A DARING OTHELLO AT STRATFORD

Encouraged by its inexhaustible audience of tourists, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon is setting out this year to pick the eyes out of the London stage. Olivier and Charles Laughton, Dame Edith Evans and two Americans, Robeson and Sam Wanamaker, are on its list of players. London's fashionable directors and stage artists are working with them. If the season is not a great one, it will not be for lack of highly priced talent.

Paul Robeson as Othello, with Mary Ure as Desdemona in the Stratford Memorial Theatre's production of the play.

IN THE PAST THE theatre has had its lean years when it was considered rather a shaky repertory company and a poor tribute to Shakespeare's birthplace, but that ended long ago. As Australians have seen since the war, the company can equal any in London; Glen Byam Shaw, the director of the theatre, aims to make it a kind of English Bayreuth — a place where people from all over the world will come as pilgrims to see Shakespeare as it should be played.

But there is a wide difference between playing Shakespeare and playing Wagner today, and we saw it in the season's opening tragedy, Othello. Allowing for minor differences of interpretation, there is no real difference of opinion on the way Wagner should be staged. The composer himself supervised the mise-en-scene of every opera he wrote, and there are Wagnerians alive who can remember early productions.

Fresh Challenge

But presenting Shakespeare is a fresh challenge to each generation and each producer. Unless it is attempted as Tyrone Guthrie does on an Elizabethan stage it must be some kind of compromise. What kind?

There are traditionalists who believe that from the time of Davenant each leading Shakespearian actor passed on the master's secrets to his successors. Scenery was added to the bare stage and all sorts of mechanical tricks were needed to prevent it from bogging down the tragedies and historical pageants under its own weight. But in style and costume, they maintained, Shakespeare was still recognisable until the clever young men got to work on him 20 years ago.

No doubt they would like to see Stratford as a last home of the tradition; no doubt it was the radical nature of Tony Richardson's Othello (including Loudon Sainthill's designs and Paul Robeson's Moor) which has shocked them so deeply this year. For Stratford is not a home of tradition; it is a daring, radical and sometimes unsuccessful home of experiments.

The new Othello is not a complete success. It has the virtues of vitality and coherence; producer, designer and players have worked to a conception which is clear enough. They offer us an Othello which is dark, violent and shadowy (in fact, it looks almost like King Lear).

In their hurry to get on with it they have bolted it down to two uninterrupted scenes. The music is a din of percussion and trumpets. To show their disrespect for tradition, Mr. Richardson has given us an dramatic Doge, who is carried from the scene like a baby, while Mr. Sainthill has designed the fatal last act on two levels. The drunken brawl becomes the visual highlight of the play, and the wounding of Cassio takes place in the dark. The blinding sunshine of Cyprus has been blacked out in respect for Othello's mood.

This form of production has its excitements; it also has its failings. Robeson's Othello has many of the qualities which white actors miss in this gruelling part. Since I last saw him play it in New York 15 years ago he has somewhat declined into the vale of years (he has Shakespeare's authority for it), but he still has the essential passion and dignity which make him a memorable Othello.

But real greatness in this role must depend ultimately on the speaking voice, and here he is still short of the highest standards. Some of the measured purity of the poetry has escaped him, and it is not until the remorseful finale that his deep bass achieves a sense of repose and the words take on their full meaning.

Iago is essentially prose, and Sam Wanamaker is such an all-round craftsman that he dazzles with his brilliant, sharp, wiry performance, and unctuous, expert at taking the audience into his confidence, rather reminiscent of Olivier in Richard III. I have one fault to find with this piece of virtuosity: it does not appear blunt and honest enough. The villain must really look and sound like a sergeant major, a pillar of the warrant officers' mess. This man is too smooth to deceive even the free and impetuous Othello.

Promising Actress

Mary Ure is a young actress of promise, but her Desdemona is ruined rather than dignified; time may improve it. The supporting cast is sound as one expects, particularly Albert Finney's Cassio, and it is good to see our own Zoe Caldwell making much of the emotional baggage Bianca.

This is an Othello of mood, conceived by romantics and carried out with a lively imagination. What it lacks is the classic discipline which can keep Shakespeare between, or above, both worlds. All the same, it will whet the appetite for the plays to come; there will be nothing tame or academic about this Stratford season.

