



BETTE DAVIS: HOLLYWOOD REBEL

The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex

This fictional take on the tempestuous and troubled relationship between Queen Elizabeth I and the Duke of Essex chronicles the rise and fall of a privileged and popular member of the royal court. Davis lobbied for Laurence Olivier to play Essex but the role went to Flynn. For her own role as the Queen she researched the Elizabethan period to ensure that her look and accent were as authentic as she could make them in this, her first colour film.

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Maxwell Anderson's play *Elizabeth the Queen* was a highly successful vehicle for Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne: their only film together *The Guardsman*, opens with an extended extract from it, showing how effective it could be for an actor and actress able to make believable its many elaborate dialogue sequences where innocuous and courtly conversation must be felt to make a sexual attraction. Laurence Olivier was originally cast to play Essex in this film version, but when he became unavailable, the part was given to the inappropriate Flynn who, though physically wrong for the part, was sufficiently certain of success as to demand a title change in order to accentuate what he felt to be a central role. Curtiz, despairing, gave all his attention to Bette Davis as Elizabeth, and she turned in one of her most memorable performances.

Few of Curtiz's films are as meticulously elaborate as this, which sacrifices physical action for a flawless technical exercise in historical recreation. Its sets, music score, colour photography, special effects and sound recording were all nominated for Oscars, though the board that year was swept by *Gone with the Wind*.

The film remains one of the lushest of the time, an interesting contrast to current TV versions of Elizabeth's court which, while they exceed the film in dramatic quality, seem sadly disadvantaged by a lack of the physical resources on which Hollywood could call.

The acting, however, remains the most satisfying aspect of the film, with Davis capturing superbly the mercurial nature of the queen as well as her femininity, while veteran character actors like Henry Daniell and Vincent Price intrigue darkly on the sidelines. It may be, as many have charged, a simplistic view of a complex incident, but as filmmaking it is above criticism.

John Baxter, National Film Theatre programme notes

A contemporary review

As a spectacle this film has seldom been matched. The Technicolor is admirable, and court scenes in Elizabethan dress lend themselves to representation in this medium. There is also some magnificent pageantry – e.g. the return of Essex from Cadiz, some eerie sequences in Ireland; and some beautiful backgrounds, e.g. the closing scene at the Tower and a lovely picture of hawk-flying. Dramatically, the story fails. It is not quite big enough to

be really tragic. This is partly due to casting. Errol Flynn is a fine figure of a man, with a Robin Hood-like charm but – compared with Bette Davis – he is no actor. She is in her element. No other star can so effectively portray neurotic and fierce hatred and passionate love. She storms, rages, is icily bitter, and yet pathetic in her longing for affection. She is not only a lonely woman, but a queen with the brain of a statesman, and a shrewd and wide knowledge of men and affairs. Among a practically all-star supporting cast, Donald Crisp’s portrait of Francis Bacon stands out as an admirable little cameo.

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THE PRIVATE LIVES OF ELIZABETH AND ESSEX

Director: Michael Curtiz
©/Production Company: Warner Bros.
In Charge of Production: Jack L. Warner
Executive Producer: Hal B. Wallis
Associate Producer: Robert Lord
Unit Manager: Frank Mattison *
Dialogue Director: Stanley Logan
Assistant Director: Sherry Shourds *
Screenplay: Norman Reilly Raine, Aeneas MacKenzie
Based on the play Elizabeth the Queen by: Maxwell Anderson
Director of Photography: Sol Polito
Associate Photography: W. Howard Greene
Colour Director: Natalie Kalmus
Associate [Colour Director]: Morgan Padelford
Special Effects: Byron Haskin, H.F. Koenekamp
Editor: Owen Marks
Art Director: Anton F. Grot
Costumes: Orry-Kelly
Make-up Artist: Perc Westmore
Music: Erich Wolfgang Korngold
Music Director: Leo F. Forbstein
Orchestrations: Hugo Friedhofer, Milan Roder
Sound: C.A. Riggs
Technical Adviser: Ali Hubert

Cast

Bette Davis (*Queen Elizabeth*)
Errol Flynn (*Robert Devereaux, Earl of Essex*)
Olivia de Havilland (*Lady Penelope Grey*)
Donald Crisp (*Francis Bacon*)
Alan Hale (*Earl of Tyrone*)
Vincent Price (*Sir Walter Raleigh*)
Henry Stephenson (*Lord Burghley*)
Henry Daniell (*Sir Robert Cecil*)
James Stephenson (*Sir Thomas Egerton*)
Nanette Fabares (*Mistress Margaret Radcliffe*)
Ralph Forbes (*Lord Knollys*)
Robert Warwick (*Lord Mountjoy*)
Leo G. Carroll (*Sir Edward Coke*)
Guy Bellis (*Lord Charles Howard*)
John Sutton (*captain of the guards*)

USA 1939©
106 mins

* Uncredited

35mm print courtesy of The Library of Congress

BETTE DAVIS: HOLLYWOOD REBEL

Of Human Bondage
Sun 1 Aug 12:40; Thu 12 Aug 18:00
Dangerous
Mon 2 Aug 18:15; Fri 13 Aug 21:00; Wed 18 Aug 18:10
All about Eve
Tue 3 Aug 14:30; Sat 14 Aug 20:25; Sun 29 Aug 15:00
Marked Woman
Tue 3 Aug 18:10; Thu 12 Aug 20:40; Sat 14 Aug 14:45
What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?
Wed 4 Aug 14:15; Wed 11 Aug 20:30; Mon 16 Aug 18:00; Sat 28 Aug 17:20
Jezebel
Wed 4 Aug 20:40; Sun 15 Aug 15:30; Fri 27 Aug 18:00
Hush... Hush, Sweet Charlotte
Thu 5 Aug 14:15; Fri 13 Aug 17:40; Wed 18 Aug 14:30; Sat 28 Aug 20:30
All about Bette Davis
Thu 5 Aug 18:10
Dark Victory
Fri 6 Aug 14:15; Mon 23 Aug 18:00
The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex
Sat 7 Aug 15:00; Sat 21 Aug 11:40
The Letter
Sun 8 Aug 15:45; Tue 17 Aug 17:50

The Man Who Came to Dinner
Sun 8 Aug 18:20; Thu 19 Aug 20:40
The Little Foxes
Mon 9 Aug 18:00; Mon 16 Aug 20:30; Thu 19 Aug 17:40
The Whales of August
Wed 11 Aug 14:30; Thu 26 Aug 20:30; Tue 31 Aug 18:10
Old Acquaintance
Wed 11 Aug 17:40; Sun 22 Aug 15:30
Mr. Skeffington
Sat 14 Aug 17:10; Sun 29 Aug 11:30
The Star
Sun 15 Aug 18:30; Wed 25 Aug 20:45
Dead Ringer
Fri 20 Aug 17:45; Mon 30 Aug 15:20
The Nanny
Tue 24 Aug 20:45; Mon 30 Aug 12:40

With thanks to Martin Shingler

Promotional drinks partner



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