre was filled with young people night after night. *Look Back in Anger* finally became a success.

After its success in London, the play was promptly produced as a tour production and toured Great Britain. In 1957 *Look Back in Anger* was even produced on Broadway. There it was nominated for three Tony Awards including *Best Play* and *Best Dramatic Actress* (Mary Ure) and the New York Critics Circle chose it to be the best foreign play of the 1957/58 season.

## 4.2 *Blick zurück im Zorn* (1958)

When the play reached Vienna in 1958 it had already been successfully staged in Russia, America and Germany. One and a half years after its world premiere the German speaking premiere of *Blick zurück im Zorn* took place at the Schlosspark-Theater in Berlin.

In contrast to other countries the reception of the play in Austria was ambivalent. In order to understand the reception of *Blick zurück im Zorn* in Vienna it is important to look at the Austrian context of that time.

### 4.2.1 Austrian context<sup>4</sup>

Since a play is always performed at a particular point of time, it goes without saying how important it is to take a look at the circumstances in which it is performed. Recent political or economical actions may have an influence on the view of the people who watch the play.

After the end of the Second World War in 1945, the situation in Austria was not unproblematic. Although a declaration of independence was signed in April 1945, and the second republic was founded, Austria still had to undergo ten years of occupation. British, American, Russian and French military forces ruled over different parts of the country. All four of them could be found in its capital, Vienna.

The years after the war were characterized by reconstruction and the foundation of an effective government. After 1950 it was already possible to notice economic growth and domestic stability. The system of "Sozialpartnerschaft", which generally provided the mediation between employers and employees, was responsible for the gradual increase of salaries and the dropping of the unemployment rate. The economic development that took place due to the reconstruction was also accountable for the prevailing wealth, which Austria and its population had never experienced before. This new prosperity affected people of all ranks and became noticeable in almost every domain. The number of newly erected

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Vocelka, p.316ff.



houses was dramatically increased, the infrastructure improved and new power plants provided the necessary energy.

Also the cultural life (e.g. theatre), which had suffered greatly under the war, began to flourish again. It was characterized by the terms *continuity* and *new-start*. On the one hand it seemed very important for Austrian identity to re-establish old traditions - theatres, for example, were reopened with performances of Nestroy's and Raimund's work - on the other hand a number of new cultural festivals – from Bregenz to Mörbisch - were founded. Some of these produced traditional repertoire, others also encouraged more modern forms of theatre.

#### 4.2.2 Expectations

More than two years after its premiere at the Royal Court Theatre the Viennese *Volkstheater* decided to stage *Look Back in Anger*. The director at that time was Leon Epp<sup>5</sup>. Under his directorship the Volkstheater was known as “das tapferste Theater von Wien” and his repertoire included many contemporary dramatists. Besides John Osborne he also staged works by Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Sean O'Casey, Tennessee Williams and many more. He knew how hard it would be to convince the Austrian audience to accept new plays:

Es ist furchtbar schwer, in Wien mit zeitgenössischer Literatur durchzudringen. Der Wiener hat da einen Schutzpanzer um sich aufgerichtet. Was nicht 50 bis 60 Jahre alt ist, das läßt er nicht an sein Gemüt heran. Gegen diese Lethargie, diesen Schutzpanzer anzukämpfen, ist die Aufgabe meiner Spielplangestaltung. (Leon Epp cited in Breitenecker 1991, 60)

The expectations of the critics were high. The reputation of the play had been rushing ahead and it was therefore eagerly awaited by the press. These prospects were mirrored in a couple of theatre reviews. Rudolf Holzer (*Wiener Zeitung*) stated, “Es soll mutmaßlich eines der Zeitstücke sein, die

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Breitenecker 1991.

den seelischen Zustand der derzeitigen anglikanischen Intelligenz schildern.“ and made clear that he knew what he had to expect when taking his seat at the Volkstheater. Hans Heinz Hahnl from the newspaper *Neue Zeit* formulated his view more concrete:

Was haben wir nicht alles über diesen jungen Osborne und seine zornigen Helden gelesen und gehört. Nichts fördert die Legendenbildung sosehr wie Unkenntnis. Nun haben wir ihn kennengelernt, den zornigen jungen Mann, und es ist aus mit der Legende. (Hahnl in Neue Zeit)

This statement can be claimed to summarize the overall reception of the play in Vienna correctly. The expectations were not fulfilled. But in order to substantiate this declaration it is necessary to analyze the theatre reviews in detail.

### 4.2.3 The Reception

The Austrian premiere took place on 30th of August 1958. The play was directed by Gustav Manker, who was also responsible for the décor. The cast was as follows:

Walter Kohut	<i>Jimmy Porter</i>
Edd Stavjanik	<i>Cliff Lewis</i>
Traute Wassler	<i>Alison Porter</i>
Evi Servaes	<i>Helena Charles</i>
Egon Jordan	<i>Colonel Redfern</i>

The analysis of the reception will differentiate between various aspects of the performance. In a first step the opinions and reactions about the play itself will be collected and discussed. Then a look at the attitude of the critics towards John Osborne as a dramatist will give an interesting insight. This will be followed by an analysis of the comments about the production and the actors. And finally, an investigation of the references of the audience's reaction will round off the analysis of *Look Back in Anger's* first performance in Vienna.

#### 4.2.3.1 The Play

The opinions about the play varied. They reached from “Das Stück ist brillant geschrieben” (Peter Weiser, Salzburger Nachrichten) to „vom Dramatischen ist es kaum ein Kunstwerk zu nennen“. (Erik G. Wickenburg)

Most critics point out that this play is Osborne’s first work and comment on its structural weakness but also its innovative plot. The following quotations can illustrate this:

Das Stück hat manche Erstlingschwächen, unter denen allzulange ausgespinnene, wohl zornige, aber undramatische und papieren raschelnde Rückblicksdeklamationen längst nicht alle sind. (huba in Arbeiter Zeitung)

Es wirkt faszinierend und einigermaßen bedenklich, wie das Chaos und die Formlosigkeit in diesem dramatischen Erstling übersichtlich und ordentlich zu einem konventionellen Theaterstück geformt sind. (Hans Weigel, Neuer Kurier)

In diesem nicht nur realistischen, sondern geradezu naturalistischen Stück – meisterhafte Dialoge! – ersteht ein Sinnbild des heutigen Menschen, der, versumpft er nicht innerlich, ein „Revolutionär ohne Ziel“ ist wie Jimmy. (Karl Maria Grimme, Österreichische Neue Tageszeitung)

Es zeigt die Schwächen und Stärken eines typischen Jungwerkes: überlange Monologe für ein künstlich übersteigertes Thema, aber auch echte Konflikte der jungen Menschen von heute. (Dr. S. St. in Stimme der Frau)

The main points of critique were the “unreasonable” length of the monologues and the “papierene raschelnde” language, which may have been caused by an insufficient translation. Still they seemed to be fascinated by this “naturalistic” play.

Not well received were the plot-line and the characters. According to them, four out of five characters were "klare Exemplare von Sonderfällen psychischen, nervlichen und moralischen Verfalles" (Holzer, WZ) and "die Unwahrscheinlichkeit der Handlung" (Hahnl SN) could not be compensated through “geschickte Aktschlüsse” (ibid).

A further possible reason for the ambivalent reception of the play is given by Hahl:

Osborne hat den Typ des unzufriedenen jungen Mannes von heute im Guten und Bösen völlig verzeichnet. Was daran stimmen mag, bezieht sich auf englische Verhältnisse, die uns nichts angehen. (ibid)

Hahl is one of two critics who mention one of the main hurdles of the reception, namely the British context of the play. Austrian audiences seemed to feel alienated about the play because it described situations of a society that they could not comprehend. The second one to affirm this view is the theatre critic of the Wiener Montag "E.W." who says:

Für den Broadway das „beste Stück des Jahres“, gut so, aber für das Wiener Theaterpublikum – nein, für die Wiener war diese infernalische Jugendbotschaft doch zu frech, zu leer, zu gestaltlos. (E.W., Wiener Montag)

#### 4.2.3.2 The Author

In their reviews the Austrian theatre critics introduced the new playwright John Osborne to the Austrian people. They informed their readership about who he was, where he came from and what reputation he had earned himself so far. They were also informed about the *Angry Young Men* movement.

Der englische Dramatiker John Osborne ist der Chefideologe jener britischen Nachkriegsgeneration, die sich als „Angry young men“ (zornige junge Leute) in den letzten zwei Jahren vor allem literarisch bemerkbar gemacht hat und ein Gegenstück zur „Beat-Generation“ Amerikas ist, als dessen Idol der verstorbene Filmschauspieler James Dean auch heute noch gilt. (Peter Weiser, Salzburger Nachrichten)

Osborne's talent was praised by most critics. They seemed to like this new style of writing that they had not experienced before. One of the critics gives the impression to be glad that someone new has reached Austria:

Der englische Autor John Osborne, den sein Erstlingswerk „Blick zurück im Zorn“ über Nacht berühmt gemacht hat, scheint eine der großen dramatischen Begabungen zu sein an denen unsere Zeit solchen Mangel leidet. (Dr.J, Kleines Volksblatt)

With this statement Dr.J might have alluded to the current situation in the Austrian theatre landscape. In the 1950s, Austria had re-discovered the traditional *Volksstück*.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the “high culture” shown at the Burgtheater it can be described as its simple, entertaining, and “low culture” counterpart. The plot is mostly about the struggle and happiness of the lower and middle classes and often also includes social-criticism. Important authors were Ludwig Anzengruber, Johann Nepomuk Nestroy and Ferdinand Raimund. By 1958 Austria had undergone a dry spell of innovative authors and therefore the declaration of Dr.J. is reasonable.

#### 4.2.3.3 The Production

This production of *Blick Zurück Im Zorn* was directed by Gustav Manker<sup>7</sup>. Manker, who has been working for the Volkstheater since 1938, had studied acting and directing under Max Reinhardt and simultaneously had learned the art of stage décor. From 1938 onwards he was employed by the Volkstheater as stage designer, in 1942 he also started directing various productions. Under the directorate of Leon Epp (1952-1968) Manker became the most important director at the Volkstheater and also the chief of stage design. In 1968 he succeeded Epp and stayed theatre director until 1979.

For *Blick Zurück Im Zorn* he also created the stage décor, which was very well received and felt to be adequate. The critics spoke of a “milieugerechte[s], naturalistische[s]” (Karl Maria Grimme, Österr. Neue Tageszeitung) and a “drückend dumpfe[s] Bühnenbild” (F.K., Neues Österreich).

The theatre critics’ voices about the production as such were generally positive. Although criticizing the weaknesses of the play, they seemed to appreciate the way Gustav Manker has dealt with it.

Das Volkstheater bietet eine respektable Aufführung. Gustav Manker hat als Regisseur und Bühnenbildner verknüpft und verdichtet: es ist ihm gelungen, die zerflatternden Gedanken und Anklagen im

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Deutsch-Schreiner, p.75ff.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Kenschill, p.1ff.

Brennspiegel eines Menschlichen Gemütes zu konzentrieren. (Dr.J, Kleines Volksblatt)

Dr. J from the newspaper Kleines Volksblatt credits Manker with the improvement of the play. According to him, Manker was contrived to shorten the right passages without losing any of the plays essential character. Friedrich Heer writes about “die unverminderte Spannung, das Vibrierende“(Friedrich Heer, Die Furche) that Osborne was aiming for and which Manker managed to preserve.

Gustav Manker inszenierte dieses Stück am Wiener Volkstheater hervorragend. Die Aufführung hat (wie das Stück) Dramatik, Poesie und Humor. Und ein (von innen her) starkes Tempo, dass es dem Publikum kaum jemals zum Bewusstsein kommt, dass es Zeuge von Gesprächen statt von Ereignissen ist. (Peter Weiser, Salzburger Nachrichten)

Peter Weiser praised the play and also the work of Gustav Manker. According to him Manker did everything necessary to make the play easier to digest for the Austrian audience. As the traditional Viennese theatre-goer of that time enjoyed plays that were funny and had a plotline that was easy to follow, *Look Back in Anger* was not a candidate for a major success. Manker managed to direct the play in such a manner that its pace captivated the audience and made them forget that they were not watching a traditional play.

However, there was one major point of critique concerning the production: the translation of the play. Several critics pointed out that they were not convinced by the language used in the production. Hans Weigel talks about “vorzüglich sprechbaren (von Hans Sahl leider unzureichend übersetzten) Dialogen“ (Hans Weigel, Neuer Kurier) while the Arbeiter Zeitung claims to have witnessed „undramatische und papieren raschelnde Rückblicksdeklamationen“ (huba, Arbeiter Zeitung).

The critic of the Arbeiter Zeitung complained even further about the translation and its effect on the audience:

Der Eindruck des Stückes auf das Publikum war stark; er wäre wahrscheinlich noch stärker gewesen, hätte man das wie bei den meisten Übersetzungen auch hier produzierte Papierdeutsch einer

Schriftsprache mit all der zur Deklamation verleitenden Unnatürlichkeit ihrer Imperfeksätze, in eine natürliche „Redesprache“ aufgelockert; was besonders den Monologen (und ihren Sprechern) dieser interessanten Aufführung gut getan hätte, die mit starkem und herzlichem Beifall bedankt wurden. (ibid.)

The translation that was available in 1958 was written by Hans Sahl. He was the first author to translate *Look Back in Anger* into German. Later he also translated further plays by Osborne. In order to understand what the critics complain about it is crucial to turn to the topic of drama translation. A brief excursus should illustrate this.

#### **4.2.3.3.1 Digression: John Osborne's language and its translatability**

Osborne's language style is different from the style that his colleagues used at that time. Instead of sticking to old traditions in drama-writing he used an innovative manner of writing. While, in the 1950s, others wrote drawing-room comedies that were set in the upper middle class or bourgeoisie, Osborne's work was set in the lower middle class or working class.<sup>8</sup> He wanted to convey the language of everyday speech, and shock with its bluntness. But not only was his use of vocabulary different. When taking a look at the text of *Look Back in Anger* the amount of stage directions given by Osborne is striking. Those seemed to be important since the theatrical language that Osborne introduced was completely new to the actors.

Actors needed to develop an ear for the give and take of language, for the logic of the language game. Since characters now rarely meant what they said, in fact, used language mainly strategically, actors had to pay more attention to swiftly changing interactional dynamics. The "how" and "why" of language sometimes became more important than the "what." Once audience and performers had assimilated the new acting and dialogue conventions, Osborne's stage directions became less conspicuously present. (Gilleman, 49)

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Gilleman, p.48ff

For a translator it is “quite” easy to translate the *what* of an utterance, but it is hard to give an utterance the right connotations that might also imply the *why* that the author intended. Hans Sahl, the translator of Osborne’s work, brought the problem to the point when he wrote that “jede Übersetzung ist ein Steinwurf nach dem Ziel, das nur annäherungsweise erreicht werden kann”(Sahl, 104). He also claimed that it is very hard to translate texts into German because of the range of this language space.

[...] ein ins Deutsche übertragenes Stück muß in Wien, Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg, München und Zürich gespielt werden, was zur Folge hat, daß der Übersetzer sich einer Idealsprache bedienen und es dem Regisseur respektive den Schauspielern überlassen muß, sie jeweils mit Lokalkolorit einzufärben. (Sahl, 105)

In *Look Back in Anger* a passage can be found where Jimmy is looking for a word to describe his wife Alison. It is a good example to illustrate how difficult it can be to find an appropriate translation.

**Jimmy** I looked up that word the other day, It’s one of those words I’ve never been quite sure of, but always thought I knew.

**Cliff** What was that?

**Jimmy** I told you – pusillanimous. Do you know what it means?

*Cliff shakes his head*

Neither did I really. All this time, I have been married to this woman, this monument to non-attachment, and suddenly I discover that there is actually a word that sums her up. Not just an adjective in the English language to describe her with – it’s her name! Pusillanimous! It sounds like some fleshy Roman matron, doesn’t it?

[...]

**Alison** God help me, if he doesn’t stop, I’ll go out of my mind in a minute.

**Jimmy** Why don’t you? That would be something, anyway. (*crosses to chest of drawers R*) But I haven’t told you what it means yet, have I? (*picks up dictionary*) I don’t have to tell her – she knows. In fact, if my pronunciation is at fault, she’ll probably wait for a suitable public moment to correct it. Here it is. I quote: 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. (*slams book shut*) That’s my wife! That’s



*her* isn't it? Behold the Lady Pusillanimous. (*shouting hoarsely*) Hi, Pusey! When's your next picture?<sup>9</sup>

The word that Jimmy has found for Alison is *pusillanimous*, which, translated into German, means *kleinmütig, verzagt*. There is no foreign word for it in German which makes it hard for this dialogue to be translated appropriately. Hans Sahl's translation of this dialogue is as follows:

**Jimmy** Es gibt im Englischen<sup>10</sup> ein Wort, das auf meine Frau und ihre Familie genau zutrifft-

(Alison stützt sich auf das Bügelbrett und schließt die Augen.)

