

start eating mine. Maybe that's a clue.

"I do know that every time I get a project going here, someone steals it off my plate. I started that horrible mini-series, 'Amerika.' I got money, but no credit. I started that TV movie about Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner that CBS is making. The woman I brought it to, an Israeli who had never even heard of those guys, never heard of Mississippi, just stole it away from me. Ganged up with David Wolper. Of course, they tell a different story, but I guarantee that if I hadn't told that woman about the three civil rights workers, she still wouldn't know them from blini.

"I mean, the way it works is that if you think you would be successful as a con man in a Turkish bazaar, you

would probably do well in Hollywood. Then again, you might not. It has to do with a certain smell you have. Some people have it, and others don't. I can tell you that if you do make it, you'll sort of wish you hadn't. It's that tough. It takes that much out of you. Maybe you should consider stealing corpses for medical experiments."

"So, can I call you if I have a good idea for a movie?" he asked.

I left LAX and headed up La Tijera, up La Cienega, up La Brea toward my little home in the Hollywood Hills. It was about eleven at night. Terrifying Mexicans pulled up next to me in battered Camaros. Haughty looking black men in Cadillacs stared at me through

tinted glass and passed onward. On every street corner in Hollywood there were mounds of newspapers, old clothes, wires, feet wrapped in rags sticking out. Homeless people. Lots of them. In the parking lot of the Mayfair all-night grocery two insane men shouted at no one in particular. A hired guard slept against the wall where once a ten-cents-a-ride mechanical pony had slept. Inside the Mayfair, a bag boy greeted me with a huge smile. "I saw you in *Ghostbusters*," he said. "I love your work."

In line next to me, two Hasids talked in Yiddish at blinding speed. The only words I could make out were "percent," "net, net, net" and "bondit." I think one of them might also have said "internal rate of return." They smiled

at me and I smiled back at them. A little boy with sideburns and a yarmulke came up to the line and handed the two men a bag of oranges. "Weren't you in 'Charles in Charge'?" he asked.

I walked back outside with my sacks of dog biscuits. In the parking lot next to my car was a huge rusting Oldsmobile. In it, an entire family of pale blond Okies slept. A few feet away under a plexiglass bus shelter two homeless black men slept under a pile of rags. A few feet from them, two young teenage boys in tight jeans smiled at men in Mercedes who stopped at the light.

I drove up La Brea. I tried to put myself back in 1959 in Silver Spring, Maryland. How could it all have gone so bad so fast? □

THE TALKIES



THE BARON OF BRIGHTON

by Bruce Bawer

For decades—indeed, since long before many of us were born—it has been a commonplace that Laurence Olivier was the greatest actor of our time. So much of a commonplace has it been, alas, that many of us may well have taken his genius—and his contribution to his art—for granted. To be sure, much of that contribution is forever lost to us: Olivier, who shook off this mortal coil on July 11 at the age of eighty-two, was perhaps most celebrated of all for theatrical performances which few of us were privileged to witness. But, over a period of six decades, he also compiled a sizable body of work on film—sixty-odd movies in all, some of which he did just for the money (and it shows), but many of which are masterpieces, and most of which (thanks to the videotape revolution) we can see again and again.

