

NEW YORK ART THEATRES



Last showings Mar. 11 at PLAZA
ALEC GUINNESS in
"THE PRISONER"
 Starts Mon., Mar. 12 at PLAZA
"HOUSE of RICORDI"
 The story of the Golden Age of
 Italian Opera, 19th Century!
PLAZA Thea. 58 St. Nr. Madison



THE J. ARTHUR BARK ORGANIZATION PRESENTS
DOCTOR AT SEA
 starring **DIRK BOGARDE**
 In VistaVision • A REPUBLIC RELEASE
TRANS-LUX 52nd on LEXINGTON PL. 3-2434



WALT DISNEY'S
FANTASIA
 with **STOKOWSKI** TECHNICOLOR
TRANS-LUX 57th St. West of 6th Ave. JU 6-4448
Normandie For your greater enjoyment see "Fantasia" from the beginning!

FOUR FRESHMEN
 and 5 trombones
BEST SELLER
 Newest album by the nation's sharpest quartet.
 Great tunes.
Capitol

AUTHORS: TALENT GOING TO WASTE?

If you are the talented author of an unpublished manuscript, let us help you gain the recognition you deserve. We will publish your book—we will edit, design, print, promote, advertise and sell it! Low subsidies. good royalties.

WRITE FOR FREE BOOKLET, DEPT. AT 356
COMET PRESS BOOKS, 11 W. 42 ST., N. Y. 36, N. Y.

Film Programs Puzzling?

Complete New index of 16mm film reviews and feature articles which have appeared in SR's "Ideas on Films" and "Film Forum" now available.

Send 10¢ in stamps to cover
 handling and postage to

FILMS

THE SATURDAY REVIEW

25 West 45 Street
 New York 36, N. Y.



SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

Sir Laurence and the Bard

FOR the third time Sir Laurence Olivier had addressed himself to what is, beyond any doubt, the most difficult of all film assignments, the translation of the poetic drama of Shakespeare into the overwhelmingly realistic motion-picture medium. And to say that in "Richard III" (Lo-pert Films) he has succeeded admirably suggests less the extent of his achievement than the magnitude of the problem itself. Preparing a film version of Shakespeare is far more than a matter of building characterizations or making textual ellisions and emendations; the theatre director must do that too. But to bring alive the patterns of Shakespearean speech, the conventions of Elizabethan drama and action conceived in theatrical terms upon a two-dimensional rectangle that has its own laws and conventions—this is a formidable task. Olivier brings to it, above all else, a keen intelligence, an ability to think through the words of Shakespeare to a vivid, visual setting for them, and a deep feeling for the poetry itself, for the music of the lines, that is reflected not only in his own readings but also in the superb casts he has always gathered around himself. The credit sheets for "Richard III," headed by John Gielgud, Ralph Richardson, Claire Bloom, Alec Clunes, and Cedric Hardwicke, read like an honor roll of the British theatre.

And so let it be said first of this "Richard III" that the poetry is there—in the rich, melancholy tones of Gielgud's Clarence, in Richardson's dulcet, scheming Buckingham, in Claire Bloom's distraught innocence as Lady Anne, even in the sardonic, rasping voice that Olivier has assumed for the title role. Even such minor roles as Norman Wooland's Catesby, Alec Clunes's Hastings, and Helen Haye as the unhappy Duchess of York are handled with rare distinction. Throughout there is the purely sensual pleasure of hearing Shakespeare's lines beautifully spoken. William Walton's music provides an apposite accompaniment to the flow of words, whether punctuating the coronation ceremony with sharp trumpet flourishes or underlining with muted, half-heard woodwinds the evil plans of Richard.

In adapting one of Shakespeare's lesser plays to the screen Olivier has permitted himself considerably more freedom than was possible in either

"Henry V" or "Hamlet" and the results are, on the whole, more than justified. The film opens with the final scene from the third part of "King Henry VI," transformed (with both poetic and historic license) into the coronation of Edward IV. Its lines afford a brilliant opportunity to introduce the tangle of relationships and the uneasy atmosphere that pervades the court, the suggestion of factions, veiled discontent, and divided loyalties. Then, the ceremony over, the courtiers depart and Richard limps toward the camera and, speaking straight at the audience, begins "Now is the winter of our discontent. . . ." The effect is startling, as if we are being unexpectedly invited into the confidence of a man so sure of himself that he can afford to reveal his plans. Olivier makes nimble use of this device repeatedly, transforming the awkward asides and soliloquies of the play into bold, cynical comments upon the advancing action. It adds a whole new dimension to the play and to the character.

Much of the later action of the original—the court intrigues, the repeated denunciations—has either been deleted or telescoped, speeding the action along to Bosworth Field and the final clash between Richard and Richmond. Perhaps Olivier might even have cut more deeply in pruning away the devious counterplots that clutter the second half of his film. Missing, though, is Queen Margaret, whose half-mad maledictions served as the bony understructure of Shakespeare's rambling history: the fate of each of the central figures was dictated by her early curse. Missing too, by consequence, is the magnificent scene in which Margaret, Elizabeth, and the Duchess of York, three successive Queens of England, sit upon the ground and mourn together the bloody extinction of their royal lines.