**Alison** Ich werde wahnsinnig, wenn er nicht sofort aufhört.

**Jimmy** Warum wirst du's nicht? Das wär' noch etwas. (*geht zum Büchergestell und nimmt das Wörterbuch heraus*) Falls meine Aussprache nicht korrekt sein sollte, so wird Alison mich sofort korrigieren, wie sie das ja immer vor allen Leuten und im ungeeignetsten Augenblick zu tun pflegt. Also, das Wort heißt: „Pusillanimous“. Geschrieben: p-u-s-i-l-l-a-n-i-m-o-u-s. Adjektiv. Es bedeutet: Mangel an Charakterfestigkeit, Kleinmut, Engherzigkeit, Börsartigkeit, Feigheit. Vom Lateinischen „pusillus“, sehr klein, und animus, der Geist. (schlägt das Buch zu) Da bin ich nun die ganze Zeit mit dieser Frau verheiratet, diesem Monument der Gleichgültigkeit, und plötzlich finde ich ein Wort, das alle ihre Eigenschaften zusammenfaßt, ihre Lieblosigkeit, ihre Lethargie, ihre Unbeteiligtheit...<sup>11</sup>

It is evident that the German version of this scene is shorter than and not as dissipated as the English one. Hans Sahl has decided to shorten the dialogue and make it more compact. The problematic issue with Osborne's use of the word “pusillanimous” was solved by *not* translating it. Sahl decided to adopt the word and add the clarification “im Englischen gibt es”. So he was able to avoid cutting out this part of the scene, as it makes only sense when a word that needs explanation is used here. The German equivalent *verzagt* would not have been able to create the same effect.

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<sup>9</sup> Look Back in Anger (London: Faber & Faber, 1996) p.16f.

<sup>10</sup> The underlined passage was omitted in the Viennese stage text.

<sup>11</sup> Blick zurück im Zorn (Original Bühnentext Volkstheater 1958) p.25f

#### 4.2.3.4 The Actors

Selten sah man auf einer Wiener Bühne junge Menschen so richtig und doch künstlerisch in erwachsener Manier dargestellt. Vom Sinn her, ohne Mätzchen und atmosphärische Verspieltheit wird geredet, agiert, gelebt. (Hans Weigel, Neuer Kurier)

The ensemble of this production was critically acclaimed of. According to several critics it was them that made the play “bearable” at all.

Walter Kohut<sup>12</sup> played the role of Jimmy Porter. He was best known for his interpretations of dubious and mean characters. Besides his work for the theatre he was also a sought-after actor for movies. The critics praised him for his role-interpretation in *Blick zurück im Zorn* and described it as “[e]ine vollkommene, getreuste neuropathische Studie”. (Rudolf Holzer, Wiener Zeitung)

Edd Stavjanik<sup>13</sup>, who had started his career at the Volkstheater and later switched to the Burgtheater, played Cliff and “brillierte als blitzableitender Freund” (Peter Weiser, Salzburger Nachrichten). Hans Weigel especially accredited his performance. In his opinion Stavjanik managed to insert his role harmonically into the plot although the author had only thought of it as “Gegenbild” to Jimmy Porter.

The two women, Traute Waßler and Evi Servaes, and their performances of Alison and Helena were generally approved of. Traute Waßler was even critically praised:

Tragisches Zentrum aber, dem scheinbaren Helden zum Trotz, wird Traute Waßler, die, fern von aller Sentimentalität, im Leiden und Verstummen, im Ausbrechen und gläubigen Dulden viel Wahrhaftigkeit und noble Fraulichkeit ins Spiel bringt. (Hans Weigel, Neuer Kurier)

Evi Servaes was given credit for managing her role so well, although the part of Helena was not the most elaborated one: „Sie macht aus der am wenigsten ergiebigen Rolle mit sparsamsten Mitteln die vielleicht interessanteste Figur“. (Peter Weiser, Salzburger Nachrichten)

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter\\_Kohut](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Kohut)

<sup>13</sup> Cf. [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edd\\_Stavjanik](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edd_Stavjanik).

Finally, it was Egon Jordan who held the part of Alison's father, Colonel Redfern. Rudolf Holzer claimed that "Egon Jordan [...] bestätigte überzeugend durch Noblesse und Kultur den begreiflichen Haß des Proleten Jimmy." (Rudolf Holzer, Wiener Zeitung)

#### 4.2.3.5 The Audience

Fortunately, the theatre reviewers of the 1950s still held the tradition of describing the audience's reactions, thus it is easier to comprehend how the audience received the play and its production. In later reviews only very little of them mention these occurrences.

When it comes to *Blick zurück im Zorn* it is interesting to see the variations in their descriptions:

Die Schauspieler und ihr Regisseur hatten für lebhaften Beifall des beeindruckten Premierenpublikums zu danken. (Hans Weigel, Neuer Kurier)

Das brave, folgsame Volkstheaterpublikum zollte – offenbar den Künstlern – warmen und reichen Beifall. (Rudolf Holzer, Wiener Zeitung)

Das Publikum ging, nachdem der erste Schock vorüber war, freundlich und verständnisvoll mit. (o.m.f., Presse)

Das verlegen applaudierende Publikum hatte das Theater als moralische Anstalt der Halbstarcken erlebt. (E.W., Wiener Montag)

The description of the applause ranges from "lebhaft" and "reich" to "verlegen". The critic's descriptions are of course very subjective. Their perception of the atmosphere in the theatre did very much depend on their own reception of the play. Hans Weigel, who wrote a very positive critique, was sure to have experienced "lebhaften Beifall". While on the other hand, E.W. from the Wiener Montag, tells us that the audience was embarrassed. But generally speaking the reviews show that there was applause to appreciate the actors and the director.

#### 4.2.4 Conclusion

Taking the theory of cultural transfer into consideration it is possible to explain part of the reaction of the Austrian press and the play's reception.

First of all it is quite plausible why Leo Epp selected *Look Back in Anger* as one of the plays staged at the Volkstheater: it was a huge success in many of the places it was staged before. Epp therefore must have counted on a success in Austria as well, even though he knew how hard it would be to convince the Viennese audience. The critic's accounts on their expectations confirm this view.

Different people were involved in the mediation process of the play. Hans Sahl, who, by translating the play, worked as a mediator, did an insufficient job. The translation was not being approved of. Gustav Manker, who was also involved in the mediation process by directing the play, did not manage to process the translation in order to make it sound less alien to the audience.

The reviews show that the actors, with their performances, managed to present Osborne's characters accurately. Together with the setting the director was able to create the correct atmosphere. Overall it shows that the people involved in the production tried to stage the play as authentically as possible.

Although the staging itself fulfilled all criteria to be a good and appropriate one, not all the critics were convinced. The play itself was well received even though one can find remarks which show that some aspects of the plot were not being agreed with. The Austrian audience was not able to relate to Jimmy's anger. They lived in a country that was gradually improving after times of war and occupation, while the character of Jimmy railed against the establishment that did not affect the Austrians at all. They simply could not comprehend the mood of the play as they experienced the complete opposite in their country. Here it is possible to see that the distance, both geographical and cultural, was the main aspect that prevented a successful transfer of the play to Austria.

*Blick zurück im Zorn* cannot be said to have been a failure in Vienna, but it was not a success either. The opinions about the production were

ambivalent. While almost all the reviews showed to be in favour of the actors and the director, only a couple approved of the play being staged in Vienna. Still Leo Epp is to credit with being brave enough to bring this play to Austria as it definitely enriched the Austrian theatre repertoire.

### 4.3 *Blick zurück im Zorn* (1973)

Fifteen years after its first staging in Vienna *Blick zurück im Zorn* experienced a revival at the “Kleines Theater im Konzerthaus”<sup>14</sup> under the direction of Franz Stoß and Ernst Haeusserman. This location had been part of the *Theater in der Josefstadt* since 1957. It was used for staging more modern and experimental plays. By the time when *Blick zurück im Zorn* was staged it had already passed its climax and attracted less theatre-goers. The main problem was that on the one hand the “regular” Josefstadt audience was alienated by the plays that were shown, although they liked the actors with whom they were already familiar. On the other hand, the young, new audience that was attracted by the theatre’s repertoire felt disturbed by the *Josefstadt*-actors, who did seem to be miscast.

Die darauffolgenden Abende mit dem Theater der Jugend garantierten zwar die Einkünfte für die Josefstadt weiterhin, doch die Zuschauerzahlen wurden immer geringer. [...] In den folgenden Jahren wurden die Zahlen der Aufführungen herabgesetzt, das Theater hatte eigentlich nur mehr eine Alibifunktion. Unter Direktor Ernst Haeusserman wurde diese Ausweichbühne dann im Jahr 1977 geschlossen. (Hauer, 47)

One can conclude that the prerequisites for a success of *Blick zurück im Zorn* were not given. The play was part of a series called “Theater von gestern”. The intention of this cycle was to make successful dramas available to a new generation of theatre-goers. The *Theater in der Josefstadt* itself was not known for its experimentalism. The “Josefstadt” (as most people abbreviate its name) relied on comedies and farces, had a constant cast, and an audience that was mainly in hold of season tickets.

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Hauer, Andrea. 44ff.

A possible intention of the Josefstadt to revive the play can be found in Arthur West's review which refers to the play's success:

In solch beruhigender, durch siebzehn Jahre bekräftigter Gewißheit konnte das Wiener Theater in der Josefstadt in seinem vergleichsweise noch mutigsten Etablissement, dem Theaterchen im Konzerthaus, das Osborne-Werk nun füglich herausbringen. (Arthur West, Volksstimme)

The staging took place in the basement of the *Konzerthaus*. This "Theaterchen", which West describes as the braver part of the Josefstadt, should have been the ideal place for staging *Blick zurück im Zorn*, since in order to get across the feelings and atmosphere created by the play it is of advantage to use a smaller theatre. Nevertheless this production was not received positively. One could even say that its reception was devastating. The main reason for this can be attributed to the years that have elapsed since its first staging.

Trifft der Weltekel von Anno 1956 noch schmerzlich einen Nerv unserer Zeit? Oder weckt die böse Bitterkeit der Jimmy Porters nur noch melancholische Erinnerungen? John Osbornes „Blick zurück im Zorn“ war einmal mehr als ein Theaterstück; das war die Weltanschauung einer verlorenen Generation, die sich in den ausschweifenden Haßtiraden eines Jimmy Porter artikuliert. Die zornigen jungen Männer von damals sind heute Anfang der Vierzig und mehr oder weniger gesetzte Herren, ihre Rebellion ohne Ziel aus einem Gefühl der Ohnmacht und Verlassenheit ist durch neue, anderer Jugendrevolten abgelöst worden, die eine heile Welt der Utopie propagierten oder auf der Flucht vor der Gesellschaft in den Rausch im Katzenjammer endeten. (Harald Sterk, Arbeiterzeitung)

Siebzehn nicht eben entwicklungsarme Jahre sind ins britische wie ins sonstige Land gezogen, seit ein junger Mann, John Osborne, in Zorn geraten angesichts des ersten großen Nachkriegs-Katzenjammers der Bürgerwelt [...]. (Arthur West, Volksstimme)

Traces of this view can be found throughout all the newspaper reviews. Terms used to describe the play - amongst others - were "Museumsstück" and "Bühnen-Oldie". The connotations of those terms reflect the mood of the reception. But also the term "Bildungsgut", with its less offensive connotation, could be found in the reviews.

### 4.3.1 The Austrian context<sup>15</sup>

1970 marked the beginning of the “socialist era” in Austria, but before that a “balanced” leadership of ÖVP and SPÖ had governed the country until the mid 1960s. This leadership was also known as the “Proporz”, which was a form of government that has paralysed the progress in Austria rather than encouraged it. In 1966 the ÖVP won the election and was from then on the sole party in power. During their legislative period they introduced ambitious working plans for the government to enhance economical and educational programs.

The social change during the 1960s was also mirrored in cultural and artistic creations. While Herman Nitsch shocked the audiences with his “Orgien Mysterien Theater”, Thomas Bernhard provoked with works that criticised the state and its society. In the theatre scene Wolfgang Bauer and Peter Turrini scandalised with their socio-critical dramas in which they made fun of the Austrian “Habsburg-nostalgia” after the war and Austria’s self-image. The most famous personification thereof was “Herr Karl”.

When Bruno Kreisky (SPÖ-leader since 1967 and experienced minister for foreign affairs) won the election in 1970 he formed a minority government with the FPÖ and secured an absolute majority in the re-election in 1971. What followed was a liberal reform-program to modernize Austria. Kreisky legalized homosexuality under adults and abortion (up to the twelfth week of pregnancy). Furthermore he modernized various laws, including the youth-criminal-law, and established the “40-hours-work week”. Finally, amongst other things the cost-free schoolbooks and diverse other subsidies were introduced.

Bruno Kreisky became a role model of modernization and cosmopolitanism for the Austrian generation of the seventies. Unfortunately, his policy led to a budget deficit and to a fast increase of the national debt. But according to Kreisky the degression of the unemployment rate was worth it: “Ein paar Milliarden Schilling Schulden mehr machen mir weniger schlaflose Nächte als ein paar tausend Arbeitslose.” (Kreisky cited in Niederstätter, 252)

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Niederstätter, 248ff.

Kreisky's achievements were not only restricted to Austria as he was also interested in foreign affairs and therefore pursued an ambitious foreign policy. Kreisky was concerned with the conflicts of the Middle East and for that reason one of the few to speak to Jassir Arafat. He also held contact with countries of the Eastern Europe. Vienna became the headquarter of many international organisations, one of which was the United Nations.

In the seventies the Viennese theatre landscape saw performances of some British contemporary playwrights. Plays by Arnold Wesker, Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, Samuel Becket and John Osborne were produced. William Shakespeare continued to be the most popular author. But besides Shakespeare it was the work of Alan Ayckbourn that can be said to have been on the top of the list when it came to staging contemporary playwrights. In the 1970s five of his works were enacted. This, once again, leads to the conclusion, that Austrian audiences preferred lightweight and entertaining drama to socio-critical plays.

#### 4.3.2 The Reception

The premiere of *Blick zurück im Zorn* took place on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 1973, and as mentioned above, the reception of the play was not favourably. The large time gap and the incomprehension of the former *Zeitgeist*, in whose context the play was written, led to these negative responses.

The reviews show that after one and a half decades the reviewers did not criticize the play, as it had become a modern classic by that time, but the director, the cast and the stage decor. A collection of the review's headlines is able to give a first insight into the play's reception:

Blick nachdenkend hin! (*Wiener Zeitung*)

Der Zorn ist verraucht (*Die Presse*)

Blick zurück auf einen Blick zurück (*Volksstimme*)

Jimmys historischer Zorn (*Volksblatt*)

Kleine Josefstadt: Bühnen-Oldie historisch gesehen (*Tiroler Tageszeitung*)



Blick zurück in leere Oede (*Kronen Zeitung*)

Der Schnee von gestern (*Kurier*)

#### 4.3.2.1 The Play

Although the play itself had become a *Modern Classic*, some critics still referred to its weaknesses. One of them was Dr. Walter Zeleny from the *Salzburger Volksblatt*.

In Osbornes Stück geht es um den pathologischen Seelenzustand eines jungen Ehemannes, eines ehemaligen Studenten, dem jemand eine „Bude“ verschafft hat, die ihn und seine Frau ernährt. Jimmy Porter ist ein egozentrischer, cholerischer Dreiviertelgebildeter, und quält seine aus aristokratischer Familie stammende Alison. Eine Freundin kommt, schickt die schwangere Alison zu den Eltern – und ergreift nach versetzter Ohrfeige Besitz von dem Ekel, dem „Bären“. Nach dem Tode des Neugeborenen kehrt Alison zurück, und die Stellvertreterin entschwindet.

Dieses Handlungsgerüst soll zeigen, daß heutzutage kaum verständlich ist, weshalb das Werk vor anderthalb Jahrzehnten solch einen Widerhall heben konnte. Und nicht recht verständlich ist nun auch, daß es neu in den Spielplan des Josefstädter Theaters, in der Kellerbühne im Wiener Konzerthaus, aufgenommen wurde. (Dr. Walter Zeleny, *Salzburger Volksblatt*)

Zeleny reduced the play to its plotline and took that as the starting point for criticising it. He did not mention that it was the style of writing and its naturalism that made the play special and popular.

The critic's opinions about the play and its topicality varied a lot. Two opposed statements shall be shown here to illustrate this:

Als neuer Aktualitätsfaktor ist dafür die wachsende Aggressivität unseres Jahrzehnts hinzugekommen. Also weder ein überholtes noch ein „hautnahes“ Stück, sondern nur: ein von Osborne perfekt und gekonnt gebautes, mit ausgezeichneten Rollen, die nur auch gut besetzt sein wollen. (Hans Lossmann, Bühne)

Das siebzehn Jahre alte Stück liegt abseits, im Niemandsland: weder gegenwartsbezogen noch historisch. Das eine nicht mehr, das andere noch nicht. (Paul Blaha, *Kurier*)

Fortunately, there were critics who were aware of the significance the play had in the 1950s and still had in the 1970s.

Das Theater der fünfziger Jahre, dessen Engagement und dessen Experimente mit neuen Formen und Inhalten für explosiven Diskussionsstoff gesorgt hatten, schien im Theateralltag der siebziger Jahre vergessen. Jetzt kehrt es wieder: als Bildungsgut. Ionesco und Beckett, Miller und Osborne sind „Klassiker der Moderne“ geworden, die man einer neuen Generation von Kunst-Konsumenten bekannt machen möchte. (Wolfgang Greisenegger, Salzburger Nachrichten)

The play's status, according to the critics, was not an unambiguous one in 1973. Nevertheless it can be seen in the reviews that the majority of the critics approved of it.

#### **4.3.2.2 The Author**

While the newspaper reviews in 1958 dedicated a lot of space to the description of John Osborne and his work, the reviews in 1973 mention him only in passing. Only three critics give more elaborated comments. Still the articles reveal their overall attitude towards the dramatist in 1973.