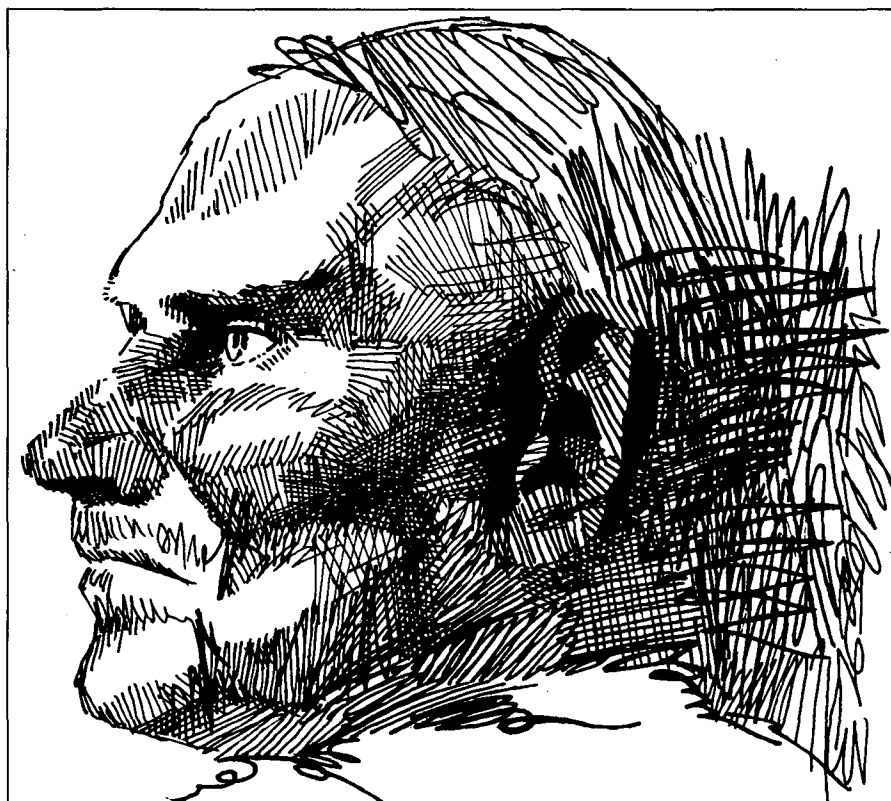
To peruse Olivier's filmography is to be reminded at once of his humor, his energy, and his remarkable range as a movie actor. Brilliant as he was in his adaptations of *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, and other Shakespearean plays, he was equally adept at enacting everything from the brooding romantic heroes of Emily Bronte, Jane Austen, and Daphne du Maurier to the whimsical

and idiosyncratic titled folk of Evelyn Waugh, Terence Rattigan, and James Costigan. His most splendidly realized movie characters tend to inhabit the extremes of life: he seemed born to play both the most virtuous and the most sinister of characters, the most glorious of national heroes and the most forlorn and shabby of losers. He was especially

gifted, too, at capturing protagonists with an enigma, a contradiction, at their hearts; one thinks, for instance, of the bold-yet-melancholy Roman general Crassus in *Spartacus*, and of the savage-yet-gentle stableboy Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*.

Though he appeared in a number of films in Britain in the early thirties—

among them *Fire Over England* (1936) and *Twenty-One Days* (1939), in both of which he acted opposite his wife-to-be, Vivien Leigh—Olivier first came to international prominence in a trio of classic American films based on romantic English novels. In *Wuthering Heights* (1939)—directed by William Wyler from a script by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur—he played Heathcliff to Merle Oberon's Catherine, bringing to the part a vigor that bordered on the flamboyant. It was a natural step from Heathcliff to the equally glamorous and enigmatic Maxim de Winter in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940), based on Daphne du Maurier's best-selling Bronte-ish novel about an ingenuous young bride (Joan Fontaine), her terse, secretive consort, and his vast, gloomy manse. (The screenplay was written by the playwright Robert Sherwood.) And it was another natural step from that film—which won the Academy Award for best picture—to the same year's *Pride and Prejudice* (scripted by Aldous Huxley and Jane Murfin), in which Olivier played the proud Mr. Darcy to Greer Garson's prejudiced Elizabeth Bennet. It's a virtually perfect adaptation, rich and charming and funny—the best possible answer to anyone who claims that a great novel cannot be made into a first-rate movie. If Olivier



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can be faulted for occasional overacting in *Wuthering Heights* and *Rebecca*, his performance here is essentially flawless. His pairing with Garson is particularly fortuitous; the two leads play splendidly off each other's wit, and the combination of mutual animosity and attraction between them feels wonderfully real.

These films were followed by the less worthy *That Hamilton Woman* (1941), an engaging (if thoroughly routine) World War II-era excursion into historical drama, courtesy of the British producer-director Alexander Korda; this would-be morale-booster cast Olivier as yet another romantic hero, the difference being that the romantic hero in this instance was the national icon Lord Nelson. (Vivien Leigh played Nelson's mistress, Lady Hamilton.) And Olivier impersonated a second national icon in his last major wartime movie, *Henry V* (1944). The earliest of Olivier's Shakespearean adaptations and his first directorial effort, the film is a tour de force almost in spite of itself; fussy, stately, stylized, and almost too richly hued, it hovers awfully close (in tone and aspect) to Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's luxuriant, borderline-campy *The Red Shoes* (1948) and *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), but is saved by its intelligence, its patent earnestness of intent, and by its director's manifest reverence for the text at hand. The film, indeed, set a standard by which Shakespearean adaptations

