



Fifteen Turns in the Theatre Real

LONDON.
LIFE'S funny. It's like sucking a sweet with the wrapper on." So says music-hall comic Archie Rice in "The Entertainer." And this is the basic complaint of the play's twenty-seven-year-old author John Osborne, a complaint against all the forces in modern British society that have stunted true aliveness there. And as in "Look Back in Anger," Mr. Osborne has put his complaint in the mouth of the play's least sympathetic character: a degenerate and irresponsible old comedian. Osborne has drawn Archie Rice uncompromisingly, and Sir Laurence Olivier plays him with an appropriate defiance of dramatic convention.

On a stage which alternately represents the music-hall and the digs where live Archie, his retired father, his unloved wife, his weak son, and his intellectual daughter, we follow Archie through fifteen numbered scenes. First, we see him cracking bad jokes, singing jingo ballads (at one point Britain is represented by a plump nude chorus girl), and sharing personal sex references with a callous audience. This part of the proceedings would be hard on any actor. The audience wants to enjoy the stunt of the legitimate actor's carrying on as a song-and-dance man, but this is precisely what the actor must not let them do. Archie Rice must come across as disgusting, phony, and ineffectual. It is to Olivier's credit that he fights his audience on the play's behalf by sticking to a forced, joyless delivery and dancing with depressing downheartedness. Playwright Osborne has made Sir Laurence's task even more difficult by making Act I a slow one, with no effective interplay between the characters. Only in the very last speech of the act does Olivier rise into three-dimensional humanity, suddenly and magnificently, to command our compassion.

However, the second act comes alive. Archie, a bit stewed, starts poking at everyone's sore spots. Using the measured and deliberate speech characteristic of a half-drunk he unwinds sarcastic truths and culminates with a cruel diatribe against his wife: "Look at that poor pathetic old thing there. She's very drunk and just now her muzzy, underdeveloped, untrained mind is racing because her bloodstream is full of alcohol I can't afford to give her, and she's going to force



—Tony Armstrong Jones.
 Laurence Olivier—"pokes at sore-spots."

us to listen to all sorts of dreary embarrassing things we've all heard a hundred times before."

But the great moment in Sir Laurence's performance is yet to come. Near the end of the act Archie quietly tells his daughter about the most moving thing he ever heard, a poor fat Negress in America singing a spiritual: "I never even liked that kind of music, but to see that old black whore singing her heart out to the whole world, you knew somehow in your heart that it didn't matter how much you kick people, the real people, how much you despise them, if they can stand up and make a pure, just natural noise like that there's nothing wrong with them, only with everybody else. I wish to God I were that old bag. I'd stand up and shake my bosom up and down, and lift up my head and make the most beautiful fuss in the world." A minute or two later the crooked Archie, sitting with his back against the wall, is informed that his son has been killed by the Egyptians at Suez. From deep inside him Olivier generates a long-buried impulse that fights its way along disused nervepaths. He doesn't stand but rises by pushing his head back against the wall, and then his wretchedness emerges in a faint but strangely pure keening: "Oh, Lord, I don't care where they bury my body, 'cos my soul's going to live with God!"

The rest of the play is somewhat anticlimactic. Mr. Osborne rushes through a lot of plot details and off-stage events. Suffice it to say that

Archie's situation finally worsens to the point where he must choose between moving to Canada and going to jail. He chooses jail, a diehard gesture of rebellion.

Against Olivier's great performance the play's other star, Dorothy Tutin, has slim pickings. While one may be refreshed with Mr. Osborne's honesty in not drawing Archie's daughter as a girl who finds an answer, there is a tiresomeness in her passive behavior. She tells of her exasperation and rebellion but never becomes very exasperated or rebellious. This is a pity, for Mr. Osborne has superbly stated his strong attitude about the society in which he lives. It may be an untrue one of that society, but it is a desperately true picture of England as it seems to the people in his play. He finds Britain top-heavy with archaic tradition: "Don't clap too hard, we're all in a very old building." He charges that the welfare state freezes rather than abolishes class society: "Look around you. Can you think of any good reason for staying in this cozy little corner of Europe? Don't kid yourself anyone's going to let you do anything or try anything here. Because they're not. You haven't got a chance. You're nobody, you've no money, and you're young. And when you end up it's pretty certain you'll still be nobody, you'll still have no money—the only difference is you'll be old! You'd better start thinking about Number One, because nobody else is going to do it for you, because nobody believes in that stuff any more. Oh, they may say they do, and may take a few bob out of your paypacket every week and stick some stamps on your card to prove it, but don't believe it—nobody will give you a second look. They're all so busy speeding down the middle of the road together, not giving a damn where they're going as long as they're in the bloody middle!" He even questions the Crown: "Why do people like us sit here, and just lap it all up, why do boys die, or stoke boilers—is it really just for the sake of a gloved hand waving at you from a golden coach?"