Osborne war der heute längst überholte Ausgangspunkt für alle Rebellion und allen Weltschmerz, die sich inzwischen weit deutlicher ausgedrückt haben, als es seinem ziellos tobenden Jimmy Porter gegeben ist. (Renate Wagner, Volksblatt)

Der junge arbeitslose Schauspieler Osborne brach alle Tabus sprachlicher Konventionen des englischen Theaters, die niemand seit Shaw zu übertreten gewagt hatte. Sein durchschlagender Erfolg machte den Weg für eine ganze Gruppe von Autoren frei, die bisher nur im Fernsehen Arbeit gefunden hatte: für Arnold Wesker, Harold Pinter und John Arden, für David Mercer und David Storey, also für den – proletarischen – englischen Realismus, der jahrelang die europäischen und nordamerikanischen Bühnen beherrschen sollte. (Wolfgang Greisenegger, Salzburger Nachrichten)

Und John Osborne, der junge zornige Mann von 1956, schrieb eine Zimmerschlacht, hart, schockierend, freizügig, unnachsichtig wider

Tabus und Konventionen sich auflehnend. Als erster schrieb er solchen radikalen Realismus. (Paul Blaha, Kurier)

One can see that the critics were very much aware of the contribution that John Osborne had made not only to the English theatre landscape, but also worldwide.

#### 4.3.2.3 The Production

The production was directed by Edwin Zbonek<sup>16</sup>. Born in 1928 he was already in his mid-forties when the play was staged. Zbonek studied at the Viennese Reinhardt-Seminar and worked as a theatre- and movie-director and also as a film critic. For a long time he was the artistic director of the "Theater der Jugend".

Even though the work of Zbonek was commonly appreciated - the critics talk of a "dichte, milieugerechte [...] Inszenierung" (Hans Lossmann, Bühne) – there were points of critique. The major points concerned the cast, "weil dem Regisseur [...] keine ideale Besetzung zur Verfügung stand." (Duglore Pizzini, Wochenpresse), and the pace of the play:

Von Edwin Zboneks Regie muß leider gesagt werden, daß sie den Rotstift zu sehr verschmähte, der sehr starken Poesie des Stückes nicht traute, aber andererseits gegen das (ebenfalls sehr starke) Melodram nichts zu unternehmen vermochte: Viele Qualitäten Osbornes kamen an diesem Abend nicht zum Tragen. (Renate Wagner, Volksblatt)

Another critic acknowledged Zbonek as a friend "langer, stummer Intermezzi" (Dr. Walter Zeleny, Salzburger Volksblatt). The stage text confirms these statements. Zbonek has hardly crossed out passages or altered parts of the text. This might be also the reason why one critic states: "Mit simpler Textrekonstruktion begnügt sich die Inszenierung." (Richard Winger, Kronen Zeitung)

This production was again working with the translation of Hans Sahl. This translation is not identical with the stage text used in 1958. The stage text

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<sup>16</sup> "Edwin Zbonek" <http://aeiou.iicm.tugraz.at/aeiou.encyclp.z/z158995.htm> .

that the Fischer Verlag provided in the 1970s seems to be a revised version of Sahl's original translation with only minor alterations.

Zbonek was also blamed for not being able to handle the cast. The actors, who did not manage to identify with their characters, were said to have been "auf Gefühlssituationen und Stimmungen abgerichtet" and therefore delivered "leeres Theater". (Harald Sterk, Arbeiter Zeitung)

Another major point of critique was the stage decor. It was designed by Monika Zallinger and consisted of a huge photomontage that surrounded the stage and its meagre chattels.

Edwin Zbonek ließ mit weißer Ölfarbe "1956" auf Monika Zallingers Photomontage, von der herab Churchill, Adenauer, die Monroe und der Chruschow grüßen lassen, hinmalen. Dies sollte die Distanz betonen, die Inszenierung und Spiel nicht überbrücken können. (Paul Blaha, Kurier)

Most critics felt alienated by the "Photomontage" and found it inappropriate. Attributes used to describe it reached from "seltsam" over "sinnlos" to "interessant".

#### 4.3.2.4 The Actors

The cast of this production of *Blick zurück im Zorn* consisted mainly of young members of the Josefstadt-ensemble:

Heinz Marecek	<i>Jimmy Porter</i>
Christian Futterknecht	<i>Cliff Lewis</i>
Ellen Rissel	<i>Alison Porter</i>
Claudia Rieschel	<i>Helena Charles</i>
Carl Bosse	<i>Colonel Redfern</i>

While Heinz Marecek<sup>17</sup> is still well known in Austria due to his appearances on stage and television, the other cast members can hardly be described more thoroughly as there is no detailed information available.

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. "Heinz Marecek" [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinz\\_Marecek](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinz_Marecek).

According to the reviews the performances of the actors varied a lot. While the male actors were generally classified as being acceptable, the two women were a total miscast.

„Blick zurück im Zorn“ steckt voller Paraderollen für erste Schauspieler. Im Keller ließ Heinz Marecek [...] jede Wandlungsfähigkeit vermissen, war immer nur eintönig böse, aggressiv, aufgebracht. Das stimmt oft, das stimmte nicht immer. Sein stiller Freund Lewis war Christian Futterknecht: er wurde mit einer farblosen Rolle beachtlich fertig. Einige schöne Momente hatte Claudia Rieschel (Helena), total unzulänglich war leider Ellen Rissel, die die Alison Porter nicht spielte, sondern betreten auf sagte. Eine interessante Randfigur konnte Carl Bosse beisteuern. (Duglore Pizzini, Wochenpresse)

Vor allem mit der hölzernen, durch Unbegabung schier Mitleid erregenden Ellen Rissel als Alison Porter war nichts anzufangen. Eher schon mit Claudia Rieschel, die wenigstens streckenweise ein Mädchen der britischen Mittelschicht glaubhaft machte. Seltsam unfertig wirkte der hochbegabte Heinz Marecek als Jimmy, sowohl sprachlich als auch in der Identifikation mit dem Zorn Osbornes. (gob, Die Presse)

While the opinion about the women was rather homogeneous it varied a lot when describing Heinz Marecek's performance. His tirades are described to be "Ausbrüche eines zornigen jungen Josefstädters, dessen frühere Routine ihn längst zur (sprachlichen und gestischen) Schlampereien verleitet hat." (Harald Sterk, Arbeiter Zeitung). Fritz Koselka from the Wiener Zeitung on the other hand speaks of a "glänzende Parforceleistung".

Part of the blame for this "bemühte Studententheater" (gob, Die Presse) is credited to Edwin Zbonik who should have taught the actors how to create a "kritisch-wissendere Haltung gegenüber bürgerlichen Charakterzügen" (Arthur West, Volksstimme).

### 4.3.3 Conclusion

This performance of *Look Back in Anger* did not fail because of the same reasons as in 1958. While in 1958 the incomprehension of the situation in

Great Britain was the main problem, in 1973 it was the huge time gap that had been created since then. The audience was very much aware of the fact that they were going to watch a play that was written in the 1950s. The stage design made this unnecessarily obvious. This awareness, however, did not cause them to receive the play favourably.

By that time *Look Back in Anger* had reached the status of being a *Modern Classic*, even in Austria. The cultural transfer of the play and its canonisation had taken place. With this status other problems arose, because once a play is accepted by a widespread audience, the way in which it is adapted and staged becomes even more important. Unfortunately the staging itself was not good enough. The whole series "Theater von Gestern" of the *Josefstadt* seemed to have failed miserably.

Drei Premierenabende der Josefstädter Bühnen: eine trostlose Boulevardaufführung, Salonkrimiroutine mit Pseudotiefgang und ein mißglückter Aufbruch einer jungen Josefstadt, die so gern im Wohlstand zornig sein möchte (im Auftrag des Theaters der Jugend): eine deprimierende Bilanz. (Harald Sterk, Arbeiterzeitung)

Volker Parschalk might have found a possible reason: "Ob man für diese Serie nicht doch mehr jüngere Regisseure heranziehen sollte?" (Volker Parschalk, *Tiroler Tageszeitung*) His suggestion was that it would have been helpful to employ young directors who were able to edit the play in a way so that young Austrians in 1973 were able to understand and accept it. One could also read into it that a contemporary adaptation of the play would have been more suitable.

#### ***4.4 Blick zurück im Zorn (1994)***

"Klassiker der Moderne" was the name of a very successful cycle of plays that were staged at the *Ensembletheater*. One of those was *Blick zurück im Zorn*. It was produced in 1994 in the second season of the cycle after the first season had turned out to be doing well. The productions of *Draußen vor der Tür* by Wolfgang Borchert followed by *Die Physiker* by Friedrich Dürrenmatt paved the way for the plays yet to come.

Jetzt prolongiert die Bühne am Petersplatz ihren Moderne-Klassiker-Zyklus. Ensembletheater-Chef Dieter Haspel bereitet die Premiere von Osbornes „Blick zurück im Zorn“ vor. Der Regisseur: „Dieses Stück, 1956 entstanden, handelt von der Ratlosigkeit und von der Rebellion. Der Zorn, der darin zum Ausdruck kommt, ist heute wieder unser Zorn.“ (bau, Kurier)

According to Haspel the reason for staging the play was obvious: the issues it deals with were still up-to-date. Further reasons that led to another production of Osborne's classic can be found in further reviews:

Was sind aber die Gründe, dieses Stück, das in den letzten Jahren immer wieder im deutschen Sprachraum zu sehen war, auf den Spielplan zu setzen? Der Protest gegen das englische Establishment der Mittfünfziger kann es wohl nicht sein. Viel eher dürfte die Ratlosigkeit, die das Protagonistenpaar mit vielen heutigen, jungen Ehepaaren verbindet, die Antriebsfeder sein, die zur Aufführung dieses Werkes veranlaßt. (Eva-Maria Mantler, Wiener Zeitung)

In seiner Inszenierung im Ensemble-Theater zeigt Dieter Haspel, wie aktuell Osbornes Klassiker der Moderne noch sein kann. Denn der Regisseur Haspel hat den Text wörtlich genommen, sich weniger auf den vielzitierten Zorn der jungen Männer (und Frauen) verlassen, sondern die Hilflosigkeit von Jimmy Porter & Co in den Vordergrund gerückt. (pra, Kurier)

But why would the Austrian audience be so interested in watching a relationship on stage? And why were Austrian couples so troubled and insecure at that time. A look at the Austrian context might reveal possible causes for the perplexity in Austria's society.

#### 4.4.1 Austrian context<sup>18</sup>

In 1989 the Iron Curtain fell, which separated Europe into East and West. Austria, who had experienced this separation more closely than most other European countries, was very glad. Unfortunately it did not take long for

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Vocelka, 353ff.

disillusionment to spread over the country. The states east of Austria began to fall apart. Some of them peacefully, such as Czechoslovakia, which was divided in 1993, but others went to war. The conflicts in Yugoslavia affected the Austrian people. Thousands of refugees streamed into the country. Hostilities in Slovenia took place very close to the Austrian border and had therefore an influence on the security-political thinking of the government. Besides those who had to flee from the war there were also economical refugees who could not survive in their own country and therefore came to Austria to work here illegally. The share of foreigners in Austria grew constantly and so did the crime rate in certain areas. This issue aroused many domestic political discussions.

In 1993 Austria started the negotiations for a possible accession to the European Union. This was only natural, as the country was in a most insecure position at that time and needed a sense of protection. The negotiations led to a plebiscite in which 65 percent voted for an accession. Since the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1995 Austria is an official member of the European Union.

Another incident that threw the country into a state of terror was Franz Fuchs' series of letter bomb attacks between 1993 and 1997. The first series of attacks took place in December 1993 and caused three people being injured of whom one was Vienna's major, Helmut Zilk.

Under these circumstances *Blick zurück im Zorn* was produced. The insecurity that people must have felt at that time is comprehensible.

#### **4.4.2 The Reception**

The play *Blick zurück im Zorn* premiered on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 1994. As already mentioned before, the play was directed by Dieter Haspel. Christian Feichtinger was responsible for the stage décor and Andrea Bernd designed the costumes. This time the translation used was by Helmar Harald Fischer. His translation is the only official one beside Hans Sahl's.



The press have received this production the most favourable of all Austrian productions. Reasons for this were Haspel's achievements as director of this staging and also the cast. Aap Lindenberg seemed to be the reincarnation of a true Jimmy Porter. Another possible reason was be the new translation of the play which used a language less alien to the audience than the language of Hans Sahl. In order to illustrate this, the same passage that has been used to exemplify the difficulties of translation in the analysis of *Blick zurück im Zorn* 1958<sup>19</sup> will be shown here.

**Jimmy** Nigel und Alison. Sie sind, wonach sie sich anhören: synkophantisch, phlegmatisch und pusillanim. Weißt du, was es bedeutet?

(Cliff schüttelt den Kopf, ist verstört, sieht bedrückt zu Alison)

(Alison stützt sich aufs Bügelbrett, sie schließt die Augen)

**Alison** Lieber Gott, wenn er nicht aufhört, werde ich in einer Minute wahnsinnig.

**Jimmy** Na, prima. Das wär doch mal was.

(Nimmt ein Wörterbuch zur Hand)

Also, wenn meine Aussprache falsch ist, wird sie den geeigneten Moment allgemeiner Aufmerksamkeit abwarten, um mich zu korrigieren. Ich zitiere: pusillianim. Adjektiv. Geistesschwach, kleinmütig, von schmalem Verstand, durchschnittlicher Gesinnung, feige, meinungsscheu. Vom lateinischen „pusillus“, „sehr klein“, und „animus“, „der Geist“. Das ist meine Frau! Wie sie leibt und lebt! Siehe, die Lady Pusillanim.<sup>20</sup>

Once again it is evident that the German version is shorter than the English original. It can also be seen that Fischer used other words than Sahl to translate the meanings of the word “pusillianim”. Another difference is that Fischer does not, like Sahl did, introduce the English word “pusillanimous”, but a translation of it. This might be one of the reasons why people felt less alienated by this German version of the text. Unfortunately, the reviews do not give any hint on the translation-matter of the text. But this could also mean that they were so satisfied with it that they have not felt the need to mention it.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Chapter (4.2.3.3.1).

<sup>20</sup> *Blick Zurück im Zorn*, Spielfassung Ensembletheater 1994, p.13.

#### 4.4.2.1 The Play and the Author

In 1994 the critics did not comment a lot on *Look Back in Anger* itself and John Osborne. Only very little statements can be found in the reviews. Descriptions of the play are “Erfolgsstück der Fifties” (Helmut Schneider, Salzburger Nachrichten), and “Osbornes zeitloses Beziehungsdrama” (anonym., City). Furthermore, some critics commented on the play’s effect on people and its topicality:

Heute vertraut und etwas abgestanden, damals wie eine Bombe krachend.

Das Wohnzimmer als Schlachtfeld. (Meinhard Rüdener, Täglich Alles)

Dieser Aufstand der Halbstarke ist heute, meint man, eher etwas fürs Nostalgiealbum. Falsch. (pra, Kurier)

The critics seemed to prefer discussing the staging and the performances of the actors to ruminating on Osborne and his play.

#### 4.4.2.2 The Production

The work of Dieter Haspel was generally praised. The critic’s voices were almost in unison when writing about the production:

Dieter Haspel hat die Beziehungsgeschichte um Jimmy und Alison sensibel und feinnervig – bei aller immer wieder geforderten Lautstärke – inszeniert. Vor der Pause wären allerdings ein paar zusätzliche Striche wohl von Vorteil.

Christian Feichtinger entwarf als Bühnenbildner eine karg möblierte Mansarde und trug mit dieser – wie auch Andrea Bernd mit den Kostümen – wesentlich zum Gelingen der Vorstellung bei. (Eva-Maria Mantler, Wiener Zeitung)

Mantler’s point of critique here was minor. She approved the staging and mentioned favourably the stage design and the costumes. Thomas Trenker from *Der Standard*, on the other hand, claims that Dieter Haspel should have been more innovative:

Direktor Dieter Haspel inszeniert John Osbornes Blick zurück im Zorn mit Tempo, Witz und drastischen Einlagen.

Risiko aber scheut er. Das wohltuend gestraffte Konversationsstück über die Orientierungslosigkeit der Nachkriegsjugend, dessen Thematik nur wenig von seiner Aktualität einbüßen mußte, beließ Haspel in den Mitt-50er-Jahren und beließ es dabei, den Seelenstriptease im schäbigen Wohnzimmer-Ambiente (Bühne: Christian Feichtinger) plausibel zu machen. (Thomas Trenkler, Der Standard)

It is interesting to note that while Mantler speaks of the absence of necessary “Striche” in the text, Trenker found it to be a “wohltuend gestraffte Konversationsstück”. This discrepancy is hard to prove, because it may have depended very much on the personal conception of the two critics.

Although the play had become a modern classic by that time, Helmut Schneider from the *Salzburger Nachrichten* is still complaining about the weaknesses of the play that have already been discussed in 1958. He also emphasises the time gap between the play’s setting and its time of staging. But from his review we can also suggest that Haspel had tried to modernize the play:

Denn daß das Stück dramaturgische Schwächen hat, daß die Handlung kaum erwähnenswert ist und daß der Schock über die vulgäre Sprache nicht mehr nachvollziehbar ist, das ist nur im Vergleich interessant, eben wenn man sich das Zeitkolorit dazu vorstellt. Haspel als Regisseur tut [sic!] dem Stück freilich nichts Gutes, wenn er es mit manchmal recht plumpen Mitteln moderner erscheinen lassen will, als es ist. (Helmut Schneider, Salzburger Nachrichten)

The overall impression that one can get of the critic’s reviews is that most of them have accepted *Look Back in Anger* for what it is and was. Haspels attempts to modernize have not been approved, but the way in which he focussed on the relationship between Jimmy and Alison was received very well.