THEATRE IN ENGLAND
By Geoffrey Hutton

SOME BRUSSELS EXPERIMENTS COMING TO THE FESTIVAL

Last year, the organisers of the Brussels Exhibition ran an international competition for experimental films, open to "works which, through their form show an attempt to renew cinematographic language, or through their content approach territories not generally frequented by film makers." To the delight of Australian film lovers, some of the best of the 400 entries at Brussels will be seen at this year's Melbourne Film Festival.

WHAT EXACTLY IS an "experimental film." The Brussels judges kept to broad terms of reference: "It has no precise frontiers . . . it may be poetic and lyrical, a story or a documentary; it is sometimes satirical, often abstract."

The cinema, of course, offers an unlimited chance to imaginative artists to create special kinds of fantasy which belong only to it. Yet in 70 years, few have dared explore these possibilities. Georges Melies began it all, I suppose, with his discovery of camera tricks and his trips to the moon. And in the days of silence there were also the young Rene Clair, G. W. Pabst, Luis Bunuel working with Salvador Dali, and Mitchell Romm, the Russian. A little later Cocteau tried his hand and another young Frenchman, Jean Vigo, began to imagine the subconscious on film. Vigo died, alas, before his presence was really felt in the cinema.

All too often the experimental film became hopelessly introverted, or led to an avant-garde dead-end; or it was too esoteric for the mass audience, as in the Freudian film The Seashell and The Clergyman and certain bits of "intellectual" montage in Eisenstein's October. All too often the results could be justified only on the grounds that they used the medium for all it was worth.

So more and more, nowadays, experiment of this sort is confined to the amateur field. The commercial world shuns it like the plague, as it shuns anything which smacks of "arty" innovation. Boris Karloff and Things from Space are the best it has to offer in this line.

Even the animated cartoon, the most obvious genre for fantasy, is concerned almost exclusively with the banal and sadistic exploits of cats and mice, doing unmentionable things to each other (and these films are considered the ideal children's entertainment !). Only once in a blue moon do we find an item like Disney's abstract experiment with Bach in Fantasia; while Norman McLaren's wonderful shorts using "pixillated" animation or painted sound tracks are left for the film society movement to import.

What about the experimental in the field of acted comedy ? The anarchic Marx brothers have now disbanded, and films like Helzapoppin are once-a-century freaks. And in the musical, experiment is usually restricted to a brash but conventional dream sequence set in a Technicolor heaven.

Yet realism and formalism are not mutually exclusive in cinema, any more than they are in modern art. Satirical films, for example, which exaggerate human behavior to emphasise its absurdities, have a vital role to play, underlining what a fantastic civilization we have created to live in.

The collection of experimental films at this year's festival should prove my point. Three of the Brussels entries we are seeing come from Poland, which has a cinema—noble and fantastic, romantic and positive and apt to run wild—we can no longer afford to ignore. The Grand Prix among the 400 Brussels films is Dom (Home), the work of two young Poles, in which a girl daydreams about her past. Her emotions are expressed in a series of surrealist images, crystallising an atmosphere of anxiety. This is a tour-de-force of purely visual film making, fresh in its invention and shown with the intensity and concentration of poetry.

Representing a very different sort of experimental movement are those films of angry young men who use actuality material to make satirical comments on the present age. **Life Is Beautiful** is the one we shall see of this school—"a newsreel compilation with a really vicious kick to it." Shots of concentration camps, H-bombs exploding, hysterical entertainments, are accompanied by a sound track which gently croons love songs and pops. This is a cry of rage, intended to shock, and ends with a monkey laying a wreath on the grave of Homo Sapiens.

The third Polish film is already famous—**Two Men and a Wardrobe**, an "etude" made by the students of the Higher State Film School. Here surrealism is used to convey the essence of life's comedy and tragedy. No word is spoken, and the action takes place against a background of solo saxophone and percussion.

Two solemn workmen, one tall, one short, emerge from the sea carrying between them a large wardrobe of florid design. We follow their progress through a busy dockside town and watch their fruitless attempts to load their burden on a bulging tram, deliver it at a private house and leave it in a crowded restaurant. The film moves from slapstick farce into the realms of frustration and weariness, and, finally, nightmare, as the sane, gentle, long-suffering visitors from the sea are made gradually more and more aware of the violence and brutality around them.