have been judged ever since. Its patriotic pageantry gave way to the more Spartan *Hamlet* (1948), which won the Academy Award for best picture (and for Olivier as best actor); filmed in black and white, on an austere, expressionistic, almost Bergman-like set consisting mostly of mist-enshrouded stone, Olivier's version of the "story of a man who could not make up his mind" (as he identifies it in a prefatory Wellesian voice-over) features a highly fluid camera and voice-over soliloquies, omits several characters and speeches, and seems designed to make the Bard coherent and captivating to the average moviegoer. The wondrous thing is that the film actually does so without seriously compromising the play; and Olivier's vigorous, athletic Hamlet—a Dane as full of life as he is haunted by death—is well-nigh unforgettable. (One can hardly believe he was over forty at the time.)

From first-rate renderings of Shakespeare, Olivier proceeded (unwisely, perhaps) to a third-rate adaptation of Theodore Dreiser. *Carrie* (1952)—directed by William Wyler from a mediocre script by Ruth and Augustus Goetz—turned Dreiser's biting naturalistic novel *Sister Carrie* into a routinely bland Hollywood tear-jerker with top production values and a modestly talented star (Jennifer Jones) in the title role. As Hurstwood, the affluent Chicago restaurateur whose fortunes plummet as his beloved Carrie prospers, Olivier all but wipes everyone else off the screen; he offers us a genuine tragic character in the midst of much unconvincing pathos.

He is equally commanding in the lighter but far more successful *The Prince and the Showgirl* (1958), which he directed from a very funny, charming, and wittily constructed screenplay by Terence Rattigan, then the reigning master of well-made middlebrow English drama. (Rattigan based the script on his stage play *The Sleeping Princess*, in which Olivier had recently appeared with Vivien Leigh.) Olivier turns in one of his richest comic performances as a cold, choleric middle-European aristocrat, the Regent of Carpathia, who, in London for the coronation of King George V, finds himself involved with a giddy, sentimental American dancer named Elsie Marina (Marilyn Monroe). *Spartacus* (1960), meanwhile, offers a somewhat different patrician-and-peasant contraposition: in this provocative epic about the slave revolt of 73 B.C., based on Howard Fast's sentimental-Marxist novel and directed by Stanley Kubrick from a most skillful script by Dalton Trumbo, Olivier brings not only great authority but an exceptional poignancy to the character of Crassus, the urbane, corrupt Roman general and dictator whom the film consistently contrasts with Kirk Douglas's true-blue, unrefined slave general.

Is *The Entertainer* still considered as wonderful as it was in 1960? This tears-of-a-clown piece about a down-at-the-heels vaudeville comic, Archie Rice, has always struck me as dull, facile, and stagy, the protagonist's seedy pathos as ultimately pointless; Olivier's spirited performance seems wasted on the one-note script (which was based on the acclaimed play by Angry Young Man John Osborne). His ability to portray a pitiful loser is far more movingly displayed in *Term of Trial* (1962), in which he appears as a sensitive and literate secondary-school teacher in a gray, working-class English town, one of whose students (Sarah Miles) has falsely accused him of sexual molestation. (The carnal wife of this cerebral pedagogue is played by Simone Signoret.) Written and directed by Peter Glenville, the film is a gripping, intensely disturbing morality tale, and Olivier's portrayal of the teacher—a virtuous man trapped in moral circumstances wherein his worst enemy is his own virtue, and the only means of his ultimate salvation a lie—is deeply credible and affecting.

In his last two decades, Olivier seemed to show up more frequently than ever in films, though the vehicles themselves were often mediocre and the parts mere cameos. He served as little more than high-class adornment, for instance, in such high-gloss spectacles as *The Shoes of the Fisherman* (1968)

and *Nicholas and Alexandra* (1971), and was hardly challenged by his part as a murderous mystery novelist in the lightweight thriller *Sleuth* (1972); while George Roy Hill's *A Little Romance* (1978) was quite charming, moreover, one grew rather uneasy at the sight of Olivier (in the insubstantial role of a petty con man, Julius Edmond Santorin) providing support to a couple of less-than-brilliant child actors. And of course the very idea of Olivier in Harold Robbins's *The Betsy* (1977), or as Neil Diamond's father in a remake of *The Jazz Singer* (1981), was enough to induce nausea.