THE playwright, the best young playwright of the Fifties, has not made "The Entertainer" into the masterpiece it could be. Let us hope he will revise it after it finishes its limited run at the Royal Court Theatre here. Meanwhile he can take genuine pleasure in the knowledge that he has provided the wherewithal for Sir Laurence Olivier's only great modern performance, and that for the second year in a row he has come up with the most vital piece of new playwriting of the London season. —HENRY HEWES.



SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

More Bull

THE one and only time I saw a live bullfight in a real ring I was told by my companion to be sure not to take the side of the bull or I would miss the whole point of the spectacle, and all that death in the afternoon would be wasted on me. Above all I would miss the catharsis, the empathetic identification with the "moment of truth," that moment when the matador's sword is poised to descend into the vital, fleshy area between the shoulder blades of the bull. (The matadors were in bad form that day; they kept missing, and had to keep plunging the sword.) For an American, trained from an early age to root for the underdog, it is difficult not to root for the bull. He looks so lively and spirited as he comes dashing into the ring. One can imagine, if one is so weak as to let oneself imagine, that the bull sees the whole thing as a game. Then the poor, stupid creature is taunted beyond all bearing, is pricked and stuck by picadors and banderilleros, and a big, red rag is waved *ad nauseum* in his face. Who wouldn't charge, and charge again?

I caution you, however, not to have this attitude when you see "**Torero**," an excellent Mexican film that delves more intimately and authentically into the sport and spectacle of bullfighting than any yet made. It tells the story of Luis Procuna, one of Mexico's greatest and most picturesque bullfighters. One can only appreciate the story if one is on his side. This isn't difficult, however, because Procuna (who plays himself) is a most winning sort of person, and the shots in which he demonstrates his art—some of them clipped from newsreels—show his extraordinary style and bravery. The movie also makes clear why such as Procuna take up bullfighting in the first place (economic circumstances, pride, egotism, the desire for riches—not necessarily all these reasons, and not necessarily in that order) and what the perils of the profession are once a foothold has been gained in it. It is a well-photographed and absorbing movie, and not the least of its inter-

esting features is the portion in which the late Manolete appears, taken apparently from newsreels made during his Mexican tour.

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The boys at Twentieth Century-Fox traveled all the way to Greece to make "**Boy on a Dolphin**," a movie which begins with a song that sounds a little like "Three Coins in a Fountain" and some great CinemaScope shots of several Greek islands. For just a moment I was in hopes that a story would not be brought in to spoil the photography, but sad to relate the movie does have a story. It wearies me to detail it: Sophia Loren is a sponge diver who, while diving, sees an antiquated shiphead in the shape of a boy on a dolphin. From there to the mainland, where Professor Alan Ladd is monkeying around the Parthenon; also Clifton Webb, rich man, yacht-owner, unscrupulous art collector. Who gets the boy on the dolphin? Who gets Sophia Loren? The Greek people get the statue and Alan Ladd gets the statuesque Miss Loren, one of the most interesting Italian fertility symbols Hollywood has yet acquired.

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The French "**Nana**," currently playing in New York, is by far the best one. As Martine Carol plays her she is a bawdy, vulgar trollop who spends her mornings and afternoons in various beds, and her evenings in the music hall. She makes deals for her body the way a more virtuous woman might make a deal for some real estate. At one point, while arranging business details with a banker, she asks the banker if she can go and see his money. "At this hour?" he asks. But certainly, and off they go, he to open his big safe, she to coo amorously at the sight of the money. Charles Boyer is the straight-man as a highly placed count in the reign of Napoleon III, and he illustrates, in an expert and sympathetic performance, the perils of tangling with music-hall performers. Jacques Castelot is equally good as Count Vandevures, and Christian Jacques has put it all together with humor, grace, and a feeling for the period. The story is a mite old-fashioned, I must warn you, but at the same time I enjoyed it thoroughly.

—HOLLIS ALPERT.

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