

Shakespearean Redgrave

by Judith Pratt

Halifax was greatly honoured Tuesday with the Canadian premiere of **Shakespeare's People** at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium. The diversified audience responded to this honour with attentiveness, comprehension, and laudation, concluding with a unanimous and resounding applause of considerable duration.

As an introduction to the performance, contemporary Ben Jonson's note to Shakespeare was read: "Thou art a monument without a tomb". Sir Michael Redgrave and his cast of four paid tribute to the master in **Shakespeare's People**, reading from nineteen plays, as well as three sonnets and musical interludes, many taken from the plays themselves. It was not necessary for the audience to be well-versed in Shakespearean drama: the method of entwining these presentations together proved, in general, very efficient.

But it soon became obvious that a large part of the audience was there to witness the performance of Sir Michael Redgrave, international actor of stage and screen, literary critic of recognized merit, and patriarch of a family of accomplished theatrical artists. And, as a critic once wrote of him, Redgrave is "a craftsman who approaches each new task with a questing mind and a calculating eye." **Shakespeare's People** proved a worthy vehicle for him to accumulate into one performance the many highlights of his career. There was a freshness and vitality in all five performers that rejuvenated what many people feel to be a now-exhausted art form: the Elizabethan Drama.

The curtain opened upon a barren stage, highlighted only by five chairs, a podium, a cushioned box in the center and a backdrop of a stylized tapestry, picturing the Globe theatre of Elizabethan London. Redgrave introduced the production with a reading of "The Word Shakespeare" by Christopher Hassall, and was then joined by the remainder of the cast. From the outset, it was evident that this production would be relatively informal: actors speaking to the audience and establishing a lecturer-audience rapport.

The primary theme to be developed was that of Spring. Music, love declarations, the sonnet "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?", and courtly jesting, usually by a disguised lover, all played a role in displaying the spring of Shakespeare's life. Often addressing the audience, partially reading from notebooks, the actors connected the segments with incidents from Shakespeare's life and developments in England's history, adopting an atmosphere almost like that of the fireside chat with the knowledgeable story-teller. In this manner, the intensity of a previous performance was subsequently softened, and thus enabled the actors to flow into the next roles seemingly free of the previous.

England's Summer, and likewise Shakespeare's, was next displayed. This was the country's season of greatness, internally and internationally. This was also the time of Shakespeare's 'history' plays. Interspersed with historical comments by Elizabeth Counsell, Redgrave, Dodimead, Bowen, and Willmott portrayed characters from **Richard II**, **Henry V**, **Henry VIII**, and **Henry IV, Part I**, exhibiting such relevant themes as divine ordination of kings, insurrection, disloyalty, and the responsibility to rule justly. Redgrave's Richard II was particularly vivid, as the proud victor returns to his realm from Ireland, only to be crushed under the op-

pressiveness of disloyalty and successful rebellion. The once too-proud king crumbles under Redgrave's artistic display.

But this stage in Shakespeare's life also produced the jovial and witty John Falstaff, and the delightful fantasy, **A Midsummer Night's Dream**. Elizabeth Counsell and Philip Bowen enchantingly portray the Queen and King of Fairyland, with all their jealousies and greeds and ambitions. For Shakespeare and for England, this span of time was one of security and peace, when the artist could display the many intricacies threatening the crown through his history plays, and when he could escape to internal wanderings, concerned only with the delightful.

Autumn follows with its introspection and reflections on fundamentals. Highlighted in **Shakespeare's People** by numerous readings from **Hamlet**, despondency, near-Freudian psychology, and contemplation are explored. While Elizabeth Counsell again addresses the audience with a discussion of the actors and acting of Shakespeare's time, Redgrave and Bowen deliver their renditions of the much-interpreted Prince of Denmark. Dodimead follows with some humorous accounts of Charles Macready's impressions of fellow actors and audiences, noting the stupidity of many actors and the barbarism of many audiences.

The highlight of this Autumn theme, and perhaps of the entire production, is assuredly the scene between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth before and after the murder of Duncan the king. Counsell's Lady Macbeth is multifaceted, as she displays love, condescension, ambition, murderous passion, and, after the murder, scorn, cunning, and dispassion, followed by hesitation and childish fright. In a voice reminiscent of the three witches of **Macbeth's** previous scenes, Lady Macbeth grotesquely paints the scene of the murder, and upbraids her husband (Redgrave) for this faltering before and after the treacherous deed. This scene is Counsell's triumph in the production and the crowing performance.