Many of his movie assignments of recent years, indeed, required Olivier to be little more than old, colorful, and cantankerous (one thinks, for instance, of the television movies "A Voyage Round My Father" and "The Ebony Tower"). But he was made good use of—and was very funny—as an Edwardian barrister in James Costigan's Rattigan-like television drama "Love Among the Ruins" (1974), and managed to make a three-dimensional character out of William Goldman's ruthless Nazi dentist, Christian Szell, in John Schlesinger's *Marathon Man* (1976). (His performance, two years later, as a Holocaust survivor and Nazi hunter in the rather shabby *Boys from Brazil* was considerably less impressive.) And it was a joy to watch him in the television miniseries *Brideshead Revisited* (1981)—though one suspected that Waugh's suave, cosmopolitan Lord Marchmain was hardly a stretch for Lord Olivier.

The inferior roles, needless to say, were a waste of his time and ours. But given a halfway decent part, Olivier was almost invariably mesmerizing. Even his deathbed scene in *Brideshead*—the character feeble, gasping, nearly immobile—has fire; even a gloomy character like Heathcliff, in his most controlled, inward moments, exudes an unsettling forcefulness. Yet none of this force, this fire, seemed ingenuine: indeed, in his intensity Olivier generally appeared, if anything, *realer* than the more subdued performers around him, more vital, more acquainted with passion, with evil, with the night. One was, to be sure, often aware of Olivier's acting—yet it was not in the way one is aware of some Strasbergian's plodding Methodism; one was conscious of it, rather, in the way that one is conscious of a writer like Joyce or Nabokov even as one is thoroughly absorbed in his fiction. Somehow, with Olivier, the illusion of reality coexisted happily with one's delighted awareness of the maestro's artistry. Take him for all in all, we shall not see his like again. □

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THE GREAT CARIBBEAN SALOON SERIES



RUMINISCENCES

by Richard Brookhiser

The time to flee America for the Caribbean is winter, though if, like me, you are in an annual months-long fret about income taxes, the time to flee is June. In the first case, leaving from say, New York, the point is to go some place warmer. In the second case, the point is to go some place cooler and more clement. In any case, you will be drinking. Here, on the basis of experience which consists of trips to six islands for pleasure and Cuba for business, are some pointers:

What to eat. Food, as all good drinkers know, is the companion of drink. Some drinkers reach the point where they don't care what they eat, but if you're that much of a souse, you've probably lost all good taste in drink too.

Unfortunately, there is almost no good food in the Caribbean—or at least little that I've come across. Seafood is the best bet. I have tried two hamburgers, seven years and several hundred miles apart. Don't repeat the mistake. They had to be the worst in the hemisphere. You would think the fish and shellfish, which are caught on the spot, would be better, and they are somewhat. But Caribbeans love to overcook. If you want spiny lobster that doesn't taste like the Michelin tire boy, you must be very firm. Prices are almost always ruinous, New York levels or worse. I will get a letter, I know, from some lowlife epicure who will tell me that my only problem is a timid hewing to the beaten path; *he* knows a beach shack in Carriacou where, for one dollar American, you can get red snapper done to a turn. He's welcome to it. I am a tourist, not a traveler. I have carried my internal organs safely through Morocco, Java, and the Great Indian Desert. I have no intention of risking them two hours from Miami.

There are three exceptions to this grim picture. One, surprisingly, is curries. The British brought a lot of Indians to the Caribbean as coolies (whence V. S. Naipaul). The dishes

they brought with them are often good. The same may apply to the Indonesians who followed the Dutch. Another exception is Castro. If an invitation to his buffet table comes your way, and you don't mind eating under the roof of a despot, you will eat well. He must have a good relation with his caterer. The last is Cozumel. This is the little island off the coast at Cancun. The food here is Mexican, which means that it is very tasty, very heavy, and very much the same, meal after meal. The sense of monotony is heightened by the fact that you must rigidly avoid such dishes as guacamole, or any salad, unless you want to spend half your vacation in the bathroom. This leaves you with beans and mole sauce three times a day, which will begin to feel like a diet of footballs. Still, I would rather eat in Cozumel than all points east.

What to drink. As with food, options are limited. American and European beers are widely available, but why travel to drink Heineken? In Jamaica, they make a brand called Red Stripe, which is bad without being actually offensive, like Indian beers. Wines can be had, but the mark-up is dismaying. Again, why bother? In the Dutch islands, there are fantastic concoctions like guavaberry liqueur, though you'd have to be crazy. The only alternative is to stick to the local classic which, happily, is excellent: rum.