At last, still carrying the wardrobe, they go back to the sea, stepping with infinite care between the sand castles built by a small boy on the shore, and vanish beneath the waves.

One critic at the Edinburgh Festival wrote: "This 14-minute fantasy contains more humor, tenderness, poetry and underlying tragedy than all the rest of the festival films put together." And another critic, Karel Reisz, observed, "It makes you wonder about what you do with your own wardrobe."

In the cartoon category, our festival will screen an entry from Yugoslavia, which won first prize at Venice last year and tells the story of a man who seeks in sleep freedom from the day's worries, only to find a greater fear in its solitude. Coupled with Ivan the Terrible in an evening programme will be **The Creation of the World**, feature-length, from Czechoslovakia which is now almost the home of the cartoon. This is based on the drawings of the French newspaper cartoonist Jean Effel and retells the story of the first part of Genesis, with Gallic wit but without offending. It visualises "God the Father, lay and kind," creating the earth and everything, and it with the help of three delightful little angels and some hindrance from the Devil.

An American short-story film I have often mentioned in this column will at last be seen here—**A Time Out of War** (1954), about two Yankees and a Johnny Reb in the Civil War, agreeing on an hours truce by a shallow river. Made by two brothers, Denis and Terry Sanders, it has deep meanings with us, unstained by violence or one careless image. For many, the 22 quiet minutes of A Time Out of War will prove the highlight of the whole festival.

But many more shorts and documentaries await us — **La Premiere Nuit**, for instance, concerning a schoolboy's discovery of Paris when he boards the Metro in pursuit of a girl; this will be our first sight of the work of France's top documentarists, Georges Franju.

In the Forest of the Falcons and **From Blossom Time to Autumn Frost** are two big Hungarian nature films, savage and uncompromising. **Power Among Men** is Thomas Dickinson's United Nations picture, shot in Italy, Haiti, Canada and Norway. And **The Golden Age of Flemish Art** (Belgium) is the first color work of Paul Haesarts, perhaps the best known "art film" maker in the world.

AT THE CINEMA WITH COLIN BENNETT

SCOTTISH SHOW PIECE: SUB-TROPICAL GARDENS IN LONELY GLEN

You have gardened strenuously most of the week end, and now coming in from the chill of an early autumn evening to a warm fire you feel like reading. Nothing serious, nothing demanding, nothing too frivolous either, because it has been a good satisfying day and should end well.

"OASIS OF THE NORTH: A Highland Garden," by Dawn MacLeod. (Hutchinson; Australian price, 22/6.)

Reviewed by JOAN GILLISON.

"OASIS OF THE NORTH," by Dawn MacLeod, is your book: a quiet, delightful story of the West Highlands of Scotland, with more than its share of the pawky wit, the hard common sense and the independence of the Scots and a most loving description of the wild coast of Wester Ross and the beautiful sub-tropical garden of Inverewe, sheltering on the shores of Loch Ewe.

Dawn MacLeod was invited by her adopted aunt, Mrs. Mairi Sawyer, daughter of Sir Osgood MacKenzie, founder of Inverewe Gardens, to leave London and come to live in a cottage on the estate.

Aunt Mairi, who had spoken only Gaelic as a child, was completely indifferent to English spelling. "The cottage is a wee one," she wrote to her niece, "really only ½ of the gardiner's house divided into two but I can get it let for 3 gins a week to summer visitas. There is milk from the farm and eggs and plenty wood and you could have veg. free from the gardins here. In return for the help I need in the afternoons with shruberys and boarders round this house."

Dawn MacLeod had a well-paid job in the London civil service with superannuation to keep her to it but she had long ago fallen under the spell of her aunt and of this west coast of Scotland; as well, she was a direct descendant of famous MacLeods. She abandoned London and went North.

In 1862 Lady Mary MacKenzie of Gairloch bought her 20-year-old son, Osgood, the estates of Inverewe and Kernsary on the west coast of Ross-shire. The young man had one ambition—to make a great garden.

He chose a 50-acre peninsula, filled with steep glens and bounded on three sides by Loch Ewe. It seemed an unlikely place for a garden, but it had two promising qualities, a mild, wet climate and acid peaty soil.

