

PUT OUT THE LIGHT...

OTHELLO

(Marceau Films-United Artists) Y Cert.

WE were (no need to be falsely modest about it) a knowledgeable but sparse audience when the Orson Welles *Othello* opened in Wellington—and temperatures were still around freezing-point at the box-office when the season closed. A great deal of selective film-going, you will gather, is still not being done, and though one can't blame the unthinking multitude for missing a good thing, particularly when no trumpets blow, I suspect, too, a snobbish aloofness among the Shakesperians.

Whoever they were (and why), the absentees missed an enthralling display of screen artistry which caught most of the spirit of the play with the help of rather less than a quarter of the text. For this is (as you might expect) a pictorial *Othello*, an exciting progression of superb images in which just enough is used of the original dialogue to hold the sequences together and give them impetus and direction.

Welles, who has no objection to standing on his head if it will give him a new camera-angle (indeed, the first frame of the film shows his inverted face), begins with the bodies—in a prologue which is the very ocular proof of his capacity. Bells toll, as long converging files of chanting monks escort the dead Othello and his Desdemona to their burial. And while the corteges pass, the doomed Iago—crammed in a steel cage—is hoisted to the battlements. As the dark shadows circling in the sky suggest, his heart is not for daws to peck at.

... If there be any cunning cruelty That can torment him much and hold him long, It shall be his ...

Othello is a magnificent affair of battlements and banners, a chiaroscuro of courtyards and cloisters, Renaissance splendour and squalor, glittering sun and black shadow. Of the players I enjoyed Michael Mac Liammoire's Iago best. Welles often throws away his lines and too often the eye peers through the portal of the head as if he were in the breach at Agincourt instead of on the beach at Cyprus—though I would not say of him that "all that's spoke is marr'd." Suzanne Cloutier's Desdemona is, if anything, a little too restrained—particularly in the more climactic passages—and Roderigo (Robert Coote) too much a clown. But Mac Liammoire's Iago is a persuasive piece of villainy, cold, unsmiling, soft-voiced, venomous—an Irishman Italianate, if you like.

But it is to Welles the director, of course, that the chief credit belongs. This is, he straightforwardly affirms, a motion-picture adaptation of the play, and in the movement and the pictures he has, I believe, captured the essential spirit of *Othello*. In this he has been well served by his cameramen—Anchise Brizzi, G. Araldo and Robert Panto—and, indeed, by all his crew.

He that hath eyes to see let him see!

BAROMETER

FINE: "Othello."
FINE: "The Secret Game."
FAIR: "Geordie."
OVERCAST: "The Killer is Loose."

THE SECRET GAME

(Miracle Films)

Y Cert.

THIS, I should say straightway, is *Les Jeux Interdits*—a film which all enthusiasts will know by repute—and beyond any peradventure it is a masterpiece. The principal players are a small boy (Georges Poujouly) and girl (Brigitte Fossey)—aged, I should say, about 10 and 6 respectively—and I do not recall having seen at any time such faultless response to direction as René Clément has coaxed from them.

Clément (who made *Bataille du Rail*, and was assistant to Cocteau in *La Belle et la Bête*) had a formidable assignment, artistically and psychologically. The story (from the novel by François Boyer) is that of a little child whose parents are machine-gunned from the air on a refugee-choked road in 1940. Wandering off with her dead puppy in her arms she is befriended by a small boy and finds refuge in a friendly but squalid farmhouse. Here the infant encounters for the first time the rituals of Catholicism and this new fascination, coinciding with the talk of death she hears all around her—and the impulse to have a funeral for her dead puppy—sets the pattern for the secret and forbidden game. This is simply the creation of a cemetery for birds and small animals and insects which the two children construct in a deserted mill. With complete seriousness and rapt absorption they heap earth and patter prayers over dead beetles and moles and birds. They fashion rude crosses, then, becoming more ambitious, despoil the village cemetery for the genuine article. *Jeux Interdits*, you perceive, is artistically as well as psychologically exacting. But I don't think Clément fails once to maintain, and keep acceptable, the atmosphere of this doubly complex tale—for around the picture of the children he has had also to draw the somewhat brutish world of the adult peasantry. Though he looks at the latter with a cold eye, his study of the children is infused with pity and a profound sympathy for the defenceless. *The Secret Game*, too, reminds us of events which should not be forgotten. It's not a comfortable film, but it's a great one.

GEORDIE

(London Films-British Lion) G Cert.

If you are in need of a relaxed evening—and if you'd just seen *Othello* and *The Secret Game* you may be—then *Geordie* will more than do. *Geordie*, which had something like a record season in the south and looks like holding up the accession of *Richard III* in Wellington, is a sentimental comedy about a small boy who was so small that he took a correspondence course in muscle-building and became a champion hammer-thrower. I thought the juvenile opening of the film a little stiff—the child characters were poorly handled—but as the grown-up *Geordie*, Bill Travers makes an engaging young Highlander. About seven feet high, I should say, if the camera doesn't lie. Alastair Sim, as the local laird, and Miles Maleson make notable contributions to the fun, and the fact that *Geordie* hasn't a good match temperament provides some nominal excitement. Gilliat and Lauder collaborated in the script (from George Walker's novel) and achieved something a little in advance of topicality by having the climax set at the Melbourne Olympics. Lauder directed.

THE KILLER IS LOOSE

(Crown Productions)

A Cert.

DON'T be misled (as I was) by the names of Wendell Cory and Joseph Cotten in the star-credits of this production. It is a dim little cheapie about an escaped convict bent on revenge. The convict—no quasi-mixed up kid, but a criminal psychopath (Wendell Cory)—lost his wife because Police Lieutenant Cotten had an itchy trigger-finger, and is bent on squaring the match by potting the lieutenant's *cara sposa*. The story goes to fantastic lengths to make it easy for him, but the odds (and, of course, the Johnston Office) are against him.



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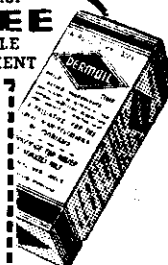
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