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## SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

### Olivier's Othello

**B**ERNARD SHAW once described a famous Irish actor walking through *Othello* as if the only line in the play that conveyed any idea to him was the description of Othello as "perplexed in the extreme." I mention this to demonstrate the really enormous efforts of Laurence Olivier to give clarity and meaning to one of the most difficult of all Shakespearian roles, now to be seen in a filmed version of the recent production of Great Britain's National Theatre. One of the problems of acting Othello is that the man starts out as entirely noble and admirable, then descends with almost bewildering rapidity into the torments of jealous rage and an acceptance of murder as the only way of relieving his fancied injuries. By choosing to play Othello instead of the more interesting and, in an odd way, the more likeable Iago, Olivier deserves congratulations. And, if he comes off second best to Frank Finlay's Iago, he was certainly aware of and had accepted the risk. For the most part, though, this *Othello*, thankfully brought to the screen almost whole and pure, is as brilliant and beautifully modeled a version as one would wish to see. All American repertory companies, including that at Lincoln Center, should at once herd their members into the movie houses during the four days of performances throughout the country that are at present scheduled by Warner Brothers, for here is acting of enormous skill and passion.

As is well known by now, Olivier has taken Shakespeare's "black" description of the Moor of Venice as implying "blackamoor," for otherwise Othello would have been of mixed Arab and Berber ancestry. So, he has dyed his body to the darkest of hues, reddened the inner portions of his lips for a broadening effect and crinkled his hair, and to these stereotyped physical characteristics of a Negro he has added a deeper, huskier voice tone than is his usual, and bodily movements that are, again, not his own, but those of certain Negroes he has presumably studied. Olivier has quite obviously done this in order to make clearer the essential nature of Othello as a man of bravery, nobility, and simplicity whose very lack of guile and cunning enable him to be destroyed by the sophisticated and scheming Iago. Rigorous integrity of artistic purpose was Olivier's aim, but there are those who are going to be made unhappy by what might seem an undue emphasis on racial characteristics, and the suggestion (is it Shakespeare's or Olivier's?) of a

certain residual primitivism in Othello's psyche.

But, perhaps a greater trouble with the performance is that sometimes it is not always Othello, but Olivier who comes creeping through, or rather, the Shakespearian style of his own that he has made familiar. At the same time, he has given Othello a larger understanding than is customary. Even in the early scenes, Olivier's Othello betrays a puzzlement with Venetian subtleties: they cause him to dissemble with friendly grins and a show of good fellowship, which is the same reaction he has to the prejudice demonstrated by Desdemona's father. This sort of acting interpretation does help to overcome a weakness of the play in that it adds a dimension that prepares us for Othello's later collapse. The hidden physical weakness of the Moor (epileptic attacks that are known only to Iago) is emphasized in a striking scene that reveals a root of sexual disturbance. Yet one feels that no matter how head-on the challenge of the role has been met, it has not been made into an entirely harmonious whole.

Otherwise, though, there is little that disturbs about the performances. We can only applaud wholeheartedly, helplessly, Frank Finlay's masterful Iago, which will simply have to be a model for generations to come (the filming of the play can then be seen to be priceless on a cultural and educational level) because of the consummate ease with which he plays the action and enunciates the rich poetry. No whisker-twirling villain this, but a personality competent and capable and distorted by thwarted ambition into dripping his poisoned words. Maggie Smith's Desdemona is lovely and sweet, beautifully and precisely spoken. Derek Jacobi's Cassio is handsome and eloquent and Joyce Redman's Emilia shows her to be an actress of great capability. But they're all good, the ensemble leaves almost nothing to be desired.

The filming was done in a studio, but the stage settings influenced the unobtrusive design of the backgrounds, and the costumes, too, rich, but keyed into the totality of the design, are based, I am told, on those of the stage production. Very little has been done to make this *Othello* cinematic (as was not the case with Olivier's *Hamlet* and *Richard III*), and, as a result, we have the play itself, benefiting hugely from the use of close-ups, discreet in its shifting of scene, a living proof that theater and film can serve each other and serve us all.