He planted vast windbreaks with native rhododendron and trees and he built 15-feet high stone walls to make a series of enclosed gardens—policies the Scots call them. He imported shrubs, trees and plants from all over the world and he planted them to the beautiful landscape design he had dreamed as a boy. When he died in 1924 these wonderful sub-tropical gardens were attracting visitors from every country.

In 1953 Inverewe Gardens were taken over by the National Trust of Scotland, just a few weeks before Mrs. Sawyer died from a heart attack. But when Dawn MacLeod went to Inverewe in 1951 her aunt still maintained the direction and active care she had commenced on her father's death.

Mairi Sawyer was a remarkable woman; a brilliant, knowledgeable gardener, warm hearted, a great lady of Scotland who liked to do her own cooking, fun loving, wise, fey, steeped in the lore of the west coast, as widely known as her gardens and as well loved.

Dawn MacLeod worked hard at Inverewe, though no harder than her aunt, who drove herself as strenuously as any of her gardeners, but she needed to increase her income. She became a part-time craft teacher at small, lonely schools and she writes with affection of her pupils, their parents, her fellow teachers, even of the stern Free Kirk minister who preached against her evening classes for adults since he feared they might tempt the faithful from their proper study of the Bible.

Most of the community lived by the stern laws of the Free Kirk—never had Dawn MacLeod lived among more honest, upright, fearless people—but they made one exception. They considered it no crime to outwit excisemen.

She tells some very good stories about this. There were two men, father and son, whose illicit still was worn out. They needed their daily dram, for they were out in all weathers, but they had no money to buy a new still or to buy whisky. They heard that the excisemen was offering £25 for the capture of a still. They took their old one from its secret cave, hid it in a far glen, reported finding it, collected the reward, went to Inverness and spent £20 on parts for a new still and had £5 over for a glorious celebration.

There was the time when Sir Hector MacKenzie, laird of Gairloch and father of Osgood, was away from home and The Rover's Bride, a famous ship for smuggling, raced in ahead of the revenue men with her load of French brandy and claret. By the time the revenue men were in the Gairloch streets there was no sign or trace of any casks. It was only when Sir Hector arrived back unexpectedly, in the midst of the hunt, and found he was quite unable to get in his front door that he guessed — and kept quiet—where the casks were hidden. The laird's house was reckoned safe; rightly so.

By and large these Scots agreed with the Inverness grocer who, when he was censured for selling contraband spirits from the back parlor of his shop, said indignantly and with plain sincerity. "But I never approved of that law !"

Dawn MacLeod was sometimes aware on this lonely coast of incidents beyond natural explanation. There were children calling in a glen when most positively no children were there . . . "For a few moments you stepped out of time," a Scot told her . . . and there was the white yacht, the sun shining clear through it, which sailed into Loch Ewe on the day of Mairi Sawyer's funeral, which put out no boat to come ashore, and sailed away without any sign of life when the last rites of the ceremony finished. She knew with the intensity and concentration of poetry.

"Oasis of the North" is not a particularly well written book, but that is incidental. The quality of the book is not in the writing; it is in the people in the book, in their grand sense of values and in the writer herself.

The book is illustrated by William McLaren, who must know and love Inverewe Gardens and the West Highlands very well.

"... with the help of three delightful little angels." — Here they pick out coats for the newly created animals. From the Czech cartoon The Creation of the World.

SECTION FOR SCHOOLS:

GALILEO: The First Modern Scientist

The name of Galileo has become a legend. He was the first really modern scientist, but he has attracted many fanciful stories to his fame. He is said to have established the principle of the pendulum by observing a swinging lamp, to have used the Leaning Tower of Pisa for his experiments in gravitation, and to have defied the Court of the Inquisition. What is vitally important about him is that he introduced the modern scientific method of hypothesis, deduction, and experimental proof.

THE YOUNG GALILEO was particularly fortunate in his father. A nobly born but not very successful merchant, the older Galileo not only made sacrifices to send his son to the University of Pisa, but also supported him in his numerous changes of study.

Galileo was born in 1564, and early showed remarkable talents in drawing, music and instrument making. At the age of 16 he entered the medical school at Pisa, but soon deserted it for the study of mathematics and physics.

