



POLONIUS (Felix Aylmer) reads Hamlet's letter to King Claudius (Basil Sidney) and Queen Gertrude (Eileen Herlie)

of "Get thee to a nunnery" which precedes the great soliloquy in the film, sends Hamlet angered to the battlements and the camera focusses on his feet as he climbs. Hamlet picks up Yorick's skull and a handful of dust falls noiselessly to the ground.

* * *

MUCH of the vivid detail which the camera so faithfully records is, of course, the result of Olivier's genius for "business," for suiting the action to the word, but this same talent occasionally traps him into a shallower gesture. Why did he bleach his hair? Most Danes may be blond, but many are not and artfulness on top of art is surely a gratuitous addition. Moreover, on a black-and-white screen, hair that is almost white inevitably gives an effect of age which contrasts oddly with the young-seeming queen.

It is the soliloquies, naturally, which give us the most interesting glimpses of Olivier's mind at work, and yet nowhere (it seemed to me) was the clash of screen and stage techniques more evident, nowhere were the *unexplored* possibilities of the screen more potently suggested. The soliloquy is a highly conventional stage device, and the conditions which made it necessary on the stage do not exist in the film. But the film has not yet developed an adequate technique of its own to take the place of the soliloquy. Hamlet's soliloquies, therefore, are a mixture of stage and screen forms. Most of the time we are watching Hamlet, and hear his thoughts, and only occasionally do these thoughts break through into direct speech. But the screen, which can bring an actor's face to within a hand's-breadth of the audience, can, if it wishes, take them right inside his skull. We see the ghost through Hamlet's eyes, but we see Hamlet himself draw the bare bodkin. More subjective treatment might have distilled more of the essence of the play.

Just what subjective treatment can mean to the audience is brilliantly demonstrated in the scenes in which the ghost appears. Each appearance is accompanied by the grotesquely amplified sound of pulsing heartbeats and the image of Hamlet on the screen swims in and out of focus in time with them. This device of the swinging camera (used by Fritz Lang in *Metropolis* 20 years ago) exerts a positive physical effect on

the audience and immeasurably strengthens the tension of these moments. With such good camera-work, it is a pity that the ghost's delivery is so bronchial.

* * *

I HAVE purposely left little space in which to discuss the calibre of the players. For most New Zealanders there is no comparative basis on which to judge the individual performances. I cannot compare Olivier with anyone in his class to-day—I saw Frank Benson nearly 30 years ago, when I was a small boy, and have seen no one of comparable standing since. For me, then, as for most filmgoers hereabouts, Olivier will be the nonpareil—was there ever a more dramatic assault-at-arms than that with Laertes? Of the minor members of the cast, there did not seem one who was not fitted as to the manner born for his part. I would single out in particular Felix Aylmer's splendid portrayal of Polonius (not such a fool, the old man, and honest after his fashion), Eileen Herlie as Gertrude, and the quaint appealing wistfulness of Jean Simmons's Ophelia—so much younger than I had imagined Ophelia to be, and yet so aptly young.

* * *

HAMLET is great, but is it great enough? I am not wise enough to say, but I cannot rid myself of the thought that Olivier has been somewhat precipitate and has forced himself on before the mellowing year. There are other worthy Shakespearian plays which might admirably have followed after *Henry V.* and smoothed the steep ascent to *Elsinore*, giving time for the maturing not only of an individual genius, but of film techniques and processes. To leap from *Henry* to *Hamlet* is the mark of vaulting ambition. Ambition—let us be honest—has not overleaped itself, but it has not, perhaps, landed so surefootedly as it might have done.

(The above review was written a fortnight before the arrival in this country of Sir Laurence and Lady Olivier—and the simultaneous arrival of the news that "Hamlet" had won the premier award at the International Film Festival held this year at Venice. The Festival judges also awarded first place to Jean Simmons for her portrayal of Ophelia, and the photography in the film was voted best for 1948. Desmond Dickinson was director of photography and Ray Sturges was cameraman.)

SOON
AT THE
PLAZA KINGS STATE
—AUCKLAND
—WELLINGTON
—AUCKLAND

Amber

The Woman...
The Picture...
You'll Remember
Forever!



Darryl F. Zanuck
presents

*Forever
Amber*

COLOR BY TECHNICOLOR



Starring
LINDA DARNELL
CORNEL WILDE

**Amber IS COMING
TO THE SCREEN!**