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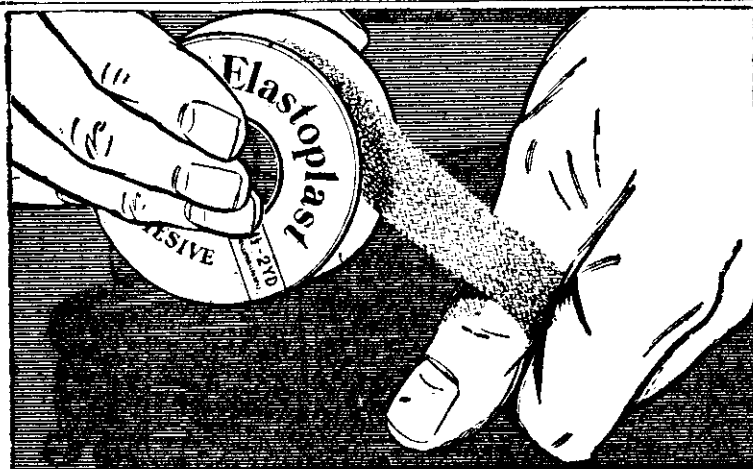
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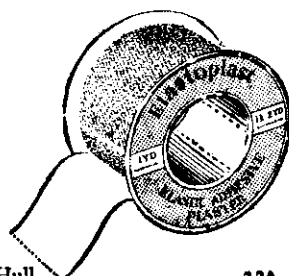
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22A

Filming Shakespeare

IT is nearly two decades since the first sound film version of *Romeo and Juliet* was produced in Hollywood by Irving Thalberg. Recently in London we saw the Venice prize-winning *Romeo and Juliet* of Renato Castellani. This film was made largely on Italian soil and in fairness it should be said that it is beautiful to look at; but so in its way was Thalberg's *Romeo*, which was also far more loyal to Shakespeare; indeed, one recalls Thalberg's wife, Norma Shearer, as one of the best Juliets of our time. At any rate, I think that older version had much more of the text and much more of the true warmth and pathos of the play. Let us call it the first of the successful filmed Shakespeare experiments.

Basically the problem has always been the same: what to do with the camera while the verse is being spoken. Thalberg in *Romeo*, Laurence Olivier in *Henry V* and *Hamlet*, Orson Welles in *Macbeth* and *Othello*—all have approached the problem differently.

A brief examination of the plays themselves shows, of course, that the one thing the Shakespearian theatre never is, is a theatre of the eye; it is a theatre of the mind's eye. Not just that there was no scenery, no accuracy of costume at the Globe Theatre where many of Shakespeare's plays were first enacted. The nature of the place, where performances were given in broad daylight, forbade visually effective detail. The actors do not merely describe where they are and whether it is cold or hot (see *Macbeth*, any of the first few scenes), they also describe to each other who it is who has just come on stage and how one character looks to another. It was through the ear that Shakespeare made his audience see.

A moment's thought will show that in listening to a Shakespeare play in a theatre, as in listening to music drama, one's eyes and ears do not work at full pressure all the time. One looks; then, during some long speech, one so to say

"turns off" one's sight, as one might turn off a tap, and takes in the impact of the drama by ear. At other times, of course, the cut-and-thrust of the dialogue keeps one watching as one watches a tennis tournament, and this the cinema can admirably match. In a play, such as *Julius Caesar*, which Joseph Mankiewicz put on the screen more or less straight for Metro-Goldwyn-Maver, the cut and thrust of the dialogue between Cassius (John Gielgud) and Brutus (James Mason) and Antony (Marlon Brando) was just like perfectly photographed stage playing.

But what happens in deeply pondered soliloquies such as *Macbeth's* "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow . . ." or in *Hamlet*, "To be or not to be"? Ideally, after taking a look at the speaker's face, we want not pictures but an absence of all outer visual stimulus for the next few minutes. And precisely what the cinema cannot give us—

By PHILIP HOPE-WALLACE,
Drama Critic of "The Manchester Guardian" and "Time and Tide"

without abdicating altogether — is a blank, an empty screen. If you remember, Orson Welles took his camera away from

Macbeth's brooding brow and trailed it about the battlements, peering at the storm clouds for minutes on end while his voice droned on.

Olivier's blond *Hamlet's* lips remained sealed while he rolled his eyes and the sound track only whispered his words to us, which was another solution only partially successful. In *Hamlet*, too, there was the extreme and, to me, repugnant example of "illustrated" soliloquy. When Queen Gertrude began telling Laertes about the way his sister Ophelia was drowned with the famous "purple patch," "There is a willow grows aslant a brook . . ." we were transported out of the castle doors to a willow by a brook and shown Ophelia afloat on the weeds, where she looked not pathetic but very silly indeed.

Yet another approach was used in the film of *Henry V*: that of stylisation. We began by witnessing an "actual" Shakespearian production of the play in the Elizabethan Theatre; then we moved out into a "real" world, yet even then

(continued on next page)



ROMEO (Lawrence Harvey) and JULIET (Susan Shentall) in the Capulet's tomb—a scene from the Rank-Universalcine Film, most of which was made in Verona, Italy

N.Z. LISTENER, NOVEMBER 26, 1954.