It was while studying medicine that he made his first great scientific discovery. It was understood by doctors even in those days that the rate of the heart-beat was significant in diagnosis, but there were no clocks or watches to measure the rate with accuracy.

Galileo made an instrument for measuring the pulse-beats by using a pendulum. He discovered (possibly while watching the chain-lamps of Pisa Cathedral swinging in the draughts) that the swing of a pendulum of a given length takes the same time, whether in a large arc or in a small one. From this scientific fact he developed his pulse-timer, and later in his life worked out a design for a pendulum clock.

Professor at 24

Another story about Galileo is that he overheard a lecturer on geometry, and later hid himself in a cupboard to follow the remainder of the series. Certainly he was a student of extraordinary quickness, assimilating everything on the first hearing. He dropped medicine, turned to mathematics, and at the age of 24 became a professor in that subject.

Already he had achieved the reputation of being a merciless opponent of all who taught what he considered to be erroneous theories. In particular he attacked the prevailing veneration for Aristotle, the Greek philosopher and scientist. This great thinker had propounded many ideas that we now recognise as quite wrong, but during the Middle Ages he had been regarded as almost as sacrosanct as the Bible.

One of the Aristotelian doctrines in mechanics was that the velocity of freely falling bodies was proportional to their weight, so that a heavy object would fall more rapidly than a light one. Galileo argued that they should fall at the same speed, and his reasoning was remarkably clever.

When his many enemies and few friends refused to accept his revolutionary idea, he is supposed to have proved it in practice at the Leaning Tower of Pisa in an experiment that everyone has read about. There is some doubt whether the story is true, but he was forced to resign from his professorship in 1592.

In the same year he was appointed to a lectureship at Padua, by this time he was famous all over Europe. His university classes in mathematics and engineering were crowded, but at home he was turning his attention to instrument making once again. He invented a machine for simplifying the calculation of gunnery, a hydrostatic balance and the first thermometer.

In 1609 came his greatest sensation. For some years he had been attacking the Ptolemaic idea of the cosmos, which had been generally accepted for 15 centuries. According to this the universe was geocentric, that is, the heavens revolved around a fixed earth. Copernicus, the Polish astronomer, had tried to disprove this, but his heliocentric theory of the solar system had not been accepted.

In denying the system of Ptolemy the brilliant Galileo was treading on very dangerous ground, for it had received the approval of the Roman Church. In fact, it was a matter of doctrine, so that all who denied its validity were, strictly speaking, heretics.

In 1604 a new star of great brightness had appeared, a thing that was impossible according to Ptolemy. Galileo showed that even upon commonly accepted facts of astronomy the Copernican theory was a good one, but it was with his invention of the telescope that he brought the Ptolemaic system down in ruins.

He seems to have heard that a Dutch spectacle maker had accidentally put two lenses together so as to make distant objects seem larger and nearer. Galileo procured two similar lenses, one convex and the other concave, put them at the ends of an adjustable tube, and thus made the first practical telescope.

He carried the new instrument to Venice, and presented it to the Doge. He was at once rewarded with a life professorship at Padua and a greatly increased salary. For months his telescope was the chief attraction in the great city.

From his various telescopes came a flow of discoveries that completely changed the study of astronomy, with profound influences on philosophy and religion. Among these were the mountain ranges and craters of the moon, the librations of the moon (our ability to see rather more than half its surface over a period of time), four satellites revolving around Jupiter, the rings of Saturn, the rotating spots on the sun's surface, the number of stars in the Pleiades, and the fact that the Milky Way is composed of a vast number of separate stars.

Galileo's fanatical love of truth continued to exasperate as many people as it pleased. He did nothing to placate those who opposed him, using bitter and violent language in his disputations. So many of his discoveries contradicted the teachings of the Church that the Inquisition at last intervened.

This was the Roman Inquisition (whose methods were not so drastic as that of Spain and some other countries), and Galileo was summoned to appear before it. There is some doubt as to how he handled the predicament, but he eventually decided formally to admit to error. For this he was condemned to imprisonment and penance, but neither punishment was really enforced.

