

# 'Coriolanus' Said Absorbing Production at Festival Theater

Shakespeare's tragic heroes are complex men who wrestle in a death struggle with the knottiest possible problems in ethical and moral relationships.

Events, as well as other men, seem to conspire against them, and they inevitably lose. But in their defeat each reasserts the basic nobility of man, reminding the audience that there is virtue in the battle well fought, that there are principles worth dying for, that there is meaning in the midst of meaninglessness.

"Coriolanus," the fourth in this year's cycle of plays staged by the Ashland Shakespearean Festival, is such a play, and the protagonist is such a hero.

A near capacity first-night audience gathered in the Festival theater last night to watch Director J. H. Crouch's uneven production of the play. It was only partly a satisfying experience.

**Possesses Flaw**  
A standard explication of the heroes in classical drama is that each man, no matter how great or powerful, possesses a "tragic flaw" in his character, an Achilles' heel of some kind that will make him vulnerable to fate and be the certain cause of his doom.

Using that approach, for example, Agamemnon was a guilty of hubris, Oedipus suffered from an uncontrollable temper, and Macbeth was corrupted by a lust for power.

With Coriolanus, the apparent flaw is an excess of pride fused with a volatile temper. Unfortunately for him, his violent enemies, the tribunes Sicinius and Brutus, know exactly how to trigger the combination.

**Set Against Ethics**  
The problem is that set against the expedient ethics of his friends, and the spineslessness of the Roman citizens of common rank, Coriolanus' "flaw" appears to be shining virtue and not a defect at all.

Director Crouch seems to have shored up this problem by injecting an element of Freudian psychology into the play. Indeed, in the director's notes in the program, he refers to an article soon to be published in The Psychoanalytic Quarterly.

He develops a man un-naturally attached to and dominated by Volturnia, his mother. Crouch's apparent motivation for the suicidal risks Coriolanus takes in battle is the desire to satisfy a mother whom he can never satisfy short of death.

**Dwells on Wounds**  
She dwells lovingly on each wound that he has received in his many battles (she's even kept count of them), and it is clear she is

the kind who would much rather her son earn a Purple Heart than a Good Conduct medal.

Her motivation? Inexplicably, she would rather seem to be a man than the woman she is, so she attempts to appropriate her son's body. And her ambition knows no bounds.

Hounded by it, and made ramrod stiff by the pride she has inculcated in him, Coriolanus blunders like a confused bull. He is upset by genuine praise, distrusts and is repelled by emotion, and seems happiest when he has a bloody sword in his hand, hacking at physical forces he can cope with and understand.

The Festival is fortunate that Peter D. MacLean was available to play Coriolanus, for he was the only one we saw on the stage last night who could have come within a country mile of handling the role. Visually, he was the perfect proud Roman warrior.

**Overshadowed Others**  
Unhappily, he totally overshadowed everyone else in sight, so that a group of unusually weak supporting players seemed so much the weaker.

However, all is not on the credit side with MacLean. His pitch and volume were nearly unrelieved by variation throughout the play so that there was no demarcation between the moments of high drama and the scenes with lesser impact.

Probably the most accomplished actor on the stage was Rod Alexander, who brought a wit and versatility to the role of Menenius that pleased the audience and livened the play. There were some inconsistencies in his characterization — his strength and age seemed to vary — but it was easily the most satisfying performance of the night.

The demanding role of Volturnia, Coriolanus' mother, was capably handled by Susan Brewer. One could have wished that she could have appeared a bit older, but she gave the part an icy strength and power that lent credulity to her son's actions.

**Scenes Exciting**  
Director Crouch's staging of the battle scenes was exciting and one involuntarily held his breath when the swords started flailing about, but he erred in attempting to do too much with too few actors.

The audience involuntarily laughed when the gates of Corioli were stormed by a Roman legion of a scant half dozen soldiers. We recognize the company is perforce limited in numbers, so that any attempt at realism in such a scene is bound to fall short.