#### 4.4.2.3 The Actors

The cast of this performance was the following:

Aap Lindenberg	<i>Jimmy Porter</i>
Stefan Bochdansky	<i>Cliff Lewis</i>
Christine Brandner	<i>Alison Porter</i>
Gunda Hofmann	<i>Helena Charles</i>
Gunther W. Lämmert	<i>Colonel Redfern</i>

From the articles it can be guessed that Dieter Haspel had managed to engage a very good cast for this play. He found an outstanding actor to play Jimmy Porter. The critics were impressed by his performance.

Mit Aap Lindenberg als unberechenbarem Rüpel hat Haspel zudem auch den richtigen Jimmy Porter gefunden. Sein Temperament, sein nervöses Schwanken zwischen lautem Koloß und vor Mitleid zerfließendem Arbeiterkind bringt Lautstärke und Dramatik ins Spiel. (pra, Kurier)

Aap Lindenberg ist so ganz das eigentliche „Urgestein“ Jimmy Porter, von dem seine Frau einmal völlig zu Recht sagt, er würde besser in eine andere Zeit – etwa die französische Revolution – passen. Mit großer körperlicher Präsenz beherrscht er die für ihn sichtlich zu kleine Bühne. (Helmut Schneider, Salzburger Nachrichten)

Aap Lindenberg in der Rolle der Zentralfigur Jimmy Porter. Lindenberg umschiff die Klippe, Jimmy auf einen Berserker zu reduzieren. Kontrolliert und stetig quillt ihm der Selbst- und Welthaß ebenso überzeugend aus allen Poren wie in kurzen Augenblicken Zartheit. Dem Wechselspiel zwischen intimen Infantilitäten und kalten Zynismen, mit denen er seine Frau Alison liebt und quält, fehlt allerdings der Widerpart. (göt, Presse)

Aap Lindenberg seemed to fulfil everything that a good characterization of Jimmy Porter was asking for and the critics were full of praise. He must have dominated the stage like no other. It must have been hard for his colleagues to make a stand against his performance. Stefan Bochdansky “bleibt blaß wie seine Rolle als anpassungsfähiger Freund Cliff Lewis.“ (göt, Presse).

Ihm zur Seite steht Stefan Bochdansky als sein Freund Cliff, eine etwas uneinheitliche Persönlichkeit, zerrissen zwischen bürgerlichen und rebellischen Ansprüchen. Die beiden weiblichen Rollen – Jimmys Frau Alison (Christine Brandner) sowie ihre Freundin und spätere Nachfolgerin bei Jimmy, Helena Charles (Gunda Hofmann) – verkommen in dieser Aufführung etwas zu Unrecht zu bloßen Stichwortgeberinnen. (Helmut Schneider, Salzburger Nachrichten)

The two women have a very difficult position in this play. It is hard for them and for every other actress not to become a “Stichwortgeber” next to a dominant character as Jimmy. While “Christine Brandner als Jimmys Angetraute Alison” was said to play “die Offizierstochter ein wenig zu zärtlich“ (pra, Kurier), Gunda Hofmann could manage to turn the wheel around.

Doch Gunda Hofmann als Femme fatale bringt das Geschlechterverhältnis wieder zum Brodeln – nicht nur, weil sie sich entkleidet. Da stört es auch nicht, wenn Alisons Papa (Gunther W. Lämmert) kurz für glucksende Lacher sorgt. (pra, Kurier)

Gunther W. Lämmert’s performance as Colonel Redfern was called “markant” by Eva-Maria Mantler from the Wiener Zeitung. Unfortunately it is not possible to find out how exactly Lämmert has earned himself this attribute.

#### 4.4.3 Conclusion

The staging of *Blick Zurück im Zorn* at the Ensembletheater was very successful. The press approved the play. The critics did no longer stigmatise it as a “Museumsstück” (as in 1973) but saw a new topicality in its plot. The current situation in Austria at the time of staging influenced the critic’s views. The insecurity and dissatisfaction that Jimmy Porter felt in the time after the war, was not exactly the same but similar to the insecurity that spread all over Austria in 1994.

The staging was also very well received because of its quality. The production and the actors have created a good version of the play. Especially Aap Lindenberg has to be seen as the one who left the most impressive effect on the audience. “So trägt Jimmy die ganze Last des Dramas. Solange

Aap Lindenberg auf der Bühne steht, reißt der Spannungsbogen nicht.” (göt, Presse)

Finally, *Look Back in Anger* had been staged successfully in Vienna, even though the theatre it was staged in was not big. But it might have been because of that and the surrounding conditions that Dieter Haspel had created with his cycle “Klassiker der Moderne”.

## 5 Osborne's *The Entertainer*

After the huge success of *Look Back in Anger* it was not unproblematic for Osborne to work on his next play. Having overnight success is easier than sustaining it. Especially in the years after *Look Back in Anger* was written dramatists came and went very quickly and only a few managed to stay. Osborne was one of them.<sup>21</sup>

Osborne wrote *The Entertainer* in 1957. It has been claimed very often that he wrote the play with Sir Laurence Olivier in mind, but Osborne denied this. According to him the role of Archie Rice was based on a third-rate comic he had once seen at the old Chelsea Palace. Once John Osborne had finished the play Olivier decided that he wanted to play the role of Archie Rice.

It was ultimately brave of Olivier to take on the role of Archie, as Osborne acknowledged. He was the first of the theatrical knights to first joining the new generation at the Court. In effect, he was theatre royalty embracing the renegade opposition – an Osborne play whose decaying Music Hall setting is a brilliant metaphor for England's post-colonial decline. (Heilpern, 215)

Unfortunately, the artistic council of the Royal Court Theatre vetoed the entire production. Those who were against the production “opposed Olivier turning a Court play into a star vehicle” (ibid, 216) and also Osborne's work. Finally, after a couple of meetings it was decided to give it a chance because it would not have been wise to drop a production in which Olivier was eager to play.

### 5.1 *The Entertainer* (1957)

The play premiered at the Royal Court Theatre on 10 April 1957. The production was directed by Tony Richardson and the stage design was by Alan Tagg.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Gilleman, 63.

The cast was the following:

George Relph	<i>Billy Rice</i>
Dorothy Tutin	<i>Jean Rice</i>
Brenda de Banzie	<i>Phoebe Rice</i>
Laurence Olivier	<i>Archie Rice</i>
Richard Pasco	<i>Frank Rice</i>
Vivienne Drummond	<i>Gorgeous Gladys</i>
Aubrey Dexter	<i>William (Brother Bill) Rice</i>
Stanley Meadows	<i>Graham</i>

The cooperation between Britain's most famous and best established actor and its most angry son was for many reviewers the most newsworthy feature of the play. (Gilleman, 63)

For the audience this combination of John Osborne's unsavoury reputation and the fame of Laurence Olivier seemed to be irresistible as well, because when the play premiered it was already booked out for the entire season.

The plot and the unusual form of Osborne's drama were subject in all the reviews. According to Harold Hobson "Mr. Osborne's favourite dramatic *milieu* is the slums of culture." (Harold Hobson, *The Sunday Times*) He described the play as "sentimental" but also stated that "its theatrical effect is enormous" (*ibid.*). The acknowledgement of this play can also be found in Kenneth Tynan's review in *The Observer*.

To show the ironic disparity between Archie's mind and the use he makes of it, Mr. Osborne has hit on a stunningly original device. He sets out the programme like a variety bill, and switches abruptly from Archie at home, insulated by gin, to Archie on stage, ogling and mincing, joshing the conductor, doing the chin-up bit and braying with false effusiveness such aptly-named numbers as "Why should I bother to care?", "We're all out for good old Number one" and "Thank God we're normal." In these passages author, actor and composer (John Addison) are all at peak form. (Kenneth Tynan, *The Observer*)

Milton Shulman, who had already been a harsh critic on *Look Back in Anger*, described *The Entertainer* as being a "play of promise". However, he criticised the plot and also Osborne's style of writing:



For each ideal Osborne has a derisive guffaw. Patriotism is a nude Britannia in a burlesque show. Religion is a trap. Politics are futile. Life is nothing but a branch of the fertiliser business.

Bolstering up his plot with two unrelated incidents – Archie's son is killed in Egypt and he is offered a chance to go to Canada – Osborne's play juxtaposes Archie's sleazy, realistic home life with the sleazy, comic routine of the variety stage.

But there is a decided sloppy and hurried look about the writing. The first act is repetitious and dawdling. There is no coherent link between the disparate members of this odd family. Characterisations are inconclusive and inconsistent. And the dialogue often flows with sticky reluctance.

Yet *The Entertainer* has the overwhelming merit of being a play that is vital, contentious and contemporary. With a more compact production – perhaps a composite set – and some ruthless pruning it could be converted into something more satisfying than a play of promise. (Milton Shulman, Evening Standard)

Despite all the criticism that Shulman had for the play, he still acknowledged it for being contemporary. Osborne's weakness in characterizing can also be found in the review of his supporter Tynan, who states his opinion on the female characters of the play:

Rather than commit himself, Mr. Osborne has watered the girl [Jean] down to a nullity, and Dorothy Tutin can do nothing with her.

This character, coupled with Archie's wife (Brende de Banzie, bedraggled – genteel), reinforces one's feeling that Mr. Osborne cannot yet write convincing lines for women. (Kenneth Tynan, The Observer)

On the other hand the critics speak with one voice when it comes to the role of Archie Rice and the performance of Sir Laurence Olivier. According to most of the reviewers it was him who "saved" the play. Only a few admitted that it was also Osborne's achievement in writing that led to this success. "When the play later appeared in print, one reviewer expressed astonishment to discovering that Laurence Olivier had not been improvising but had used Osborne's lines." (Gilleman, 65) One of those who acknowledged Osborne's style was again Kenneth Tynan:

[...] he has written one of the great acting parts of our age. Archie is a truly desperate man, and to present desperation is a hard dramatic

achievement. To explain and account for it, however, is harder still: and that is the task to which I would now direct this dazzling, self-bound writer. (Kenneth Tynan, *The Observer*)

Other critics found the play repellent and boring. Derek Monsey from the *Sunday Express* wrote that Osborne was “so hopelessly immature” as a dramatist “that he believes that a photograph of cancer of the breast is not only a thrilling picture but a substitute for a cure.” (Derek Monsey, *Sunday Express*.) His opinion of the play itself was that it was not “shocking” but rather sneering” (ibid). He also stated that it was “slackly written, slow and boring.” (ibid.)

Under Tony Richardson’s slow-motion direction it misses the consistent impact of *Look Back in Anger* (much as I hated its hero), but when it is good it is brilliant. And that is whenever Sir Laurence holds the stage. (Cecil Wilson, *Daily Mail*)

All in all it can be said that, according to the critics, *The Entertainer* was rather a triumph for Sir Laurence Olivier than for John Osborne. Anyhow, the play ran to astonishing success, as its following development on diverse stages showed:

On 10 September, it moved on to the music-hall size Palace Theatre, where it was immediately reported to be the “biggest money-spinner for advance booking that the Palace has had for years for a non-musical play.” After touring the provinces, it returned for another short spell to London’s West End, before transferring to Broadway. (Gilleman, 64)

## 5.2 *Der Entertainer* (1959) (planned production at the Burgtheater)

Rumours have it that in 1959 a production of *Der Entertainer* was planned at the Viennese Burgtheater. Unfortunately, the staging was called off in advance.

Evidence for the planning of this production can be found in newspaper reviews of the 1958 production of *Blick zurück im Zorn* at the Volkstheater.

Bei Osborne (von dem übrigens auch das Burgtheater ein Stück aufführen will) wird nur geredet, geflucht, gespien. (E.W., Wiener Montag)

Dieses romantische Angezogen-werden von der Vergangenheit kommt sogar noch stärker in Osbornes Stück „Der Entertainer“ zum Ausdruck, das angeblich in dieser Saison am Burgtheater gespielt werden soll. (G. Obzyna, Express am Morgen)

Das Volkstheater eröffnet die neue Spielzeit mit dem berühmten Stück „Blick zurück im Zorn“ von John Osborne. Also, nun wäre das erste Stück des Vielgenannten endlich in Wien gelandet – das Burgtheater kündigt auch schon Opus 2, den „Entertainer“, an. [...]

Und als dann Sir Laurence Olivier sich spontan ein zweites Stück bestellte, selbst inszenierte und die Titelrolle spielte, da war Mister Osborne gemacht - Gustav Gründgens machte das gleiche wie Sir Olivier, und in Wien wird es wohl de Kowa sein, der am Burgtheater diese begehrte Rolle des Tingeltangel-Spaßmachers spielen wird... (Dr. Friedrich Langer, Österreichische Neue Tageszeitung)

A possible reason for cancelling the production might have been the change of the directorate in 1958/59. Adolf Rott had been the director of the Burgtheater since 1954. His repertoire consisted of classics but also of plays that had been banned under the rule of the Nazis. In September 1958 Ernst Haeusserman started his work as director as well. This was the start of a tradition that would last up to the present day: the incumbent director and the future director of the Burgtheater would work parallel for one year before the position would finally be handed over to the new one.<sup>22</sup>

Haeusserman's focus was on engaging important directors for diverse productions and renewing the ensemble of the Burgtheater. Further it was his achievement to introduce a structuring of plays into cycles.<sup>23</sup>

It is possible that during this year of parallel leadership at the Burgtheater, many planned productions were cancelled because of disagreements between Rott and Haeusserman. Unfortunately it is not possible to find a definite proof of this hypothesis.

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Haeusserman, 157.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. "Burgtheater" <http://aeiou.iicm.tugraz.at/aeiou.encyclop.b/b970338.htm>.

### 5.3 *Der Entertainer* (1994)

Almost 40 years after its world premiere at the Royal Court *The Entertainer* was finally staged in Vienna. The *Theater in der Josefstadt* under the co-leadership of Otto Schenk and Robert Jungbluth produced the play. It is hard to find reasons for this delay but when reading the theatre reviews of this performance one comes across some possible explanations.

#### 5.3.1 Austrian Context

1994 was the only year in which two plays of John Osborne were produced on the Viennese stages: *Look Back in Anger* at the Ensembletheater and *The Entertainer* at the *Theater in der Josefstadt*.

As illustrated before (Cf. Chapter 4.4.1.), the beginning of the nineties had been a turbulent time in Austria which was full of fear and uncertainty. This is a probable reason why theatre directors have decided to take some of the Modern Classics into their repertoire.

Concerning *The Entertainer* it may have been the topic of the Suez-crisis which has moved the directors to stage it in this particular year. While in the 1956 British soldiers were sent out to fight for European supremacy at the Suez Canal, in the 1990s the Austrian military had to be alerted because of the crises and wars in the neighbouring countries. This parallel may also have been one of the motivating factors for producing the play.

#### 5.3.2 The Reception

The play premiered on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 1994. It was directed by Fred Berndt who was also responsible for the stage design. The German translation that was used for this production was by Helmar Harald Fischer. Besides *The Entertainer* he has also translated other works by Osborne, including *Look Back in Anger*.

As this was the first time that the play was being staged in Vienna the theatre critics also commented on the play itself and its author in more detail. Therefore those aspects of the critiques will be discussed separately in the analysis.

### 5.3.2.1 The Play

When the play finally arrived in Vienna it had already earned itself the status of being a Modern Classic. Therefore, it is not surprising that none of the critics commented negatively on it. In fact they felt the need to explain what the play, “Osbornes einstigen Sensationsstück” (H.S., Neue Freie Zeitung), was about and in which historical/political context it had been written.

Anno 1957 machte John Osborne, damals die Galionsfigur jener kurzlebigen Ära der „zornigen jungen Männer“, mit seinem Stück „Der Entertainer“ Furore. Da war ja auch soviel just Aktuelles mitverpackt: Suezkrise, schrittweise Liquidation des British Empire, latente politische Unzufriedenheit. (Gunther Martin, Kurier)

In order to make the readership familiar with this play, Barbara Petsch decided to compare it to works of drama that her readers already knew:

Das zugkräftige, wenn auch etwas plakative Stück ist Trevor Griffiths' „Komikern“ verwandt – 1991 im Volkstheater zu sehen – erinnert aber auch an Tennessee Williams oder O'Neill. Es führt eine Künstlerfamilie vor. (Barbara Petsch, Die Presse)

When reading the reviews one can see that almost all the critics tended to explain the whole storyline of the play. When *Look Back in Anger* was staged a second and third time they did not feel the need to explain its plot again as they supposed that everybody knew it by then.

### 5.3.2.2 The Author

The significance of John Osborne and his work were also recurring features in the newspaper articles. The critics reminded their readership of his success and thereby showed their sympathies for the author and his work.

Fast 40 Jahre ist es her, daß der britische Dramatiker John Osborne mit „Blick zurück im Zorn“ die Spezies „angry young men“ bühnenreif machte. Ein Sensationserfolg. Und nicht sein einziger. (Bernhard Praschl, Neue Zeit)

In den fünfziger Jahren traf er den „Zeitgeist“ wie wenige: John Osborne, dessen „Blick zurück im Zorn“ nicht nur für seine englische Heimat galt. Sein nächstes Stück „Der Entertainer“ wurde 1957 von Sir Laurence Olivier aus der Taufe gehoben, Gustaf Gründgens spielte die Titelrolle des Archie Rice in Hamburg. Das weist etwa auf die Größenordnung hin, in der dieses Werk interpretiert werden muß. (anonym., Vorarlberger Nachrichten)

### 5.3.2.3 The Production

Although the play itself was approved of by the critics the production was not received favourably at all. The work of the director, Fred Berndt, was hardly rated positively. He was accused of putting all his creativity into the “Entwurf eines schönen Bühnenbildes” (Heinz Sichrovsky, Neue Kronenzeitung) and having nothing left for directing the play itself.

