

(C) Punch

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had impressed me as a serious book legitimately using the thriller technique to say something valuable about human nature. But in the BBC play (1YC) the adaptor Rex Reints has chosen to concentrate on the circumstances leading to the death of an unpleasant usurer, and to the trial of Grant Hoathly for his murder. The essence of the book is the change of heart in Hoathly and the transformation of his personality both during the trial and after his condemnation. On the air, the story became a conventional whodunit, with a surprise "twist" at the end. Would I, I wonder, have found the radio play convincing had I not been aware of all the psychological substance in Kruger's novel? I doubt it, for in the BBC version, the operation of conscience, unprepared for, was a gimmick plucked out of Hoathly's heart like a squirming rabbit. Perhaps really good novels should always be presented in instalments, like Dickens and Trollope, instead of in one piece, if the result is to be faithful to the original.

—J.C.R.

Olivier and Gogol

THEATRE ROYAL got away to a good start with Gogol's *Inspector General*, which could, on the whole, be regarded as a feather in the cap of the half-loafers. Of course, there was the inevitable Procrustean alteration of the play's proportions, and the pace was cracked on in an endeavour to make the adapter's task less painful, but for

all that plenty of the play's humour and much of its style was preserved. Although I could not fault the playing of Hlestakov I felt it unfortunate that so much stress was laid on the fact that it was Sir Laurence Olivier doing it—it was a positive invitation to hear Sir Peter Teazle's testiness underpinning the youthful railings of Hlestakov. But this exploitation of personality came into its own at the end of the play, when, instead of the usual "The cast was as follows," we had a graceful speech by Sir Laurence thanking the cast on our behalf, which made one feel that this was indeed an occasion.

Inspired Farce

I HAVEN'T laughed so much since *TIFH* stopped as I did at "The Man Who Didn't Know How to Shudder." The scene where the young hero hypnotises the hell-hound in the haunted castle (by shining his torch in its eyes and telling it its hind legs are feeling very, very heavy) and, once hypnotised, fills it with post-hypnotic suggestions for performing simple domestic chores, was farce at its most inspired. But what chiefly delighted was the satisfying embrace between material and medium—the irresponsible playfulness of the story would have been unexploited in print and frightened out of existence in a stage production. One could perhaps accuse author Lawrence Kitchen of burning the Grimm material at both ends, but he gave us something lovely and light.

—M.B.

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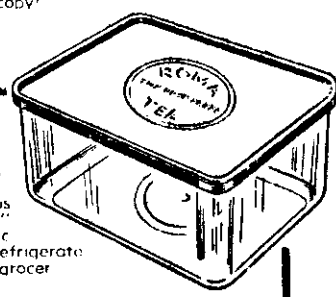


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