Rum is made from sugar cane, and all the large islands and several of the small ones make their own. Appleton comes from Jamaica; Mount Gay from Barbados. Bacardi, now located on Puerto Rico, was once a Cuban firm; the locals consider it a parvenu, preferring Don Q. I once had a friend, a folk musicologist and a female baritone, who swore by Barbancourt of Haiti, which she carried in a silver pocket flask and passed around to buck up fellow wassailers.

Though it is a potent spirit, rum mixes readily with anything that can stand up to it. The simplest drink is the rum and Coke, which is pretty foul, but does the job. Fruit potions—daiquiris,

piña coladas, planter's punch—are rum's true milieu, though you run up against a typically Caribbean limitation on the food side, which is that there almost never seems to be fresh fruit. Unless it is hanging off a tree over the bar, and often not even then, the fruit in your drink will come out of some can. That's all right, it tastes good enough anyway, and if you luck into something fresh, it makes up for a lot of cans. At the end of one long hot plantation tour, the guide handed around coconuts which he lopped open with a machete, adding some rum and a straw. The world wore a sunnier aspect.

Where to drink. This amounts to, *where to go*, and that depends on what you want to do. If music is the most important thing in life, then you must go to Jamaica. For snorkeling, there are other destinations; Cozumel was excellent, though I haven't been there since Hurricane Gilbert was. Aficionados of gambling and sailing will have their favorite spots. But the last time I went to the Caribbean, I was feeling fried, so I wanted to do nothing at all. So I went to Anguilla.

You can fly to Anguilla through San Juan or St. Thomas, but I think the way I went was best. Fly to Sint Maarten, which is the Dutch half of a neighboring island, then take a cab to Saint Martin, which is the French half. English is spoken in both places, and the dollar circulates as under the Stars and Stripes. They may be the last people who do us honor. St. Maarten/Martin is a stop for cruise ships, and has been crapped up accordingly: Moroccan restaurants, Italian restaurants, stores selling Girbaud jeans at \$50 a leg. Pass all this by and go to the ferry landing in Marigot. It is tiny and poky, but you haven't seen the one you're going to yet. Half an hour takes you there.

John Updike used to go to Anguilla for his psoriasis, and even then, which was the sixties, people were saying that the days of its remoteness were passing. It still seemed pretty remote to me. Its moment in the headlines came in 1967, when it seceded from a federa-

tion arranged by the decolonizing British with St. Kitts and Nevis. London ended up sending in policemen to restore order. Anguillian publications still talk darkly about the dread Kittitians. The island is about the size of Manhattan, and the population is 7,000. The land is flat and dry and bare and rather ugly. The coast is dusted with beaches, like soft white pollen. The names of places and things have a blunt, archetypal quality, like names in the Shire: South Hill, the Old House, the Valley. There is indeed an echo of old or New England—Nantucket on a griddle—though the isolation Nantucket has achieved by means of the bulwark of money has here been secured by the no man's land of no money. Many of the Anguillians seem to be surnamed Gumbs; the inbreeding must be Hapsburg. The Anguillian flag is a circle of three red dolphins. The roads are haphazard. On the ride to my hotel, we passed four houses of worship: one Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall, one Church of God of Prophecy, two Methodist churches.

The place has the essential quality of a *place*, that it makes all other places seem irrelevant. The quarter-inch thick film of mud called news vanished. Gorbachev, Foley, Giuliani became wraiths. When I saw "Fang" in a headline—on the *East Caribbean Chronicle* I think—I had to remind myself that this was a Chinese democrat, not a tooth.

You have seen the ad that says, "When asked what medication they would take to a desert island, nine out of ten doctors chose Bayer"? Well, I went there. It is called Sandy Island, and it lies just out of Road Bay, off Sandy Ground. It has exactly ten palm trees on it, and it looks as if it were set there by the Anguillian Tourism Board. It takes about ten minutes to get there in a Boston whaler, and once you've snorkled a little, and walked around it three times, and watched the black-headed terns hovering like wooden models on wires, there is really nothing to do. You're in a place beyond the last place.

There is one thing, actually, for Sandy Island Enterprises runs a bar in a shack, which stocks lots of rum. □

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