Als Sittenstück des Kaspers, der nicht sterben darf, quält und zerdehnt Regisseur/Ausstatter Fred Berndt die Mär von jener Pointen-Schleuder, deren Leben selbst ein Witz ist. (R.Pohl, Der Standard)

One critic characterized the production as a “wirklich bleierne, uninspirierte Aufführung” (Vorarlberger Nachrichten) and another one suggested it for the price “Langeweiler des Jahres” (Roland Koberg, Oberösterreichische Nachrichten).

Schlechtes Theater im Theater ist besonders schwierig zu spielen. Wie man dieses Kunststück zuwege bringt, hat etwa Laurence Olivier in der Verfilmung des Osborne-Stücks vorgeführt. In der Josefstadt

klappt es nicht, die Regie Fred Berndts ist der heiklen Aufgabe nicht gewachsen. Der Abend wird zur greifbaren Langeweile. Weder können die Varieté-Passagen überzeugen, an denen zuviel ungebrochener Dilettantismus klebt. Noch kann das Familiendrama überzeugend Statur annehmen. Zu spannungslos dümpeln die Dramen der einzelnen Figuren vor sich hin. Nichts bewegt sich, alle scheinen auf die ewig gleiche Leier gestimmt. Die kammerspielartige Virtuosität des Stücks bleibt verborgen. (Alfred Pfoser, Salzburger Nachrichten)

Those variety passages that Pfoser wrote about consisted mainly of a handful half-naked revue-girls. "Die Tänzerinnen waren so, wie man sich die "Girls" in einem abgewirtschafteten Etablissement vorstellt, was in diesem Fall als Kompliment zu werten ist." (H.S., Neue Freie Zeitung) Unfortunately, it seems that the Josefstadt was not the suitable place for the bareness of those girls. "Als sie sich noch dazu barbusig zeigten, war es den konservativen Gästen des Hauses allerdings dann doch zu viel." (ibid.) The critic of the Kirchenzeitung was offended the most and cried out: "Nun hat es auch die Josefstadt geschafft, den anderen Wiener Theatern nachzuziehen. Und womit? Endlich gibt es auch hier entblößte Körper zu sehen." (Wiener Kirchenzeitung)

In the magazine *Profil* Berndt was also accused of not being able to handle the more intimate family scenes of the play. Furthermore he was overstrained by the switching between those and the revue-scenes:

Doch die Intimität und Explosivität der Situation und die billigen Revuenummern, die die Handlung unterbrechen, in den Griff zu bekommen ist Regisseur Fred Berndt nicht gelungen. Seine von Leerläufen durchsetzte Inszenierung mündet in Belanglosigkeit und Oberflächlichkeit – und das haben sich weder die Darsteller noch das Stück verdient. (Profil)

Only the critic of *Die Presse* seemed to be pleased with the work of Berndt, who, according to her, "inszenierte, den Akteuren Freiraum lassend, diskret dämpfend." (Barbara Petsch, Die Presse) Her resumé was "Alles in allem aber: gut gemacht." (ibid.)

A special feature in this production was that Fred Berndt involved the auditorium. "Fred Berndt hat den ganzen Theaterraum mit bunten Lämpchen in eine Music Hall verwandelt." (Maria Rennhofer, Tiroler Tageszeitung) A more detailed description of what had been adapted was given by Alfred Pfoser:

Angeleitet vom Titel „The Entertainer“ versucht die Josefstadt, sich diesmal knallig zu geben. Am Mantel der Garderobenfrauen prangt ein großer Button mit der Aufschrift „Show“. Das schöne Ritual des Luster-Hochziehens entfällt diesmal, um den Zuschauern schon in den Pausen den Blick auf den kessen, nackten Damenfuß freizugeben, der hoch ober vom Schnürboden herausschaut. In einer Seitenloge ist eine kleine Band gruppiert, die einmal getragene Unterhaltungsmusik der 50er Jahre, dann auch den damals aufkommenden Rock ‘n’ Roll anstimmt. (Alfred Pfoser, Salzburger Nachrichten)

#### 5.3.2.4 The Actors

The cast of this production was (partly) top-class and consisted of very well known actors:

Kurt Heintel	<i>Billy Rice</i>
Janine Wegener	<i>Jean Rice</i>
Joachim Kemmer	<i>Archie Rice</i>
Marianne Mendt	<i>Phoebe Rice</i>
Alexander Wussow	<i>Frank Rice</i>
Hellmuth Hron/ Robert Grass	<i>William Rice</i>
Maximilian Müller	<i>Graham Todd</i>

The opinions about the different performances of the actors varied a lot. Each one of them has received good as well as bad reviews. In one point the critics' views were not ambivalent. They blamed (partly) the director Fred Berndt for the disappointing performance of the actors:

An der Josefstadt mühte sich Joachim Kemmer bitterer um die Darstellung des Untermittelmaßes als Rice um die Überwindung desselben. Die Anstrengungen bleiben unbelohnt, zumal sich die Kreativität des Regisseurs Fred Berndt im Entwurf eines schönen



Bühnenbildes erschöpft zu haben scheint. Der Rest ist ungestaltetes und überlanges Gerede, teils miteinander, teils aneinander vorbei, bisweilen auch gleichzeitig. Der einzige, dem da eine Chance bleibt, ist Routinier Kurt Heintel als Vater Rice. (Heinz Sichrovsky, Neue Kronenzeitung)

Wie Kemmer in seinem trauten Vagabunden-Heim grazil stakst [...] dergleichen Anstrengungen müssen zwar den Vergleich mit Sir Laurence Olivier noch scheuen, wären aber – in einer anderen Inszenierung – aller Ehren wert. (R.Pohl, Der Standard)

Those excerpts show that the actors did not get the chance to deliver a good performance because of Berndt's insufficient work.

Robert Koberg was a critic who imputed incapability to all the actors:

Ein Wettbewerb – wer ist erster Sieger im Arm-Sein – wird abgehalten, aber die Angelegenheit tangiert uns nicht im Geringsten. Aber warum? Zum einen liegt das bestimmt am Unvermögen der Schauspieler, ihre Eitelkeit soweit hintanzustellen, daß hinter dem Arme-Leute-Betroffenheits-Trallala auch Menschen wie du und ich sichtbar würden. Ziellos laufen sie auf der vom Regisseur bereitgestellten Armes-Theater-Bühne herum und eröffnen den Zuschauern, die nun einmal nicht im England der 50er Jahre leben, nur in raren Momenten eine Einstiegsmöglichkeit in das, was sie hinter ihren Fassaden wirklich bewegt. (Roland Koberg, Oberösterreichische Nachrichten)

The German actor Joachim Kemmer played the role of Archie Rice and received very ambivalent judgments:

Der rauhkehlige Vorstadt-Conférencier paßt zu Kemmer wie der verschmierte Liedstrich zu seinen schön-schaurigen Tanzgirls. (B. Praschl, Kurier)

Den Archie Rice spielt in der Josefstadt Joachim Kemmer, vom Typ her ein idealer Entertainer, der seine breitspurige Bühnenpräsenz und seinen schmierigen Charme selbstaufopfernd in den Dienst der halbseidenen Sache stellt. (Barbara Petsch, Die Presse)

Archie [...] braucht aber den überragenden Interpreten. Denn um zu zeigen, wie seine Substanzlosigkeit ihn auch zum miesen Schmierikomödianten macht, muß man selbst brillant sein. Besser jedenfalls als Joachim Kemmer. (Vorarlberger Nachrichten)

Auch schlecht sein muß man können. Kemmer und die fünf Oben-ohne-Tänzerinnen, die hier eine Probe ihres Untalents abgeben, können es nicht – sie sind es. (Robert Koberg, Oberösterreichische Tageszeitung)

The critics ascribed to Joachim Kemmer a whole variety of his competence as an actor, from being horrendous to being fantastic. It is hard to tell which of the critics was right and as the opinions were so widespread and varied one cannot even join the majority. I. St. suggested a better option for the role of Archie Rice:

Dabei hätte die Josefstadt d e n Entertainer im Ensemble: Helmut Lohner, der in Hamburg in dieser Rolle Triumphe gefeiert hat. Joachim Kemmer, in Musical-Rollen und in TV-Serien bewährt, der Mann auch, der Humphrey Bogarts sonore Stimme in der deutschen Synchronfassung von „Casablanca“ war, er kämpft wie ein Berserker, aber was er mit wieherndem Gelächter, singend, tanzend, derb zupackend, über die Rampe bringt, ist nur die Schale, nicht der Kern dieses Archie Rice, der immer über seine eigenen Witze lachen muß, weil die anderen es nicht tun. (I.St. Neues Volksblatt)

Kurt Heintel had been a member of the Josefstadt-ensemble since 1948 and was therefore very well known.<sup>24</sup> By the time he played Billy Rice he was already “Ehrenmitglied” at the *Josefstadt*, which was a great honour. “Kurt Heintel (Billy Rice) war von der bei ihm gewohnten tiefen Qualität” (H.S., Neue Freie Zeitung) is one of the statements that affirmed his acting routine. Other voices documented that he seemed to have difficulties with finding the correct “British” attitude for his role.

Kurt Heintel als Archies Vater, ein Brite vor allem Schrot und Korn, hat sich einen sonderbaren Sprechstil zurechtgelegt, er wechselt zwischen Gesäusel und Outrage, das hört sich an wie die Abfolge von akustischer Ebbe und Flut im Zeitraffer. (Gunther Martin, Wiener Zeitung)

Doch schon Kurt Heintel gibt als Opa Billy Rice bloß eine See-Promenadenmischung aus „British Bulldog“ und k.k.-Offizier. (R. Pohl, Der Standard)

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. „Kurt Heintel“ <http://aeiou.iicm.tugraz.at/aeiou.encyclop.h/h413402.htm>.

Marianne Mendt's performance seemed to be astonishingly better than expected. In 1994 she was best known for her role in the Austrian TV-series "Kaisermühlenblues", which dealt with the life of working class people living in a Viennese "Gemeindebau". How prominent this role was in the mind of the critics could be seen in their comments about Mendt's performance.

Die Überraschung ist Marianne Mendt: Als trinkfreudige Ehefrau hat sie in der Josefstadt mehr drauf als Gitti in Kaisermühlen. (pra, Kurier)

„Mutter“ Marianne Mendt hat wenigstens den Blues; mit viel Mut zur Häßlichkeit wuchtet sie, eine alkoholisch Gebrochene, ihren Körper und pumpt aus ihm für Momente – alterslos summend – ätherisches Geflöt'. (R. Pohl, Der Standard)

Marianne Mendt gibt mit manchen berührenden und vielen rührseligen Momenten der Urmutter der schlampigen Sippe einen kräftigen Anstrich von Kaisermühlen Blues. (Barbara Petsch, Die Presse)

Warum Marianne Mendt in der Rolle der versoffenen Gattin ihre profilierte schauspielerische Leistung mit Paroxysmen hemmungslosen Geschreis „aufputzt“, bleibt unerfindlich. Aufgestaute Wut in Ehren, aber die so Schätzungswerte ist ja nicht als Demonstrationsobjekt für die Psychiatrie engagiert. (Gunther Martin, Wiener Zeitung)

But again, there are critics that rather harshly described her as a "peinlicher Fall von Überforderung" (Vorarlberger Nachrichten) who's "Stimme überschlägt sich hysterisch" (I.St., Neues Volksblatt).

Janine Wegener and Alexander Wussow had the thankless task to, as R. Pohl put it, "leisten, was in der Josefstadt für burschikose Jugendlichkeit gilt." (R. Pohl, Der Standard)

Neben dem dominanten Vater-Sohn-Duo verblassen die anderen. Janine Wegener als Archie Rices Tochter Jean schafft es mit gleichbleibender Leidensmiene nicht, einen Kontrapunkt zur kaputten Family zu setzen. Alexander Wussow als ihr Bruder Frank bleibt trotz seiner Ausbrüche als Bote einer neuen Generation unkenntlich. (Barbara Petsch, Die Presse)

### 5.3.2.5 The Audience

In the reviews of this production contain only a few descriptions of the audience's behaviour and applause. Nevertheless, those may illustrate the audience's attitude towards this staging:

Jener geduldigere Teil des Publikums, der um halb elf noch im Theater war, applaudierte dann auch. (Roland Koberg, Oberösterreichische Nachrichten)

Die Schauspieler wurden mit Applaus bedacht, bevor man das Theater verließ, um sich nach drei größtenteils langweiligen Stunden zu erholen. (H.S., Neue Freie Zeitung)

These statements show that there was applause, especially for the actors. Angelika Schäfer was even speaking of "Ein großer Premierenerfolg" (Angelika Schäfer, Täglich Alles).

### 5.3.3 Conclusion

Unfortunately, the staging of Osborne's second huge success *The Entertainer* at the *Theater in der Josefstadt* can only be said to have failed in the eyes of the Austrian critics. There are various reasons for the unfavorable response to the play.

At the end of their reviews the critics tend to sum up their opinion and connect it to their overall impression of the play. These summaries give an insight into some causes that might have led to a favorable or unfavorable reception by the audience.

Woran lag es also, daß das Publikum die drei Stunden dauernde Aufführung nicht goutierte? Wahrscheinlich daran, daß Problemstücke in einer ohnehin mit Problemen überlagerten Zeit nicht recht am Platz sind. (H.S., Neue Freie Zeitung)

As mentioned in the Austrian context, 1994 was not an easy, unproblematic time for all of Austria. People were anxious because of diverse problematic areas in and outside Austria.

Die politische Aussage über die Suez-Krise und der „Zorn“ über den Zerfall des Commonwealth berührt Nicht-Engländer dreißig Jahre später kaum. Im Zeichen der Nahost-Friedensbemühungen wirkt manches sogar peinlich. (anonym., Wiener Kirchenzeitung)

For some critics the play simply was not contemporary in its themes. They could not draw parallels to their own situation at that time. It is to be assumed that if the critics could not see topical elements in the play's storyline, the audience was not able to as well.

Fortunately one critic saw aspects in the play that were very similar to the situation in 1994, but according to her it was the fault of the director that those elements of the play did not shine through.

Breit und bedächtig dehnt er das Stück zu schwerfälliger Überlänge, ohne daß es gelänge, Mitgefühl für die Figuren zu provozieren.

So manche zeitgemäße Parallele geht damit unter. Etwa die menschliche Kälte, die persönliche Beziehungen wie beruflichen Erfolg erstickt, oder die Angst vor dem sozialen Abstieg, die Feindbilder heraufbeschwört, seien es nun Iren, Neger, Polen oder Frauen. (Maria Rennhofer, Tiroler Tageszeitung)

The last aspect that may have led to the negative reception is a very obvious one: The *Theater in der Josefstadt* was not the right place to stage the play. Of all theatres in Vienna it is especially the Josefstadt that is and was still *the* platform for staging comedies and farces. But “Die Josefstadt absolviert hin und wieder pflichtgemäß auch ein richtiges Problemstück.” (anonym., Die Presse)

Drei Stunden Entertainment mit dem scharfen Geruch der Gosse mag vielleicht etwas zu lang sein. Aber immerhin sieht man auch nicht alle Tage ein klassisch-modernes Problemstück in der Josefstadt. (Bernhard Praschl, Neue Zeit)

The title *The Entertainer* fitted perfectly well into the repertoire of the Josefstadt. It can be assumed that only few people in the audience knew

what the play was going to be about. The play's title did not necessarily point out a socio-critical play. The Josefstadt-audience was not (and probably still is not) used to these kind of plays and therefore rejected it. The same could apply to the critics.

Although the play itself had already been established as a Modern Classic in Austria the production was not approved of. Most critics classified it as being old-fashioned without connection to the current time. The below average staging did not encourage a change of this view.

In conclusion it can be said *The Entertainer's* premiere in Vienna was a failure.

#### **5.4 *Der Entertainer* (2003)**

The second performance of *The Entertainer* took place at Vienna's most prestigious theatre: the Burgtheater. The *Burg* (as Austrians abbreviate its name) has a long standing tradition and is said to be the biggest German-speaking stage. It is handled as one of the most important ones in Europe. The fact that *The Entertainer* has been staged at this particular theatre shows what significance the work of John Osborne has in Vienna. The production can be seen as a great compliment and honor.