—HOLLIS ALPERT.



—Pageant Studios.

# SR / Research

## SCIENCE & HUMANITY



DEPARTMENTS: Research in America • Letters to the Science Editor

### RESEARCH IN AMERICA

## DO WE NEED NEW RULES FOR EXPERIMENTS ON PEOPLE?

ONE of the boldest research proposals in the history of science was made in a neglected lecture last May by Dr. José M. R. Delgado, associate professor of physiology at Yale University School of Medicine. Speaking at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City on "Evolution of Physical Control of the Brain," Professor Delgado declared:

In my opinion, it is necessary to shift the center of scientific research from the study and control of natural elements to the analysis and patterning of mental activities. There is a sense of urgency in this redirection because the most important problem of our present age is the reorganization of man's social relations. While the mind of future generations will be formed by pedagogic, cultural, political, and philosophical factors, it is also true that education is based on the transmission of behavioral, emotional, and intellectual patterns related to still unknown neuro-physiological mechanisms. Investigators will not be able to prevent the clash of conflicting desires or ideologies, but they can discover the neuronal [nerve cell] mechanisms of anger, hate, aggressiveness, or territoriality, providing clues for the direction of emotions and for the education of more sociable and less cruel human beings. The precarious race between intelligent brains and unchained atoms must be won if the human race is going to survive, and learning the biological mechanisms of social relations will favor the cerebral victory.

How would this revolution in human behavior be brought about?

By making use of the fact that the brain is an electric organ.

And how can the organ be played upon?

By placing electrodes at specific control points within it and, through these

mechanical intermediaries, introducing electric current either directly by means of wires or by remote radio command.

This is not the whole story of what happens, any more than it is accurate to say that the finger that pushes the launching button for a rocket flight is responsible for putting an earth satellite into orbit. The rocket button simply closes a switch that sets off a long sequence of electronic, mechanical, and chemical events previously designed and arranged to lift the satellite into a position mathematically calculated in advance; electric stimulation of the brain likewise triggers a chain of biochemical, enzymatic, thermal, and electrical processes that are built into the brain.

Having put the rocket together himself, man knows each successive event in the satellite launching sequence. Having inherited his brain complete and in place, man must explore within his own head the pathways, excitements, and inhibitions that relate the cells and synapses of his nervous system to the muscles of his body and to the more evanescent moving forces of his psyche. The hunt has only just begun, but Professor Delgado's own researches have led him to think that behavior may be organized like a symphony, with the brain drawing anatomical and functional fragments together into harmonious patterns.

"Until one or two decades ago," the professor reminded in his lecture, "the brain was treated as a 'black box' which could be reached only through the senses. Psychological investigations analyzed correlations between sensory input and behavioral output, but it was not possible to explore the processes lying in between which were hidden in the mystery of brain physiology." He continued:

During the last decade we have reached an historical turning point be-

cause of the development of methods which permit the coordination and synthesis of physical, physiological, pharmacological, and psychological research. . . . Learning, emotions, drives, memory, consciousness, and other phenomena which in the past belonged only in the realm of philosophy are now the subjects of neuro-physiological experimentation. . . .

I am not so naive as to think that cerebral research holds all the answers to mankind's present problems, but I do believe that an understanding of the biological bases of social and antisocial behavior and of mental activities, which for the first time in history can now be explored in the conscious brain, may be of decisive importance in the search for intelligent solutions to some of our present anxieties, frustrations, and conflicts. Also, it is essential to introduce a balance into the future development of the human mind, and I think that we now have the means to investigate and to influence our own intellect.

Professor Delgado then cataloged a startling array of psychological and behavioral reactions that have already been produced electrically, at will, in animals and humans.

ITEM: Different species of animals—including cat, dog, and monkey—have been induced to "move the legs, raise or lower the body, open or close the mouth, walk or lie still, turn around, and perform a variety of responses with predictable reliability, as if they were electronic toys under human control."

ITEM: The diameters of the pupils of the eyes of monkeys have been "controlled precisely like the diaphragm of a camera."

ITEM: Cats have been caused to respond "as if threatened by a dog, with