



Susannah York:

Girl with a Future— and a Problem

She's a beauty with outstanding talents, but one filled with anger and doubts

By PEER J. OPPENHEIMER

DIRECTOR John Huston—who guided her through the most demanding scenes in his production of "Freud," in which she stars opposite Montgomery Clift—calls her the most brilliant young actress of our time, one who will be as well known as Ingrid Bergman, Vivien Leigh, and Deborah Kerr.

The name of the future, says Huston, is Susannah York.

Born in London, she comes from a large family—three sisters and a brother—but seldom knew a close family relationship because she was shuttled to a succession of schools, staying never more than two years at one place.

She's tall, gangling, blonde, blue-eyed, and very appealing. Except for accentuating her eyes, she doesn't wear make-up, not even lipstick.

When she's in the mood or when she's in a rush or when she simply doesn't care, Susannah wears whatever is closest, whether it fits the occasion or not. And she is liable to wear her hair any way, even in pigtails.

Another thing she is likely to do is turn cold toward press interviews. She hopes the time will come when she no longer has to face the press at all, although she has been in the limelight barely a year.

One reason is her concern for her marriage with actor Michael Wells. "Everyone asks me how my marriage can work out now that I'm more successful than Mike. I don't think that's fair. Besides, Mike's career is climbing along fine, and in fields outside acting he is the stronger of us. He handles our finances and makes all decisions that concern our private lives."

Susannah is running away from reality—and knows it. She is handing over tasks to her husband to give him added importance, though he is probably no better qualified for them than she is. She is avoiding interviews primarily because they draw attention to her more than him. For the same reason she leaves her career problems at the studio. She fears that if they monopolized her home life, it might have an adverse affect on her marriage.

Aside from her obvious acting talent, Susannah is tremendously fortunate that people sincerely like her. Asked how she got along with men, she told me candidly: "They either look at me as a younger sister, a friend, or a lover. But they all want my friendship for a long time."

As a result of this attitude, plus her intelligence and beauty, one would think she had many friends. But she doesn't. "There are only two people I feel really close to," she confessed. She wouldn't elaborate. Presumably they are her husband and one of her parents—but which one is hard to tell, for Susannah comes from a broken home.

Her parents were divorced when she was six. More than 10 years passed before she saw or heard from her father again, while her mother married twice more. Yet no bitterness exists toward her father. While we had lunch in London recently, she told me her father had just come to town to spend a couple of days with her and Michael.

Typical of Susannah's behavior is her willingness—when she is at ease with you—to talk freely about herself. Yet when I complimented her on her frankness, she promptly came back: "But I didn't tell you the whole truth. You only know one side of me. Even Michael doesn't know me fully."

WHEN SHE ACTS like this, half-serious, half-child, half-woman, you feel she is playing games with you. Dr. David Stafford-Clark, eminent psychiatrist and technical advisor on "Freud," believed she was doing this on the movie set, where, according to him, she frequently played Montgomery Clift against Huston and vice versa. Susannah herself admitted she tried to make Huston mad a few times, "so he wouldn't treat me as his blue girl all the time."

Susannah's biggest problem in the years to come is not professional. It's the adjustment she faces as an individual with the complexities of career and attention.

On four occasions during the past three years, for example, her anger so overwhelmed her that she actually struck people. "They were arrogant," she insisted. "This is one trait I can't stand."

The only loss of self-control I witnessed oc-



Susannah's performance with Montgomery Clift in "Freud" was termed brilliant by veteran director John Huston.

curred after she finished an extremely difficult scene with Montgomery Clift. After 33 takes, John Huston finally called it a day. A few seconds later, the assistant director asked her which flight she wanted to take to London. Without a word, Susannah burst into sobs and fled to her dressing room. She came back 10 minutes later and apologized.

Quite likely, she inherited some of her complex qualities from her father, whom she describes as "a businessman, dreamer, bank director, a man of many professions and moods."

"Everyone says that I've nothing to worry about now, that I'm in a position to make a lot of money in the next couple of years," Susannah says. "But I think emotional security is more important than financial security. I'm madly in debt right now, but I won't be soon. This worries me a bit. I find financial security rather frightening. At 21, it's not good to know that everything is going to be all right."

But will it be?