The degradation of man and the state about him is exemplified in **Winter**. Again it is Redgrave and Counsell who grasp the essence of the theme in their too-short scene from **King Lear**. Lear, the utter ruin of a once-powerful king, now crazed by treachery and disloyalty, is confronted by the loving daughter he had cast off. Confusion and despair contort Redgrave's face as Lear apologizes and bemoans his fate to Cordelia, who attempts to comfort him without spite or anger at being scorned for not articulating her love for her father.

It is in **Winter** too that Shakespeare delivers his own valedictory to his art, in the speech by Prospero, from **The Tempest**, renouncing his magical arts. Redgrave announces to the audience the impetus that has finally led him to this stage, and Prospero fades away.

The play concludes in a musical number taken from **Twelfth Night**. As complete artists, each of the five

performers display well-tuned voices (Redgrave's was trained in 1939 for **The Beggar's Opera** by Jani Strasser) and the performance closes on an optimistic note, heralding creativity, which the audience responded to with round after round of applause.

Harold Clurman stated that "no English actor ever achieves the highest eminence who has never tested himself through the challenge of the Shakespearean repertory." Sir Michael Redgrave has achieved the highest eminence in the theatre world and this production makes the reasons clear. He is able to put on face after face and still render each character in his most vivid and unforgettable terms. Supported by his meritorious cast, particularly Elizabeth Counsell, Redgrave has brought an inspired theatrical production to Canada and has wrung from it all the life juices inherent in the rich characters of Shakespeare.

sity, when dealing with the figure of the porter or that of Lady MacBeth made for a simple, if not novel, approach to Shakespeare's study of evil.

Harry Levin's lecture was the first of a series of lectures being arranged by a newly formed ad hoc Committee of Advanced Studies initiated by the French and English department. The committee is seeking to bring to Dalhousie distinguished public speakers in the humanities. Levin, as first lecturer, offered no surprises, staying clearly on the well-beaten track, but as a man of considerable reputation was an encouraging sign that Dalhousie is paying more attention to a past neglected area.

Levin disappointing

by C. McLean

Dalhousie's enthusiasm at having Harvard's Irving Babbitt professor of Comparative Literature give a public lecture here on October 7 was reflected by a fine turn-out of students and faculty members. The lecture, entitled "Two Scenes from **MacBeth**" took place in Room 115 of the Weldon Law Building.

Dr. Gray, Dean of Arts and Sciences, gave a playful introduction concerning the many fruits of what he termed the "levineyard" of this internationally known scholar and critic. An initially nervous Levin then spoke for about an hour on the 'porter's scene' (II.iii) and the 'sleepwalking scene' (V.i) which he paired because of their prose form.

Quickly warming up to an enthusiasm more befitting his interest in the subject, Levin dealt with the first scene by examining its part in the dramatic whole of the play. He saw it as "parenthesizing the horror" of **MacBeth** and as adding to the intensity of the tragedy by contrast. His discussion of the role of the porter was an attempt to justify the often questioned inclusion of the scene in the work. In dealing with the second scene he concentrated on Shakespeare's "night side of things". Levin made

no daring conjectures about either of the scenes seeking to settle critical controversy rather than to cause it.

The lecture often became difficult to follow. This was not so much due to the logic of his presentation as to his style of expression. Levin read an essay-like work which was unappealing as an oral presentation. Also, the expectant audience was disappointed by a common treatment of the topic. However, Levin's constant attention to the practical aspect of theatrical neces-

'From the Vault'

While Canadian works are foremost in Dalhousie's collection, the gallery has also extended its European holdings. On view for the first time in this show is a rare work by the 18th-century Scottish painter Sir David Wilkie. Entitled "The Storyteller", this representative example of Wilkie's style was a bequest from the Heinisch family.

Exhibited with "The Storyteller" is a portrait of Marie Antoinette by the famous French artist, Marie-Anne Elisabeth Vigée-leBrun. The

painting, one of the key works in the gallery's collection, was a gift of the later Dorothy Killam.

Rounding out the current show is the Carnegie collection of European prints, received by the gallery in the 1920s and now exhibited together in the Little Gallery. The collection includes some twenty-five etchings, lithographs and woodcuts by central figures in the history of European art spanning five centuries.

FROM THE VAULT will be on view until November 9.