##### **5.4.1 Austrian Context**

The elections in 1999 led to surprising changes in Austrian politics. The result was contrary to all expectations. While the SPÖ and the ÖVP, who had worked together in a coalition for over 10 years, lost lots of supporters, the right-winged FPÖ won new votes and moved up to second place behind the SPÖ. The negotiations for a new government took years and led to a coalition of the ÖVP and the FPÖ in 2002. The Austrian population was shocked and so were other European states that, as a reaction, imposed sanctions against Austria. There was an outright wave of protest in- and outside Austria. Especially those who were orientated left or "green-

alternative”, but also many popular people engaged in the cultural sector were against the new government. Elfriede Jelinek, for example, forbade the staging of her plays in state-theatres. It was not before the “Weisenbericht”, a report about the political situation in Austria commissioned by the EU, that the international situation for Austria was eased.<sup>25</sup>

Previous to the staging of the play in 2003, the Burgtheater itself had also lived through quite dramatic times. Before Klaus Bachler became director of the *Burg* in 2000, Claus Peymann filled this position until 1999 and caused quite a stir during his directorship. His repertoire included modern plays critical of Austria such as *Heldenplatz* by Thomas Bernhard. Staging this play and other critical ones by Peter Handke, Peter Turrini and Elfriede Jelinek, had led to a conflict with the Viennese press<sup>26</sup>. According to W.E. Yates Peymann was being accused of several other things as well:

It has been argued that his direction has been managerially and financially inefficient, with attendances dropping, with the theatre being closed for occasional evenings to create rehearsal time [...], and with too much of the programme given over to pieces with small casts [...], leaving the huge company expensively underused. (Yates 1996, 239)

Not only Peymann’s repertoire but also his ways of leading the Burgtheater were criticized harshly. As the Burgtheater is not a private but a public institution that belongs to the state, it is not surprising that also politics were involved in all the discussions. Peymann found a supporter for his work in the leading party, the SPÖ. The social democrats were at times criticized for their continuing support.

Klaus Bachler<sup>27</sup>, who had studied acting at the Max-Reinhardt-Seminar, became director of the Burgtheater after he had already worked as the manager of the *Wiener Festwochen* and the Volkstheater. Under his leadership a shift in paradigm took place at the Burg. He focused on a balanced repertoire and staged classics as well as modern, experimental plays. In 2005 Herman Nitsch’s *Orgien Mysterien Theater* was performed at

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Niederstätter, p. 258ff.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Yates 1996, p. 237ff.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. „Klaus Bachler“ [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klaus\\_Bachler](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klaus_Bachler).

the Burg as well as the *MTV-unplugged concert* of the German Punk-formation *Die Toten Hosen*.

## 5.4.2 The Reception

The premiere of *Der Entertainer* took place on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 2003. The production was directed by Karin Beier and responsible for the stage design was Florian Etti.

Some critics made it very clear that they were not in favour of this production at all. They could not understand why the Burg wanted to stage this “old” play.

In seinem rätselhaften Spielplan hat jetzt das Burgtheater nach Tennessee Williams den englischen Dramatiker John Osborne wiederentdeckt, der in den fünfziger Jahren als zorniger junger Mann Aufsehen erregte, vor allem mit der Zustandsschilderung einer verlorenen Generation, „Blick zurück im Zorn“. (Anonym., Samstag)

The Akademietheater, which is a smaller stage, is also part of the Burgtheater. Werner Rosenberger asked himself why it had not been staged there.

Am Ring statt im Akademietheater, und keiner weiß: Warum? Das mag progressive Deutschlehrer der frühen 60er Jahre beeindruckt haben. Aber hat der klägliche Versager heute noch Unterhaltungswert? (Werner Rosenberger, Kurier)

As the play had been staged at the Burgtheater the resonance of the press was overwhelming. No other Viennese production of a play by John Osborne had received such elaborate newspaper reviews than this one. Once again the articles will be analysed by taking a look at what has been said about the play, the author, the production, the actors and the audience.

### 5.4.2.1 The Play

In 2003 46 years had passed since the play’s world premiere and the critics felt the need to explain briefly what had happened with it since then. They



commented on its premiere but also on those actors who had already played the main role of Archie Rice in the course of time.

1957 hatte Laurence Olivier dem damals 28-jährigen Dramatiker John Osborne den „Entertainer“ aus der Hand gerissen; die Uraufführung am Londoner Royal Court Theatre machte Geschichte. Die Rolle des Varieté-Sisyphos ist einer der gefährlichsten Hochseilakte im Nachkriegstheater. (Angelika Hager, Profil)

Das Stück von John Osborne hatte 1957 in London Premiere. Sir Laurence Olivier spielte die Hauptrolle; Gustav Gründgens, Harald Juhnke und viele andere sollten folgen. Denn eine so geballte Ladung aus Ingredienzien von Webster, Beckett, Ibsen, Bernhard und einer Prise Mephisto findet sich wohl selten in einem Drehbuch. (Frido Hütter, Kleine Zeitung)

The opinion of some critics was that the play still had some topicality. Helmut Schödel saw a very clear reason why staging the play had been a good choice.

In unseren Zeiten der Quotenhurerei tat das Burgtheater gut daran, sich an Osbornes „Entertainer“ zu erinnern. Denn Osborne zeigt auch, wie sich im Niedergang der Unterhaltungskultur eines Landes der Zustand seiner Gesellschaft spiegelt. (Helmut Schödel, Süddeutsche Zeitung)

Heinz Sichrovsky saw another indicator of topicality in the play, namely those people who did not manage to keep up with the time in which they lived:

Stücke aus den fünfziger Jahren – vor allem solche, die einmal provoziert haben – zählen zum Leichtestverderblichen der Literaturgeschichte. Dennoch ist Osborne nicht ohne weiteres abzuschreiben, denn Menschen, die von der Zeit abgeworfen und dann überrollt wurden, gibt es heutzutage genug. (Heinz Sichrovsky, News)

Only few critics dismissed the play completely. Reinhold Reiterer was one of them. According to him the play was simply too old-fashioned to be revived successfully at the Burgtheater.

John Osbornes (1929-1994) seinerzeitiges Erfolgsstück „Der Entertainer“ hat das Ablaufdatum überschritten. Alle künstlerischen

Anstrengungen, die da jetzt am Burgtheater unternommen wurden, waren zwar nicht umsonst, aber vergebens. Osbornes „Entertainer“ bietet ein paar kostbar-schwierige Rollen, besondere Herausforderungen für Virtuosen, aber als Stück im Ganzen funktioniert es nicht (mehr). (Reinhold Reiterer, OÖ Nachrichten)

Finally, Irmgard Steiner had almost the same view as her colleague Reiterer, but as she claimed there was still a slight topicality in the play because of the war in Iraq. This war was to start one and a half months after the play's premiere in Vienna.

Dass demnächst im Irak britische Soldaten gleiches geschehen könnte, ist ein dünner Anstrich von Aktualität in einem altbackenen Stück, dessen eigentliches Anliegen die penetrant vorgeführte Selbsterstörung einer Familie ist, ausgelöst durch den Untergang einer Unterhaltungsform, die sich überlebt hat – die Music Hall. (Irmgard Steiner, Neues Volksblatt)

All in all one can see that the play itself had not been criticized, but the fact of its staging in Vienna. Some critics could not comprehend why this “old” play should be staged in 2003, while others saw parallels to the time present.

#### **5.4.2.2 The Author**

The production of *Der Entertainer* in 2003 was the first staging of one of Osborne's plays in Vienna after his death in 1994. Brigitte Sob from the newspaper *Zur Zeit* described him as “Vordenker herrschenden Unmuts, der Frustrationen und Unzufriedenheiten der Menschen“ who saw the theatre as a place “wo er seine bittere Sicht des Lebens weitergab.“ (Brigitte Sob, *Zur Zeit*)

Further comments about John Osborne restrict themselves to simply mentioning his name in connection with the words “ehemaliges Erfolgsstück”.

### 5.4.2.3 The Production

If the press can be believed the production had been a disaster from the beginning to the very end. Those critics who spoke positively about it were so few that it is possible to ignore their views, as they were overrun by the majority.

Florian Etti designed a “düsteren Veranstaltungsraum mit Guckkastenbühne, dessen letzter Gast Godot sein könnte” (Helmut Schödel, Süddeutsche Zeitung). Frido Hütter states that “der riesige Bühnenraum bleibt unbewältigt, man sehnt sich nach Kammerspiel und Kellertheater” (Frido Hütter, Kleine Zeitung).

It seems that the huge stage of the Burgtheater had been very hard to handle for Florian Etti. Against all efforts Etti did not succeed in creating the appropriate setting for the play.

Most harshly criticized was the work of director Karin Beier. Before this production she had already caused a stir with her unconventional adaptations of other plays at the Burg. One critic described her as Karin Beier “die sich am Burgtheater bereits mit Schillers „Jungfrau von Orleans“ vertan hat“. (Petra Rathmanner, Falter)

Der erste Auftritt des Entertainers hat den rüdigigen Charme eines B-Movies und könnte aus einem Tarantino-Film stammen. [...] Der letzte Auftritt des Entertainers wird dann doch wieder großes Theater sein. [...] Dazwischen liegt ein dreistündiges Missverständnis: Was hat ein herrlich absturzgefährdeter Entertainer und Stinkstiefel, wie Hackl ihn spielt, in dieser lärmend-lähmenden Inszenierung verloren? Wie kommt John Osbornes bissiger Klassiker „Der Entertainer“ dazu, dass er in der Regie von Karin Beier zu einem zahnlosen Altherrenwitz verkommt? (Petra Rathmanner, Falter)

The main point of critique was that Karin Beier did not manage to separate the show-scenes and the domestic-scenes appropriately. As this is one of the most dominant features of the play it is understandable that a production that missed out on that could not be successful. Frido Hütter documented that she randomly mingled „drastische[s] Sozialdrama, magische[n] Realismus und Revue [...]“. (Frido Hütter, Kleine Zeitung)

Ein Stück, das auf Spielfreude und Spiellust, auf große Auftritte auf der Bühne und auf die großen Auftritte zu Hause, auf das Neben- und Ineinander von „Familie“ und „Show“ setzt. Aber gerade an diesem Hin und Her der beiden Welten, an diesem Schnittpunkt scheitert die Aufführung. Indem sie beide Welten ununterscheidbar vermischt, indem sie einen outrierten Einheitsbrei von Anfang bis Ende anrührt, tendiert die dramatische Spannung in Richtung Null. (Alfred Pfoser, Salzburger Nachrichten)

Moreover, Karin Beier was blamed for not being able to handle the cast correctly. The press stated that it was not easy for the ensemble to play successfully under her direction. Especially Karlheinz Hackl, who played the role of Archie Rice, had his difficulties to succeed in this production.

Archie Rice [...] ist einer der ganz großen Exzentriker des Theaters. Mit ihm muß man behutsam umgehen, sonst überdreht er sich und läuft leer. Das ist Regisseurin Karin Beier im Burgtheater passiert. Sie hat das Stück gewaltsam in Grund und Boden inszeniert, mit dem Ergebnis, dass ihr die Geschichte unter den Fingern zerbröseln ist und Karlheinz Hackl sich die Seele aus dem Leib schreit, um letztendlich niemanden damit zu erreichen... (Anonym., Frauenblatt)

Karin Beier, who produced “zähstes Stadttheater” (Helmut Schödel, Süddeutsche Zeitung), was also accused of presenting the play “in zuviel Dekor und Kunstlärm verpackt und mit zu hoch gedrehtem Tempo serviert” (Barbara Petsch, Die Presse). All in all the newspaper reviews show that her production failed miserably.

#### 5.4.2.4 The Actors

As the production took place at the Burgtheater most of the actors who took part were very well known. The cast consisted of:

Martin Schwab	<i>Billy Rice</i>
Alexandra Henkel	<i>Jean Rice</i>
Karlheinz Hackl	<i>Archie Rice</i>
Barbara Petritsch	<i>Phoebe Rice</i>

Raphael von Bargen

*Frank Rice*

Paul Wolff-Plottegg

*William Rice*

Michael Ciciuffo

*Graham Todd*

The only positively received aspects of this production were the performances of the actors, although the opinions of the critics were sometimes divided as well.

Von der Besetzung her scheint es ein Heimspiel zu sein, ein sicherer Tip für Provokation und Unterhaltung, für ein Beziehungsdrama, das unter die Haut geht. (Alfred Pfoser, Salzburger Nachrichten)

Foremost, Karlheinz Hackl, as Archie Rice, received a large amount of comments. This role was the first one that Hackl played after a severe illness. The fact that he was generally loved by the Austrian audiences favored his good reception.

In Wien steigt nun Karlheinz Hackl in die Stapfen seiner Vorgänger, ein alpenländischer Publikumsliebhaber, den man an der Donau auch dann noch ins Herz schließt, wenn er eine Figur wie an diesem Abend macht. (Stephan Hilpold, Frankfurter Rundschau)

Alle seine Künste auf der Bühne muss er just so präsentieren, dass sie treffsicher und möglichst haarscharf den Geschmack des Publikums verfehlen. Und diese Gratwanderung gelingt ihm wie anderen vor ihm, von Laurence Olivier bis Harald Juhnke, vortrefflich. (Wenzel Müller, Südkurier)

Those who were not too fond of his performance found a good scapegoat in Karin Beier. One could even suggest that some critics did not dare to criticize Hackl after all he had gone through.

Karlheinz Hackl hat durchaus das Zeug, einen schlechten Komödianten so gut zu spielen, dass daraus eine unvergessliche Figur wird. Das Problem ist nur, dass so gut wie jeder seiner Auftritte von einem Regieeinfall verhunzt wird. (Petra Rathmanner, Falter)

It should be said that Beier's ideas were indeed atypical, particularly at one point when Archie had to throw flour at other characters on stage and smirch ketchup into his face..

But, overall, the cast and their performances were received well, especially the roles of Billy and Archie Rice:

Dennoch verblassen all diese möglichen Fehlleistungen neben der Höchstleistung zweier Schauspieler, die man tatsächlich nur als hinreißend bezeichnen kann. Zum einen: Karlheinz Hackl. In der Rolle des abgewrackten Music-Hall-Alleinunterhalters Archie Rice reißt er sich die Haxen aus und spielt sich die Seele aus dem Leib. Theater als aktionistisches Erlebnis. Und zum anderen: Martin Schwab. Ganz still und allürenfrei hat er sich zu einem der markantesten Charakterdarsteller des deutschen Sprachraums entwickelt. Sein sympathisches Monster Billy Rice allein lohnte schon den Besuch des „Entertainers“. (Christian Hirschmann, Format)

The other characters in the play were hardly commented on. Mostly their performances were mentioned in passing. Barbara Petritsch, who played Phoebe, was described as “blond gelockte Fuchtel, deren hysterische Kapriolen nicht nachvollziehbar sind.” (Petra Rathmanner, Falter).

Raphael von Barga zeigt kraftvoll einen Sohn, dem die Verkommenheit seiner Mischpoche den Boden unter den Füßen wegrißt. Allein Alexandra Henkel sackt durch eine Überdosis Farblosigkeit als Tochter Jean unter den Varieté-Osbornes ab. (Angelika Hager, Profil)

Angelika Hager was not the only one who used a wordplay alluding to “The Osbornes”:

Lauter sich überlebt habende Zombies auf dem Abschlussball ihrer Säuferleben. Das Mehl staubt im Handgemenge. Wenn nichts mehr verschlägt, zerrt Beiern die bedauernswerten Leutchen nach vor, an ein Mikrofon, um ihre Meinung einzuholen – von Osborne, dem ehrwürdigen Klassiker an der Schwelle zur heutigen Moderne, führt ja offenbar doch eine Spur zu den „Osbornes“. (Roland Pohl, Der Standard)

“The Osbornes”<sup>28</sup> was an American reality-TV series that documented the daily routine of Ozzy Osbourne, a former member of a heavy metal band

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. „The Osbornes“ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Osbornes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Osbornes).

called *Black Sabbath*, and his family. The series was in a way similar to John Osborne's *Entertainer* as it also demonstrated the life of a family of artists.

#### 5.4.2.5 The Audience

This time the critics wrote quite elaborately about the audience. Thomas Gabler, who was not in favour of the production, even stated how astonished he was about the audience not leaving the theatre during the intermission:

Die ursprünglich nicht eingeplante Pause könnte sich zur idealen Fluchtmöglichkeit für das Publikum entwickeln und Archie Rices treffende Bemerkung „mich wundert, dass ihr überhaupt zurückgekommen seid“ im Halbleer verhallen. (Thomas Gabler, Kronen Zeitung)

Wenzel Müller, the critic of the German newspaper *Südkurier*, commented on the role of the audience in this particular play and how the Viennese audience managed to fulfil this role.

Doch da rührt sich überhaupt nichts, kein Lacher, nicht einmal höflicher Applaus. Und so soll es auch sein. Das Publikum im Wiener Burgtheater findet sich bei der jüngsten Premiere von John Osbornes Klassiker „Der Entertainer“ in einer doppelten Rolle wieder: Es schaut zu, wie ein inzwischen abgetakelter, drittklassiger Conférencier mit seinen Späßchen eben dieses zu unterhalten versucht. Insofern es sich aber überhaupt nicht berühren lässt, begründet es zugleich den Niedergang dieses traurigen Bühnenhelden. Wenn man so will, greift der Zuschauer also auch aktiv in das Geschehen mit ein. (Wenzel Müller, Südkurier)

Fortunately, comments on the audience's reactions were numerous and therefore it is possible to get an insight into how they received the play and its staging.

Folglich war in der Premiere am Wochenende spontaner Beifall selten und dünn, der Applaus nach dem Fall des Vorhangs aber umso kräftiger. Es lohnt sich hinzugehen. (was, Wirtschaftsblatt)

Das Premierenpublikum feierte begeistert die Schauspieler. (Reinhold Reiterer, OÖ Nachrichten)

Das mit höflichem Applaus bedachte Ensemble (Hilde Haider-Pregler, Wiener Zeitung)

Kurz und matt war der Applaus für so viele freudlose Stunden! (Thomas Gabler, Kronen Zeitung)

Das Publikum klatschte heftig, empfahl sich rasch. (Irmgard Steiner, Neues Volksblatt)

Anhaltender, milder Applaus eines Publikums, das auf dieser Ebene ganz offensichtlich nicht verwöhnt ist. (Frido Hütter, Kleine Zeitung)

Das Publikum reagierte bleiern und klatschte am Ende wohl mehr aus Höflichkeit denn aus Überzeugung. (Anonym., Frauenblatt)

According to the reviews the applause was not overwhelming. It seems to be typical for the Viennese audience to applaud at least for the actors even if it did not like the production. This “Höflichkeit” might have also been the reason why the premiere-audience did not leave during the intermission as suggested.