Without Margaret's curses, however, and their implication of divine retribution at work, Olivier's Richard becomes wholly a mental case, a twisted, paranoiac villain driven by a lust for power and, even more basically, by a will to dominate. The former wins for him the crown through devious stratagems and cold-blooded murder. But once he has reached the throne, once the golden round sits upon his brow, he quickly realizes that power alone is not what satisfies him. There is a marvelous, mystic

Stage Comments

moment during Richard's coronation when everything is stilled and the fruition of all his evil plans seems to bring an instant of pure contentment to his warped soul. Then Lady Anne, his wife, faints in the next room and Richard is brought back to reality, back to his need to force his will on others and others to his will. By scornfully denying Buckingham, the henchman of all his crimes, his promised share in the hard-won booty—"I am not in the giving vein today"—Richard commits what can only be interpreted as an act of wilful self-destruction. From that moment on he rushes down the bloody path to doom.

All of this Olivier has imagined with a keen perception for visual effect. The very first image is a slow tilt down from a huge crown that dominates the throne room to the actual coronation of Edward, from which the camera wanders on to Richard's cold, twisted, envious face. Two priests look on through Richard's early plotting with Buckingham in unfeigned, but unspoken, astonishment. Richard's misshapen shadow falls across a scene, hinting eloquently at the villainy that he has set afoot. The staging of Richard's pretended rejection of the crown while Buckingham extols his virtues conveys not only Richard's sardonic hypocrisy but also the people's instinctive distrust of the man. Naturally, the slaughter of the two young Princes in the Tower of London, narrated in the play, is shown in the film. Most effective of all is the final sequence when Richard, whose pennant is The Boar, is unhorsed and run to earth by com-

mon foot-soldiers. In a muddy gully they close in on him and back him to pieces as dogs would tear at a wild animal. Historical accuracy is followed as Richard's body, trussed over a pack horse, is slowly carried off the field of battle.

Curiously, the more obvious cinematic moments prove the least successful. The procession of ghosts that appears to Richard and Richmond on the night before the battle (always awkward in the theatre), now comes to Richard as a series of decidedly unghostly double-exposures. And the battle itself, although executed on the grand scale of "Henry V," remains remote and confused, with lots of soldiers and lots of horses but a lack of identification as to just *whose* soldiers or *whose* horses they are. They swirl across the screen in a series of shots that seem to have been collected at random, generating no mounting tension—and all giving way abruptly to Richard's stumbling entrance shrieking, "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!"

But these are minor defects in a masterful achievement. The imagination and interpretive power that Olivier first displayed in his "Henry V" is now coupled with a firm, sure grasp of film technique. The calculated over-stressing of "effects" and directorial touches that dominated and marred his "Hamlet" are now controlled to illuminate and advance the text. Certainly, "Richard III" is not as great a play as either of its predecessors; but from it Olivier has wrought a greater film—a film that constantly intrigues the eye and delights the ear.

—ARTHUR KNIGHT.

IN TAILORING "Richard III," one of Shakespeare's most chaotic plays, Sir Laurence Olivier has taken more liberties with the text than he did in either of his two previous Shakespearean films. As Sir Laurence points out, "For a new movie audience, which isn't supposed to realize 'Richard III' is the last of an involved cycle of four historical plays, you must deal with the shape of the plot and the progress of the picture in a new way. By editing and transposing, and just plain horsing around, you have to get the story flowing."

TEXTUAL: He has changed dozens of words and phrases. Some changes, like "raze our helms" to "chop off our heads," are simply for the purpose of making archaic phrases intelligible to contemporary audiences. Others try to make the puzzling swarm of identities clearer by replacing "My Lady Grey" with "Our upstart queen," etc. Perhaps none of these will startle the Shakespearean scholars as much as his replacement of the corpse of Henry VI with the corpse of Henry's son Edward. Perhaps it is more significant for Richard to win his Anne over her husband's corpse than her father's.

Not only has "Henry VI" supplied the coronation scene which begins the film, but generous chunks of Richard's third-act soliloquy in that play have been inserted into the movie. British tradition also lends the film a "God save King Richard! May the King live forever!" And Colley Cibber contributes some of his famous eighteenth-century amendments. "Off with his head! So much for Buckingham!" and the facetiously-spoken "Richard's himself again" are Cibber inventions.

CUTS: Since long speeches tend to fatigue the moviegoer, who expects a flow of motion, Sir Laurence has eliminated the cursing Queen Margaret, who had the fourth longest role in the play. The third longest role, that of Queen Elizabeth, has been greatly diminished. Of the other big roles Richmond has shrunk most drastically.

The number of ghosts who appear in Richard's pre-battle nightmare has been reduced from ten to four. And out is his long speech of remorse and terror that follows the dream. This deletion leaves Richard as unrelenting a villain as Iago; yet such an interpretation is consistent with the inhuman snake Olivier portrays throughout, and in general the cuts have the happy effect of simplifying the play. In the theatre a man's eye is free to wander; more complexity and number of background elements are possible. In a



Olivier and Claire Bloom as Richard and Anne—"the sensual pleasure of Shakespeare."