

Charge of the Light Brigade filled with flaws

by Jill Pivnick

If you have nothing better to do than watch an overly-graphic dramatization of the Crimean War, then by all means see *The Charge of the Light Brigade* at the Capitol Fine Art Theatre. Otherwise, don't bother.

Director Tony Richardson has added several new techniques to the conventional epic film, but the outcome does not have the effect of any cinematic marvel. Perhaps as a depiction of the great futility of war, *The Charge of the Light Brigade* is a movie to be appreciated.

"How many times must the cannonball strike, before they're forever banned?"

To orient you historically, the Crimean War took place in 1854, with the British and French forces supporting the Turks against the Russians. The three important British military figures were Baron Raglan (general in charge of British Forces in the Crimea), the Earl of Cardigan (commander of the Light Brigade) and Lord Luccia (commander of the cavalry division). Due to the stupidity and ineptitude of these three men,

the Charge of the Light Brigade became one of the worst military disasters in history.

"Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred."

Although one comes away feeling little or no involvement with the characters themselves, superficial sketches were done brilliantly.

Trevor Howard was excellent as Lord Cardigan, the man who led the charge. Sir John Gielgud was very good as Baron Raglan and Lord Luccia was well portrayed by Harry Andrews.

David Hemmings, however, was less than believable in his role as Captain Nolan, the soldier who "disapproved of the system." Vanessa Redgrave has little effect in her cameo role as a soldier's wife in love with Nolan.

One fascinating technique which the director has added to the conventional epic film is the inclusion of several very funny, very clever animated sequences. They are designed to orient the audience and describe succinctly, the progression of the Crimean War. I found these seg-

ments to be the best parts of the film are most entertaining and evoke the response; 'Could this be an epic with a message?'

The battle scenes are particularly graphic; overly so. Perhaps they are one of the more salient points of the film for certainly the lines of Tennyson's poem,

"Cannon to right of them, cannon
to left of them
Cannon behind them
Volley'd and thunder'd
Stormed at with shot and shell
While horse and hero fell..."

could not have been more realistically portrayed.

If one again reflects upon the whole film as a brilliant essay on war, and upon the pathetic episode in the Crimea, the flaws can be overlooked. Who could possibly believe the British military methods — red coats marching with a pipe band, the foolishness of their commanders — aristocrats who bought their positions, and the dedication of their warriors?

"Theirs is not to reason why
Theirs is but to do and die."

R (muttering to Maud in Founders Coffee Shop): Maud, pert-looking girl in the mauve mini-dress whose hair is always fresh and washed, I have something to tell you.

MAUD (excited): Let me guess. It's about a new birthday present, an orange mini-cake with green icing and candles! Oh, R!

R: Green! That reminds me, what should we tell Adam Apple about Green Julia, the play we saw on Saturday at Burton Auditorium?

Maud: I think you should try to write a review for his journal, the Ragamuffin Weekly.

R: That stodgy magazine! The review would have to be something like this:

Paul Ableman's play, *Green Julia*, was first presented in Edinburgh in 1965. Ableman, a young British playwright, has already been published in a collection of his short playlets, but *Green Julia* is his first full-length play.

MAUD: That's too dry. Why not write the review for Voodoo, Vanier's poetry rag?

R: No good either. Then I'd have to write like this —

At Burton Theatre Saturday last, Founders players were the cast. The first Toronto performance ever, I thought the performance very clever.

MAUD: Stop! Stop!

R: Then let me write it as it would go in Excalibur.

Green Julia concerns two graduate students, Carruthers and Bradshaw, who have lived as college roommates for five years. Carruthers, a young economist, is leaving for Hong Kong. They will not see each other for some years, perhaps. They plan a quiet champagne farewell, and Carruthers invites a third person, Julia, his older mistress, to share in the farewell.

Maud: Well, at least it's making more sense.

R: Be quiet. Let me continue

The best part of the production was the entertaining and lively conversations between the two friends. For instance, they act out a meeting between a bishop and a priest, in which the priest asks how to pray, and the bishop recommends 'pray for me.'

Green Julia was no theatre of the absurd. Carruthers and Bradshaw had strong personalities, but straightforward. The actors were so proficient, however, that at no time did the private jokes



photo by Bob Koledin

In a sensible moment Carruthers (seated) talks about Julia, while Bradshaw loses interest and idly flips through a medical dictionary.

MAUD'S Green Julia A DRAMATIC REVIEW OF BURTON THEATRE



photo by Bob Koledin

Bradshaw has accused Carruthers of lying about Julia. But the two friends cannot remain at cross-purposes for more than a moment. Together they turn the accusation into a jest about real (earthly) truth, and false Martian lies. Here they play two Martians about to reveal the 'melodious Martian names of Yick and Glog' to the audience.

confuse us. It was quite clear, for instance, that Carruthers did not always dominate Bradshaw, though in their private jokes he usually took the leading part.

MAUD: I wouldn't agree about that, R. But I do agree about the acting. I know when you kid around, I don't always know when you're joking, but the actors were talented enough to show us the difference between the jokes and the truth. By the way, R, why was she called green Julia?

R: Oh, she was called that because she spent so much time in the Green Man, a pub. You know, I guess we learned a lot about her even though she never came. She was a drunken, older woman, an adultress, who gains our sympathy. In fact, the play's sadness lies in knowing that Julia probably wants Carruthers more than he realizes, and also, of course, in watching the separation of the two friends.

MAUD: Well, I guess the play was sad, but your review still isn't good enough.

R: Well, what am I missing? The excellent lighting? The audible footsteps? Telephones ringing on cue? Perhaps Adam Apple can tell us.

ADAM APPLE (unexpectedly from beneath the coffee table): I'll drink to that! What you need is my review from Women's Wear Daily —

John Smith, neat and dapper in a charcoal grey corduroy suit . . . Rick Blair, sporting a dark sweater and pipe-stem trousers, woollen lounging slippers and dark socks . . . Don McKay, lighting director, festive for the occasion in a bright blue and gray tie, (and other clothing) an Oleg Cassini original . . . Frank Liebeck, applauding the cast in a white turtleneck under a dark orlon wool suit, natural shoulders, shaped slightly at the waist . . . and the audience brightly attired for the occasion . . . Miss I.B. wearing a charming little-girl blouse in the latest fashion . . . Miss S.S., appealing in a classic blue wool St. Laurent, white semi-circle collar . . . Mr.R.L., classically genteel in Indian beads and a Nehru jacket . . .

MAUD (rising): Well, R . . . I'm late for class already. See you at Festival.

FOUNDERS CROWD (heatedly): Plug! Plug! Illicit advertising! Maud, turn in your button.

MAUD: Say, R . . . that reminds me, what about my mini-cake?