Although he now faced a period of family tragedies in his old age, Galileo continued to work, even after he went blind. By now he was a great mathematical physicist, and his finest book, "Dialogues concerning Two Scientists," established the techniques of modern physical sciences. Upon some of its ideas Newton was later to formulate his famous laws of motion.

Galileo revolutionised the world of thought. His genius established science as the foundation of the modern life.

Galileo before the Papal Inquisition in 1633. He seems to have defied the inquisitors at first, but later formally confessed his error in opposing the Ptolemaic system of the universe. His punishment was not really enforced.

THE FORSAKEN MERMAN

The Forsaken Merman is a chant that incidentally tells a story. True to his own law of "pure and flawless workmanship," Matthew Arnold created in this poem a rare and beautiful thing. But even in its lyric rapture there is an almost oppressive melancholy. To Arnold "time was out of joint," and he longed for a return to the classical age when men were supposed to live at peace with themselves. This outlook provides the undertones of The Forsaken Merman.

MATTHEW ARNOLD had always to work for his living. Private secretary to Lord Lansdowne, Inspector of Schools, Professor of Poetry at Oxford, writer of many important books of literary and religious criticism, he found little time for composing poetry.

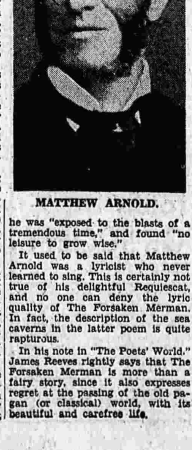
A student of Victorian poetry inevitably compares Arnold's work with that of Tennyson, Browning and Swinburne. They had little in common, but Arnold showed a depth of thought and purity of style that the others either did not possess or would not condescend to acknowledge, despite their genius.

We know from his numerous works of criticism that Arnold was steeped in classicism. In that respect he approached nearer to the spirit of Milton than any other English poet. Privately he was a man of the world, vivacious and charming; but his philosophy was one of deep brooding and discontent of soul.

Arnold found himself "wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born." Unlike his famous father, the head master of Rugby School, he had no religious faith, and he found a melancholy dissatisfaction not only with the times he lived in but also with life itself.

Although he has been called an anti-romantic, Arnold had a loving eye for the simple charms of life and for the less spectacular beauties of nature. And, although not a believer in any particular creed, he nevertheless looked back wistfully to the times when men's religious beliefs were still undisturbed.

Arnold was, in truth, one of the many victims of the apparent conflict between science and religion which came from Darwin's theory of evolution. He complained that



MATTHEW ARNOLD.

he was "exposed to the blasts of a tremendous time," and found "no leisure to grow wise."

It used to be said that Matthew Arnold was a lyricist who never learned to sing. This is certainly not true of his delightful Requiescat, and no one can deny the pure lyric quality of The Forsaken Merman. In fact, the description of the sea wavers in the latter poem is quite rapturous.

In his note in "The Poets' World," James Reeves rightly says that The Forsaken Merman is more than a fairy story, since it is also expresses regret at the passing of the old pagan (or classical) world, with its beautiful and carefree life.

A comparison might be made with the last six lines of Wordsworth's famous sonnet:

> *Great God ! I'd rather be*
> *A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;*
> *So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,*
> *Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;*
> *Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;*
> *Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.*

Arnold had an enormous admiration for Wordsworth, and the attitudes of the two poets to the "weariness, the fever, and the fret" of the industrial and social ferment around them had much in common.

The theme of The Forsaken Merman is a moving one. An ill-matched couple, an unsuccessful marriage leading to desertion of husband and children and lingering sadness on both sides, make a poignant story. The anguish of the deserted children is well brought out, for long after they are told to "call no more" they are implored to "call yet once."

The meter fit might almost be called the "tune") of The Forsake Merman varies in subtle fashion; there is an almost perfect mating of free verse and rhymed verse in its stanzas. Every word is chosen for its sound effect as well as its power of imagery. For example, the mother's name is "Margaret."

Repetition is also used with remarkable effect. The pupil will observe the four initial "nows" in the first verse, the five initial "wheres" in the fourth, the eight initial "ands" in the seventh, and four initial "whens" in the last.

Indeed, the poem bristles with all the tricks of the poetic trade, but this is a rare harmony and beauty because Arnold was a most fastidious artist in words.