### 5.4.3 Conclusion

46 years after its world premiere, the play itself had been accepted by the critics and the audience. Unfortunately, the production at the Burgtheater was not very well received. Several factors were named by the critics in order to explain their views.

Ein Star macht noch kein Stück. Und so belegt der garantiert humorfreie Abend einmal mehr die These, dass im deutschsprachigen Regietheater Entertainment und Kritik nicht zusammengehen. (Frido Hütter, Kleine Zeitung)

Even though Karlheinz Hackl was the “darling” of the audience, the production itself did not succeed. Frido Hütter’s statement can therefore said to be true. Hackl’s overall performance was good and the audience loved it, but unfortunately he could not compensate Karin Beier’s unorthodox ideas.



Was soll man also sagen – als Resümee? Daß Osbornes zornige, gesellschaftskritische Poesie und Agitation gegen Imperialismus, Klassenschranken in zuviel Dekor und Kunstlärm verpackt und mit zu hoch gedrehtem Tempo serviert wurde. Daß es ein Nachteil ist, wenn man bei einer Theateraufführung erst in den Büchern nachschlagen muß, um die genaueren Zusammenhänge zu begreifen.

Und daß ein großspuriges Szenario und ein dominanter Protagonist nicht reichen für eine überzeugende Aufführung. Weil eine Familien-Tragödie, so kraß und pathetisch sie auch sein mag, ohne intime Momente nicht funktioniert. (Barbara Petsch, Die Presse)

Barbara Petsch aptly sums it up: it needs more than pompous surroundings and dominant characters on stage. Through the mixing up of the show-scenes with the domestic-scenes it was the intimacy that had been left out, even though the play would have needed that in order to work out.

Once again the production of Osborne's *The Entertainer* had failed.

## 6 John Osborne's *A Patriot for Me*

*A Patriot for Me* is one of Osborne's historical plays. It deals with Colonel Alfred Redl, who, because of his homosexuality, is being blackmailed into the role of a double-agent between the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and Russia. "Based on a true story, *Patriot* takes place in the Habsburg Empire between 1890 and the eve of World War I in twenty-three scenes with thirty-seven actors." (Heilpern, 303)

Because of its homosexual theme the play did not have an easy start in England. In fact, it had been banned by the Lord Chamberlain's office because, amongst other things, a drag ball scene occurred in the play.

The Lord Chamberlain considered the drag ball scene so shocking that he banned it in its entirety. He wanted to cut the heart out of the play along with its validation and symbol of defiance. "Omit the whole of this scene," went the lofty uncompromising order from the censor. The same applied to the scenes with Redl in bed with another man (or even a woman). "Omit the whole of this scene..." (Heilpern, 307)

Further the Lord Chamberlain was concerned about the influence that watching the play might have on the audience, but he was also afraid of the kind of audience that such a play may attract.

His Official Reader for a quarter of a century, Charles Heriot, judged that the play and especially the drag ball scene "would certainly attract all the perverts in London and might even persuade the young and ignorant that such a life might not be so bad, after all". (Heilpern, 307)

John Osborne refused to alter the play and to omit the scenes suggested by the Lord Chamberlain. According to him the play did not make sense without those scenes. In order to be able to stage the play the Royal Court Theatre was temporarily turned into a club with the intention to perform the play only in front of subscribed members. This was the only way to evade the ban.

The staging itself seemed to benefit from the ban, as people were very curious about the play they had read so much about in the newspapers, they streamed into the theatre.

### 6.1 *A Patriot for Me (1965)*

Before the play could finally premiere on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1965, another huge problem had to be overcome: Finding an actor to play Alfred Redl.

It was hard to cast the play as many actors did not want to play homosexual roles. Christopher Plummer, Peter O'Tool and other outstanding actors were asked to play Colonel Redl but refused. After the staging had already been postponed two months, Maximilian Schell agreed to play Alfred Redl. The Viennese-born Schell, who had won an Academy Award for his performance in *Judgement at Nuremberg*, insisted on wearing longjohns when playing the sex scenes and had a theory for himself that Redl had actually been straight.

<sup>29</sup>

Finally the cast comprised of the following actors:

Maximilian Schell	<i>Alfred Redl</i>
Frederick Jaeger	<i>Ludwig Max von Kupfer</i>
Clive Morton	Lt.-Col. Ludwig von Möhl
Sandor Eles	<i>Albrecht</i>
George Murcell	<i>Col. Mischa Oblensky</i>
Jill Bennett	<i>Countess Sophia Delyanoff</i>
Sebastian Shaw	<i>General Conrad von Hotzendorf</i>
Ferdy Mayne	<i>Miroslav Kunz</i>
George Devine	<i>Baron von Epp</i>
John Forbes	<i>Ferdy</i>

The play was directed by Anthony Page; Jocelyn Herbert arranged the set and the costumes.

The reviews show that some of the critics could not comprehend why the Lord Chamberlain had banned the play. Bernard Levin from the Daily Mail expressed his view on the situation the following way:

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Heilpern, p. 311

This ramshackle, top-heavy and profoundly unsatisfying play was banned by His Serene Noodleship, the Lord Chamberlain, so I suppose – in case, unlikely though it is, anyone still takes Lord Cobbold seriously – I had better point out that is an entirely proper and unsuggestive work, with nothing in it that any but the immeasurably dirty-minded or illiterate could take exception to. (Bernard Levin, Daily Mail)

The main point of critique was the play's length, especially the "whole of the 90-minute first act, which might and should have been compressed into a brief prologue." (ibid) Milton Shulman had mentioned this issue already in the headline of his review which was "Magnificent theatre – but, Oh, those first nine scenes!" (Milton Shulman, Evening Standard). Furthermore, the views about the play and John Osborne's writing were divided. Iain Hamilton praised the play although he had been aware of its structural weaknesses.

I think the play is superb. I think also that it is a ramshackle structure. It is too long, just as the novel *The Heart of Midlothian* is too long and just as *Hamlet* is too long. I think that it is an artistic failure, just as *Hamlet* was an artistic failure, but it is superb, and Osborne is superb. (Iain Hamilton, Listener)

Another supporter of the play can be found in the reviewer of *The Times*. He acknowledges the play's structure and Osborne's way of characterization and his technique.

Within its bold outline the public and private episodes are securely interwoven and full of calculated internal echoes; the writing has a spacious epic, quality admitting ample background detail and rich subordinate characterization. To avoid exhausting the audience's responses, climaxes are carefully displaced except at moments of crucial importance. (Anonym., The Times)

The critic of the Evening News, Felix Barker, had a completely different view than all his colleagues. According to him *A Patriot For Me* was not a real play. He described it as being "less of a play than a dramatized documentary" (Felix Barker, Evening News). He supported his view by stating that "in 23 scenes spread over 23 years and involving 90 characters, it charts the career of the ambitious young Jew" (ibid.). It is indeed a very long period of time that

elapses during the course of the play and Barker's view can therefore be understood.

The performance of the actors was generally positively received. Especially the performance of Maximilian Schell was seen as appropriate.

These scenes are played with desperate ferocity by Maximilian Schell, whose Redl grows from taciturn immaturity to lonely strength as if the performance were being slowly cut out of rock. There are other fine performances by George Murcell as Redl's Russian opposite number, Jell Bennett as the mistress, and Frederick Jaeger as Redl's upper-class rival and victim. (Anonym., *The Times*)

The scope of the play is obviously great. It evokes the splendours of imperial establishment. It is acted with understanding by Maximilian Schell as Redl, by Miss Bennett, by Clive Morton – in fact by a very large cast. Whatever the Lord Chamberlain may say, this is not a play that can be ignored. (Harold Hobson, *Listener*)

Only Bernard Levin from the *Daily Mail* had the opinion that "The play is very seriously undercast." (Bernard Levin, *Daily Mail*) According to him "Maximilian Schell *drones* through his part in an almost unvarying monotone" (ibid) and most of the rest of the cast were "a sad rag-bag" (ibid).

The drag ball scene was commented on in almost every review. W.A. Darlington from the *Daily Telegraph* described the reaction of the audience during this scene.

There was a certain amount of tee-heeing when the curtain rose on a stage-full of men dressed as women, but this died away. The scene ended in dead, and I think shamed, silence. (W.A. Darlington, *Daily Telegraph*)

Milton Shulman, who had not been in favour of the first act of *A Patriot For Me* at all, started to like the play once the second act had begun. He wrote very positively about the drag ball scene and admired the performance of George Devine.

But it is in a ballroom scene in Vienna when we slowly realise that all the perfumed, painted, coquettish women are really men engaged in a transvestite revel that *A Patriot For Me* really moves into that dramatic stature we have come to expect from John Osborne.

With George Devine, dressed as a dominating dowager and ruling over these twittering males with the biting, corrosive tongue of an ageing queer, this is a moment of magnificent theatre. (Milton Shulman, Evening Standard)

Another positive aspect of the play was the work of director Anthony Page. His achievement in directing this performance was honoured by Milton Shulman who wrote that “Anthony Page has directed this sprawling, passionate play with admirable skill and bold panache”. His colleague of the *Times* was also a supporter of the play:

Among other things, Anthony Page’s production is a sumptuous spectacle, alive with gypsy violinists, glowing costumes, and monumental backdrops. (Anonym., The Times)

In conclusion it is to say that the play itself was received well, even though it had structural weaknesses. The cast had been generally approved of and the work of the director was paid tribute to. The critics were not shocked by the frank way in which Osborne dealt with the topic of homosexuality.

## 6.2 *Ein Patriot für mich* (1970)

Gustav Manker had been the director of the Volkstheater since 1969. At the beginning of his leadership he presented his plans for the repertoire of the following seasons at a press conference. He formulated his wishes as follows:

1. Dem Namen des Volkstheaters entsprechend “weiterhin das österreichische Volksstück pflegen, sowie auch das ausländische, soweit es unserer Mentalität nahe gebracht werden könne”
2. Moderne Dramatiker spielen, die „entweder unkonventionelle Themen – also *heiße Eisen* – anfassen oder stilistisches Experiment wagen“ und
3. Die „Klassiker und die Realisten des 19. Jahrhunderts nicht vernachlässigen, sofern ihre Themen in den Rahmen des Volkstheaters passen.“ (Konschill, p.54)

Staging *Ein Patriot für mich* was a part of the second group, the so called “heiße Eisen”. The play’s themes were definitely unconventional as they touched on the topics of homosexuality and the sensible subject of Colonel Alfred Redl. By producing Osborne’s historical drama the Volkstheater proved once again that it deserved to be characterized as “das tapferste Theater” in Vienna.

### 6.2.1 Austrian Context

In the 1970s the time of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was long gone but, especially in Vienna, its flair and tradition still remained. With its impressive buildings the city of Vienna reminded inhabitants and visitors of this glorious period of time.

For some people, in particular the older generation, the story of Alfred Redl was still a weak spot and had become part of Austria’s collective memory.

At this point a short description of the “real” Colonel Redl, on which Osborne has based his play, shall be given.

#### 6.2.1.1 Colonel Alfred Redl<sup>30</sup>

Alfred Redl was born in Lemberg on March 14<sup>th</sup> 1864. Lemberg was then part of the Austrian Empire and now belongs to the Ukraine. He was a most intelligent man and spoke three languages fluently: German, Ruthenian and Polish. At the age of fifteen he already started his military career by becoming a pupil at the “k.k. Kadettenschule Karthaus” which was situated close to Brno. He graduated with distinction, became lieutenant and later applied for a place at the “k.k. Kriegsschule” in Vienna. This institution was a training school for officers of the “*Generalstabsdienst*”. Once again his efforts were crowned with success and he graduated in 1894. A position at the

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Roewer, Schäfer, Uhl: Lexikon der Geheimdienste im 20. Jahrhundert „Alfred Redl“ Knightly, Phillip: The Second Oldest Profession, p.50ff  
 „Alfred Redl “ [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred\\_Redl](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Redl)

*Railway-bureau* was his first working place as an officer. There he explored the railway routes in other countries, especially Russia, in order to design deployment plans. Afterwards Redl was sent to Russia to learn the Russian language. When he came back in 1900 he began working for the Russian group of the *Evidenzbüro*, which collected military evidence. After being announced major in 1909 he became the leader of the *Kundschafterstelle*. In September 1906 the Russians managed to get hold of Redl and his services by blackmailing him. They had found out about his homosexual relationships. In 1907 he delivered the first military information to Russia. In May 1913 he was caught by Austrian agents and “forced” to commit suicide.

When Austrian intelligence officers checked Redl’s affairs it was discovered that he was a homosexual with a taste for luxury. He had a house in Prague and another in Vienna, an estate in the country, four expensive cars, and a cellar that included 160 dozen of the finest champagnes. Documents revealed that he had been receiving about £2,400 a year from the Russians – ten times his pay as a colonel – and that his main task for his employers was to name the Austro-Hungarian agents working in Russia. And, the story goes, he had betrayed Plan Three, the complete scheme for military action against Serbia in the event of war. (Knightley, 52)

When the war started in 1914 those fears were confirmed as the Serbian army managed to fend off the Austro-Hungarian army three times. After Redl’s suicide the monarchy, above all the emperor, tried to keep the incident secret. Unfortunately the cover-up did not work out and the press got hold of important information.

### **6.2.2 The Reception**

The play premiered on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1970 at the Viennese Volkstheater. This production was directed by Rudolf Kautek. Maxi Tschunko designed the costumes and Georg Schmid created the stage design.



### 6.2.2.1 The Play and The Author

The reception of the play was ambivalent. The critics were skeptical because of the fact that a British author had written a play on such a delicate part of the Austrian history.

Piero Rismondo was the reviewer who seemed to be the least satisfied with Osborne's handling of the topic:

Die Sache ist die, daß ein Engländer in Englischer Sprache ein Stück verfaßt hat, das im alten Österreich, im einstigen Österreich-Ungarn spielt, und da wieder in einem in Diktion, Terminologie und Haltung so typisch ausgeprägten Milieu, wie es eben die k. u. k. Armee war. Und so sollte für Wien nicht ganz Wurst sein, was bei einer Aufführung in London, Paris, ja Berlin Wurst sein mag: die Authentizität der Diktion, der Terminologie, der Haltung. (Piero Rismondo, Die Presse)

Rismondo summed up the main problem that arose with the Austrian staging of *Ein Patriot für mich*: it was almost impossible to provide the Viennese audience with a language that everybody found appropriate. In 1970 the audience could be divided into two groups: people who still knew exactly what the tone within the army had to be like, and people who were too young to remember that. The German translation was written by Maximilian Schell. "Sie versucht, gewandt, bühnengerecht, den österreichischen Sprachduktus einzufangen." (ibid.)

How Austrian-German the translation was shall be exemplified with a short statement given by Baron von Elp (sic!) in a conversation with Redl at the beginning of the second act:

**Baron** Und das hier ist die Zarina. Ich weiß nicht so genau *wer* sie eigentlich ist. Ein russischer Spion, stell' ich mir vor. Gib acht, Herzerl, der Oberst verspeist jeden Morgen im Bett ein' Spion zum Frühstück, stimmt's net, Alfred? So hat man mir wenigstens g'sagt.

Schell managed to create an Austrian atmosphere by using very typical expressions such as "Herzerl" and abbreviations like "g'sagt" and "stimmt's". Unfortunately, he was not informed well enough about the terminology used in the army. "Auch hat er die Frage nicht geklärt, wann das englische "you"

mit dem in der alten Armee kameradschaftlich angewandten Du und wann mit Sie zu übersetzen wäre.“ (ibid) According to Duglore Pizzini from the newspaper *Wochenpresse* it should have been the task of director Rudolf Kautek to know “daß sich k.u.k. Offiziere niemals per Sie angesprochen haben”. (Duglore Pizzini, *Wochenpresse*)

Another point of critique, besides the play’s language, was the historical authenticity of this drama. None of the reviewers missed out on mentioning that what was shown on stage was not one hundred percent accurate.

Historische Akribie liegt ihm fern: er verlegt Handlungsorte und verändert Namen von Personen oder Truppeneinheiten, in der Milieuzeichnung des österreich-ungarischen Offizierskorps hält er sich weitgehend an Klischees. Was Gräfin Sophia im Stück kokett eingesteht, gilt auch für den Autor: „Ich fürchte, ich werde die Armee nie verstehen.“ (Krista Hauser, *Tiroler Tageszeitung*)

György Sebestyén offered a likely explanation for this general impression by stating “[Osborne] konzentriert kaum, er analysiert nicht, er bietet (in 23 Szenen) ein Panorama.“ (György Sebestyén, *Kronen Zeitung*) As the play does only give an overview of Redl’s life most reviewers forgave Osborne for this weakness and did not criticize it any further.