Perhaps some method of blocking might have been used, however, whereby numbers were suggested and left to the imagination rather than literally shown.

But, the defects picked out by the jaundiced eye of the reviewer notwithstanding, it is a fast-paced, absorbing production which held the rapt attention of last night's audience to the final curtain. And so it will be with all others who are fortunate enough to see it this summer. —G.H.B.

## Car Court Group To Check Rumor

A committee representing the Jackson County Motor Court association voted recently to send a committee to Weed and Mt. Shasta, Calif., to investigate a rumor that most tourists are going by Highway 97 or the coast route because of misinformation about poor highway conditions on Highway 99.

The highway committee reported at a recent meeting that 20 per cent of all visitors to Seattle, Wash., are pulling trailers or are using camp facilities.

The committee selected to go to Mt. Shasta and Weed will have its travel expenses paid, it was agreed. The committee plans to contact the Ashland and Medford Chambers of Commerce to seek help with this program.

William (Bill) Patton, general manager of the Shakespearean Festival, showed an aerial view of the Ashland theater and told of the wide appeal of this unique theater.

An average of 80 people daily tour the theater, he said. The present 12 active Shakespearean Festivals in the United States increases the competition considerably, he noted.

The Ashland theater is the only one, however, that has no subsidy nor government help and maintains its own operational costs by box office receipts, he said.

### ACTIVE DUTY

Lt. Col. Howard B. Shontz has completed two weeks annual active duty training at Oakland Army Terminal, Calif. He is regularly assigned to the U.S. Army Reserve school in Sacramento, Calif. He is employed by the University of California at Davis as registrar and admissions officer. The son of Mrs. Alma Shontz, Route 1, Gold Hill, Colonel Shontz received his master's degree in education from the University of California in 1958.

## Kennedy To Break Ground for Dam

Fresno, Calif. — (UPI) — President Kennedy will participate in groundbreaking ceremonies for the \$400 million San Luis dam and reservoir project this year.

Criswell is the son of Mrs. Mae A. Criswell, 622 South Central ave., and Walker is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Jack T. Walker, 2415 Lyman ave.

## Rain Brings Relief In Alaskan Forests

Anchorage, Alaska — (UPI) — Rain and the forecast of more in the next few days brought welcome relief Tuesday to firefighters combating nine forest fires covering approximately 19,150 acres in Western Alaska.

Meanwhile, in the northern district, Bureau of Land Management officials reported that the two largest blazes there, one near Hughes and the other near Shungnak, "are pretty well under control now, thanks to the rain."

A total of 144 men were on the line at Hughes and 71 more were at Shungnak. Officials said that only four fires were still burning in the district Tuesday and that all were manned.

### RECEIVES AWARD

Pfc. David L. Baker, son of Mr. and Mrs. Bert L. Baker, Butte Falls, recently received a safe driver award for driving one year without an accident or traffic violation. Baker is assigned to the 507th Ordnance company, Hanau, Germany. He attended Butte Falls High school.

### ADLAI SEES PREMIER

Rome — (UPI) — Adlai Stevenson, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, conferred Tuesday with Italian Premier Amintore Fanfani. Stevenson planned to leave for Greece today.

## Fire Weather Forecaster Named at Local Station

As a result of an increased appropriation, the U.S. department of commerce has created a fire weather office in the Medford station of the weather bureau. Named to run the branch was James K. Tyrrell, fire weather meteorologist.

Tyrrell and his wife, Charlene, moved to Medford from Sheridan, Wyo.

Tyrrell attended Central Michigan college and took advanced meteorology courses from Pennsylvania State university.

His job is to predict fire weather conditions for the southern Oregon district of the weather bureau. This includes jurisdiction over four federal forests, Siskiyou, Rogue River, Winema, and Fremont National forests; Crater Lake National park and state lands.

Although Portland and Salem have had fire weather offices for some time, it is only as a result of the increased appropriation that offices

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