



LEFT: "What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me?"—The tense scene in which Hamlet "speaks daggers" to his mother

some of its intellectual quality and acquires a faint but unmistakable flavour of modernity; almost a roman policier air.

THERE is a constant battle between the text and the new medium in which it is being interpreted. On the stage, the play progresses irresolutely, the action flows and eddies by turns as Hamlet's resolution stiffens or becomes sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought; for anyone seeing or reading the play with (as it were) a virgin mind, there is a continuing doubt whether Hamlet can indeed screw his will up to the sticking-point. The film, on the other hand, seemed to me to move with an irrevocable predestination to its end.

For this defect—if defect it is—the film-camera is largely to blame. In fact, the camera should have a place on the list of *dramatis personae*—alongside the Ghost. Like an invisible broom it sweeps the players into groups or disperses them along the endless corridors of the palace. It draws Hamlet aside from the rest, or hurries him from the council-chamber to the topmost castle battlement—and almost hurls him down into the sea. It glances from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven, it pries slyly into bed-chambers, it stoops fiercely like a hawk—and always it moves, for this is a moving-picture, a new medium. The play has been translated and the new language has lost some of the old sense.

But if something has been lost, a good deal has been gained. There is scarcely a line—and what clipped currency so many of them are—which is not enriched afresh by that same camera. Ophelia's report to her father of Hamlet's strange behaviour, for example, is illustrated by a mimed scene that gives new sense and substance to her words. The final violence

Film Review, by Jno.

THE REST IS SILENCE...

HAMLET

(Rank-Two Cities)

HAMLET is here and it is good. Whether it is also great is a matter which will be earnestly debated by all to whom the play is more than a name, and whether it is great enough will be argued even more exhaustively by those who have room in their minds to accommodate an enthusiasm for the cinema as well as a love of Shakespeare. But for most filmgoers little more need be said than that this is a picture no one in his senses will miss. It is staged with an austere dignity, photographed most skillfully, and presented by a company of players who give new life to the most smooth-worn lines in all literature. Walton's music, from the ominous-sounding viols and recorders which accompany the play-within-the-play to the solemn majesty of the final funeral march will stir even the unmusical. *Hamlet*, in fact, from the first glimpse of the murky battlements of Elsinore, is tremendously exciting. It is magnificent—*C'est magnifique* (I can already hear the phrase creaking in the wind of criticism) *mais ce n'est pas Shakespeare*.

And there's the rub! For, of course, you can't judge this simply as a film.

Shakespeare could (and did) borrow his plots holus-bolus from the old chronicles and the works of earlier dramatists and no one thought the less of him—nor was he, indeed, the less Shakespeare for doing so. But whoever adapts Shakespeare is in danger of the judgment, and whether this is called *Hamlet* or "An Essay in *Hamlet*" matters not a jot. How, then, does Sir Laurence Olivier's Essay compare with the play?

SHAKESPEARE, it is said, never "blotted out a line once he had written it, and Ben Jonson wisely wished he had "blotted a thousand." But from *Hamlet* Olivier has blotted two thousand. Long sections of text have vanished without trace (Act IV., Sc. 4, to take one example, has disappeared entirely and with it the soliloquy which begins "How all occasions do inform against me"). Those amiable fools Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, along with the young Fortinbras and his captain, and the second gravedigger have been cut off even in the blossom of their sin. Stage directions have been disregarded and the sequence of scenes altered with an audacity which has at times the touch of genius, and the action ceaselessly flows back and forth through the cavernous corridors and antechambers of Elsinore. As far as time is concerned, the film takes two and a-half hours, against about four and a-half for the play.

So absorbed does one become in the unfolding tragedy that it is only in retrospect that the effects of this wholesale reorganisation and compression become apparent. In a brief spoken foreword Olivier summarises the theme: "*Hamlet* is the tragedy of a man who could not make up his mind." And so far as it is possible to crystallize the essence of the play in a phrase, that is the phrase. But the film *Hamlet*, it seemed to me, is from the outset caught up in the march of events rather than in the toils of his own conscience. He has less time to himself, less time for introspection — two important soliloquies have gone into the discard. When you come to think of it, he has only two and a-half hours in which *not* to make up his mind. The tragedy, in fact, loses



JEAN SIMMONS

"My lord, I have remembrances of yours"

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