The newspaper articles show that their authors had also an opinion of the play that did not include those two points of critique that were discussed above. The *Wochenpresse* claimed that “*Ein Patriot für mich* [...] ist kein wirklich gutes, ist ein allzu langatmiges Stück, aber ein Stück mit Momenten echter Tragik” (Duglore Pizzini, *Wochenpresse*) while *Die Presse* called it “ein interessantes Stück. Ein gekonntes. Ein Englisch gekonntes.” (Piero Rismondo, *Die Presse*)

Fritz Koselka wrote a more elaborate comment in which he also mentioned the topic of homosexuality and its popularity:

Das Stück erhebt sich aber im Niveau nirgends über die diversen Filmfassungen des Stoffes und seine Behandlung in Illustrierten. Ein Modeautor beleuchtet das Modethema gleichgeschlechtlicher Erotik an einem „klassischen“ historischen Fall, der durch den damit verbundenen Staatsverrat sehr große Wellen geschlagen hat. Dabei bleibt der Autor dem Zeittheatergeschmack einer möglichst dick

aufgetragenen Naturalistik nichts schuldig. (Fritz Koselka, Wiener Zeitung)

Koselka criticized that the dramatic version of Colonel Redl's story did not differ a lot from any other adaptation. Furthermore he stated that the play's naturalism was a bit too much but typical for the theatre scene of 1970. By "naturalism" he alluded to the bed scenes in the play that seemed to be too many for him: "Immer wieder werden im Finstern auf die [...] Bühne von der Seite Betten herein befördert, worin dann einer von Redls Mignons und auch er selbst sichtbar werden." (ibid.)

### 6.2.2.2 The Production

Once again the opinions of the reviewers were divided. While some found Rudolf Kautek's way of directing suitable, others described it as boring. The different voices of the critics shall be analyzed in more detail.

Kautek found a supporter in Fritz Walden of the *Arbeiterzeitung*. He generally approved of the performance:

Die Aufführung hat in Rudolf Kauteks Inszenierung und den Bühnenbildern Georg Schmidts das erprobte, hohe Volkstheaterniveau mit einer beachtlichen Reihe von Glanzlichtern. (Fritz Walden, Arbeiterzeitung)

A positive aspect of Rudolf Kautek's work seemed to be his influence on the actors. Two reviews ascribe to Kautek part of the ensemble's achievements:

Rudolf Kauteks Regie traf, mit Ausnahme einiger Distinktions- und Diktionsfehler, für heutige Begriffe erstaunlich gut den ärarischen Habitus zwischen Lemberg und Wien, holte aus manchen Darstellern sogar das charakteristische altösterreichische Armeedeutsch heraus. (Fritz Koselka, Wiener Zeitung)

An der Entfaltung dieser Persönlichkeitsleistung hat, so meint man zu spüren, der Regisseur Rudolf Kautek mitgeformt. Er hat auch sonst durch einen klaren Spielrhythmus und gute Striche den Kern des Stückes herausgeschält. (Piero Rismondo, Die Presse)

Rismondo was not the only one to comment on Kautek's ability to shorten the play. Duglore Pizzini, who described the play as "nicht wirklich gut" and "langatmig", was also confident that the director's cuts were appropriate and helped to make the play easier to digest for the audience. A look at the original stage text of this production confirms these statements. Large parts of dialogues and pauses have been left out.

Kauteks Inszenierung [...] ist entschieden besser. Hervorragende Schauspielerführung, geschickte Striche, die auch den schwachen Stückschluß einbezogen, viel Sorgfalt bei sprachlichen Nuancen und disziplinierte Detailarbeit sorgen für eine beachtliche Ensembleleistung. (Duglore Pizzini, Wochenpresse)

Those who did not favour this production used expressions such as "*brave Inszenierung*" (Rudolf U. Klaus, Kurier), which was definitely an attribute that should not be ascribed to a staging of *A Patriot for Me*. Further criticism was added by Krista Hauser who thought the staging was boring.

Regisseur Rudolf Kautek – sichtlich um eine objektive Inszenierung bemüht – schlug im Wiener Volkstheater einen kühlen, sachlichen Grundton an, der weitgehend in Monotonie mündete. Der Abend wollte kein Ende nehmen. Auch Bettgeschichten und Transvestitenauftritte – so tiefenpsychologisch und hintergründig sie auch auszulegen und so degoutant-effektgeladen sie auch angelegt sind, wirken in massiver Form fad. Und in dem Stück um Alfred Redl dominierte das Bett. (Krista Hauser, Tiroler Tageszeitung)

Hauser was not at all impressed by what one of her colleagues called "dick aufgetragene Naturalistik". The review in the *Express* gives us an explanation which makes it possible to comprehend Krista Hauser's impression:

Dem Regisseur Rudolf Kautek, der Osbornes Stück im Volkstheater inszeniert hat, ist es hoch anzurechnen, daß er diese Szenen, die man auch reißerisch ausschlichten könnte, diskret behandelt, daß er der menschlichen Tragödie den Vorzug vor der Sensation gegeben hat. (G. Obzyna, Express)

The director gives the impression to have preferred a less sensational way of producing *Ein Patriot für mich*. Unfortunately, his work must have been so

tranquil that not even the play's most popular scene, the travesty ball, was as powerful as it should have been. The scene "geriet zu harmlos". (ibid.)

The costumes of this production were created by Maxi Tschunko. Her efforts were positively received. The costumes were described to be "bis zu jedem Uniformknopf authentisch" (György Sebestyén, Kronen Zeitung). Furthermore, she was praised for the "prächtige Toiletten für die einzige noble Dame der Handlung und für jene Damen, die in Wirklichkeit Herren sind." (Duglore Pizzini, Wochenpresse)

The stage design consisted mainly of „Projektionen, die stimmungshältig Veduten aus Lemberg, Wien, Prag und so weiter in Schwarzweiß darstellen, vor denen die Versatzstücke rasch wechseln.“ (Piero Rismondo, Die Presse)

Because of its high number of scenes Georg Schmid had to create a stage design that could be varied easily. Although one critic stated that the stage appeared to be "grau, spartanisch und karg" (Rudolf U. Klaus, Kurier) another reviewer noticed Schmid's achievement for this production:

Auch der technische Ablauf der zwanzig Szenen bietet große Schwierigkeiten, die jedoch in den leicht variablen Bühnenbildern von Georg Schmid [...] tadelfrei bewältigt werden. (G. Obzyna, Express)

For a historical play with 23 scenes it is of primary importance to have a stage design that is variable and easy to handle. Despite all the criticism, Georg Schmid seemed to have found the perfect solution for making the sequence of scenes run smoothly.

### 6.2.2.3 The Actors

The following actors were part of the cast at the premiere in 1970:

Wolfgang Hübsch	<i>Alfred Redl</i>
Albert Rolant	<i>Ludwig Max von Kupfer</i>
Hanns Krassnitzer	<i>Oberstleutnant Ludwig von Möhl</i>
Bernhard Hall	<i>Albrecht</i>
Herbert Propst	<i>Oberst Mischa Oblensky</i>
Anneliese Stöckl-Eberhart	<i>Gräfin Sophia Delyanoff</i>
Egon Jordan	<i>General Conrad von Hoetzendorf</i>

Viktor Gschmeidler	<i>Major Quditor Jaroslaw Kunz</i>
Joseph Hendrichs	<i>Baron von Elp</i>

The reception of the cast was positive throughout. Especially the performance of Wolfgang Hübsch was praised by the press.

Wolfgang Hübsch als Redl aber vermag den Abend zu tragen, und das ist viel, sehr viel. [...] Er ist durchgängig und bruchlos von enormer Spannung und Präsenz, er macht nicht nur die 20 Jahre Entwicklung vom Leutnant zum Obersten, sondern auch die inneren Konflikte und Abgründe des Mannes Redl vollauf glaubhaft, er überzeugt in den großen scenes a faire und erschüttert in den mehr wortkargen. (Rudolf U. Klaus, Kurier)

As the cast of *Ein Patriot für Mich* consisted of more than thirty actors, the critics chose to comment only on the most prominent ones. The two women Renata Olarova as prostitute, and Anneliese Stöckl-Eberhart as Gräfin were mentioned in all the reviews. Both of them had “die nicht sehr dankbare Aufgabe, Redls Versagen beim weiblichen Geschlecht sinnfällig zu machen. Sie lösen sie mit Takt.” (G. Obzyna, Express)

As already in the British newspapers the character of Baron von Elp had left an impression that the reviewers found worth commenting on:

Überragend Joseph Hendrichs ‘ Gastgeber am Tansvestitenball, Baron von Elp. Wie er sich mit österreichischer Nonchalance über die bürgerlichen Moralgesetze hinwegsetzt, ein Aristokrat von köstlichem Humor... (Fritz Walden, Arbeiterzeitung)

Another important character was Oberst Oblensky, the Russian Colonel. He was played by Herbert Propst, who received favourable critique throughout.

Prächtig sein Gegenspieler Herbert Propst als Oberst Oblensky, der Mann, der Redl am Faden hält, unter Druck setzt und für die russische Spionage gewinnen kann. Ein Kraftlackel, der aus allen Poren von „normaler“ Erotik dampft und dabei doch auch geistig nicht plump wirkt. (G. Obzyna, Express)

The remaining cast was only mentioned briefly. With the aim of giving an overview of the ensemble’s achievement most reviewers selected a couple of names in order to represent the whole company.

Die Herren Jordan, Krassnitzer, Haupt, Rolant und Stark möchte ich stellvertretend für das Offizierskorps, Bernhard Hall stellvertretend für die Lustknaben innerhalb eines großen Ensembles nennen, das sich mit ganzem Einsatz um ein besonders für Wien schwieriges Stück bemüht, weil hier vom historischen Geschehen mehr abstrahiert werden muß als anderswo. (ibid)

Generally speaking, the entire cast of this production was favoured by the press. The newspaper articles reveal that hardly a negative word had been written on their performances. The reviewers seemed to have been impressed by their interpretation of the roles.

#### **6.2.2.4 The Audience**

Comments on the audience's applause could be found in four different reviews. In contrast to most other productions of John Osborne's work in Vienna the reviewers' perception was exceptionally unanimous.

Der Beifall war groß. (Die Presse)

Warmer – nein, sagen wir in dem Fall: Herzlicher Beifall.  
(Arbeiterzeitung)

Der Schlußapplaus war heftig. (Tiroler Tageszeitung)

Das Publikum ging erstaunlich gut mit. Der reiche Schlußbeifall für alle steigerte sich für Wolfgang Hübsch zu einer verdienten Ovation.  
(Kurier)

The reaction of the first night's audience was very positive. One reason was the well known cast that they seemed to appreciate. Another explanation was given by Krista Hauser, who asked herself "Wer möchte sich schon dem Vorwurf der Prüderie aussetzen?" (Krista Hauser, Tiroler Tageszeitung) Regrettably, one cannot tell for sure whether the theatre-goers only applauded enthusiastically because they felt embarrassed by what they had seen or whether they were truly overwhelmed by the performance.

### 6.2.3 Conclusion

In contrast to the staging of *Blick zurück im Zorn* and *Der Entertainer*, *Ein Patriot für Mich* was definitely a success. The Viennese audience and critics received the play and its performance favourably. Even though the reviews show that some critics were not satisfied with Osborne's historical inaccuracy and the "Austrianess" of the play, it was on the whole appreciated.

Director Rudolf Kautek has turned out as the person, who was to be held responsible for this good reception. In the articles his work was generally valued, and the cast he had employed for this staging seemed to please the audience as well as the critics.

The reasons why *Ein Patriot für Mich* has only been staged once in Austria are difficult to comprehend. The most prominent explanation might be that most theatres find it hard to produce a play for which it is necessary to employ thirty actors. Paying wages for so many people is not possible for many theatres. Furthermore it must be very expensive and time-consuming to provide 19<sup>th</sup> century costumes for such a large cast. It may well be that producing *Ein Patriot für Mich* is simply too extensive and therefore hardly profitable.



## 7 Résumé: John Osborne in Vienna

In the course of time Vienna has seen the staging of five different plays by John Osborne. The productions of *Blick zurück im Zorn* (1958, 1973, and 1994), *Der Entertainer* (1994, 2003) and *Ein Patriot für Mich* (1970) were described and analyzed in this thesis. In order to provide a thorough examination the three elements of the *theory of cultural transfer* were taken into consideration: the *process of selection*, the *process of mediation*, and the *process of reception*.

Based on the findings of this analysis it can be said that the work of John Osborne was not very successful in Vienna. The performances throughout the decades failed because of various reasons:

Firstly, the reviews show that it was difficult for the Austrian population to comprehend some of Osborne's plays and the circumstances in which they were written. Especially the performances of *Blick zurück im Zorn* and *Der Entertainer* seemed to cause confusion in the Viennese theatres. In 1958 Austrians could not understand what Jimmy Porter was so angry about. He complained about things that the audience of the Volkstheater was not able to relate to. In 1994 it was the dying of the music hall and the misery of Archie Rice and his family that did not touch the hearts of the Viennese theatre-goers. Both plays were staged more than once and it is hard to understand why they had been chosen again by theatre directors. Here the reasons for the selection remain obscure.

The main reason for the blockage of those two plays appears to be their focus on Great Britain. Both their topics are so British that it was not possible to adapt them appropriately for the Austrian audience without taking away their essence.

Secondly, it turned out that the Viennese performances of *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer* were not good enough in order to convince the audience and the critics.

*Look Back in Anger's* first staging was characterized by a good ensemble and director but also by a bad translation. Although the play had established itself as a *Modern Classic*, the second performance in 1973 had its difficulties: the director and the cast were not approved of and the play itself was classified as old-fashioned. Finally, in 1994, the play and its production at the Ensembletheater succeeded. In contrast to the other performances, the director had found the perfect actor for the role of Jimmy Porter. Furthermore, the new translation that was used seemed to suit the audience and the critics.

*The Entertainer*, although staged at two prestigious theatres, was not successful. The play's first performance at the *Josefstadt* in 1994 was described as boring, uninspired and not contemporary. While the play was accepted, the production itself was not. Director Fred Berndt did not manage to adapt the play in order to convince the audience. Additionally, the *Theater in der Josefstadt* was not the proper place for the staging of this socio-critical play. The second performance took place at the *Burgtheater*. The ensemble and the play itself were received positively but director Karin Beier failed miserably in the eyes of the critics. Her version of *The Entertainer* was too loud and altogether not appropriate.

For Osborne's *Ein Patriot für Mich* it was easier to succeed as many theatre-goers were familiar with the story of Alfred Redl before they went to see the performance. Therefore it was not difficult for the audience to understand the play and relate to it. In addition to that the staging was very much approved of because of the good work of the director and his team. *Ein Patriot für Mich* was the most successful staging of all the plays examined in this paper.

The analysis of John Osborne's work staged in Vienna revealed that the Austrian mentality and the topics of his plays somehow or other did not go together. The cultural differences made it difficult for the Austrian audience to understand John Osborne's message. Moreover, the partly inappropriate staging of Osborne's work made a positive reception almost impossible.

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## 10 Zusammenfassung

Diese Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich mit den Stücken des Britischen Dramatikers John Osborne und deren Aufführungen auf Wiener Bühnen. Anhand von Zeitungsartikeln und originalen Bühnentexten wurde versucht eine möglichst objektive Evaluation über die Rezeption der Stücke in Wien zu erstellen.

Als theoretische Grundlage diente die *Theorie des kulturellen Transfers*. Diese beschäftigt sich mit der Übertragung von kulturellen Artefakten von einer Kultur in eine andere. Dabei werden vor allem drei Prozesse analysiert: der Prozess der Selektion, der Prozess der Mediation und der Prozess der Rezeption. Diese Theorie wurde für die Untersuchung des Transfers von John Osbornes Stücken adaptiert: Welche Stücke wurden gespielt? Wo wurden sie aufgeführt und von wem? Wie wurden sie von den Kritikern aufgenommen und warum?

Von über 20 Stücken, die Osborne geschrieben hat, wurden in Wien nur fünf gezeigt. In der vorliegenden Arbeit werden drei dieser fünf Werke analysiert und besprochen: *Blick zurück im Zorn*, *Der Entertainer* und *Ein Patriot für mich*.

Um einen Vergleich herstellen zu können, wurde von allen drei Stücken auch ihr Uraufführung in London besprochen. Dies war zum Teil hilfreich, um die Rezeption der Wiener Aufführungen besser nachvollziehen zu können. Zusätzlich wurde für jede Vorstellung der historische Kontext Österreichs durchleuchtet, um auch daraus Schlüsse zu ziehen.

Die Analyse der Stücke und ihrer Rezeption erfolgte vor allem durch die Zeitungsartikel und orientierte sich an folgenden Fragen: Was wurde von John Osborne und seinem Stück zur Zeit der Aufführung gehalten? Wie wurde die Arbeit des Regisseurs bewertet? Wurden die Darsteller der Produktion für gut befunden oder wurden sie negativ beurteilt? Wie hat das Publikum reagiert?

1958 fand mit *Blick zurück im Zorn* im Volkstheater die erste Inszenierung eines Osborne-Stückes statt. Es folgten weitere Aufführungen im *Kleinen Theater im Konzerthauskeller* (1973) und im *Ensembletheater* (1994). Die letzte der drei Aufführungen stellt sich als die erfolgreichste heraus.

1994, und somit fast 40 Jahre nach seiner Uraufführung, wurde *Der Entertainer* im *Theater in der Josefstadt* inszeniert. Sowohl diese, also auch die zweite Aufführung im *Burgtheater* (2003), wurden nicht positiv aufgenommen.

Das einzige Stück, das eindeutig positiv aufgenommen wurde, war *Ein Patriot für Mich*, welches 1970 im Volkstheater inszeniert wurde. Das Stück über den Spionagefall Redl und dessen offensichtlicher Bezug zu Österreich führten zu einer positiven Rezeption.

## Lebenslauf

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