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Author(s)	Judith Crist
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THE NEW MOVIE

Welles Rings 'Chimes at Midnight'

By JUDITH CRIST

ORSON WELLES' long-awaited "Chimes at Midnight" has arrived under the title of "Falstaff," a title change that pays fitting tribute to the actor-director's superb portrait of Shakespeare's mountainous rogue.

And yet the original title was more in the mood of the dramatic history Welles has constructed from five plays, a history of merry rompers grown old, their games aglow in their own memory but seen for their own staleness and crassness through the cool eyes of youth growing to maturity. It is a doddering Shallow's "Jesu—the days that we have seen!" that evokes an aged Falstaff's "Aye—we have heard the chimes at midnight—" and our awareness that the players are as worthless as the game.

LUSTY AND UNLOVABLE

This is the fascination of the Welles characterization of Falstaff. Intentionally or not, he has killed the charge of betrayal and ingratitude on Hal's part in his denial of his erstwhile companion upon his crowning. The heart does not go out to the old and foolish wastrel; Welles' Falstaff is a Rabelaisian behemoth, amusing, outrageous, imaginative, lusty—and quite unlovable. We had as lief believe that he died of the pox or cirrhosis of the liver or just general excess as suspect that his heart was broken by his rejection by the king.

The Welles chronicle—on screen it is Holinshed's, narrated by Sir Ralph Richardson—is culled from Shakespeare's Richard II, Henry IV Parts I and II, and Henry V and Merry Wives of Windsor. We see a troubled Henry V facing rebellion by the Duke of Northumberland and his son, Hotspur, the young Percy who is all that the rolistering Prince Hal is not. Through the wars we see Hal as a spoiled carouser, one who, however, despite his personal revolt against his father and jealousy of young



Orson Welles as Falstaff—a Rabelaisian behemoth

Percy is aware of the worthlessness of his chosen companions. And finally we see him as a young man coming of age, aware of the betrayals by friends and foes alike and conscious of where duty lies.

A ROUNDED TALE

So excellent a cast has Welles rallied for his history that we get a rounded tale, one dominated now by Sir John Gielgud's proud and deeply troubled Henry IV, now by Keith Baxter's saturnine but vulnerably boyish Prince Hal, now by Norman Rodway's fiery and youthful Henry Percy and only intermittently by his own Falstaff.

Above all, there is the Wellesian respect for language, so that always there is the Shakespearean flow, the poetry that provides the drama. Coming on the heels of "The Taming of the Shrew," this film, stark, simple, concentrating on word and performance, serves as a

reminder of where the substance of the plays lies.

It is a film in black and white and initially, in a tavern scene or court interior, one thinks fleetingly of color—but only fleetingly. For in the dark and gloomy monastic castle interiors, in the crudities of the tavern, the sere countryside, in the mud-wallowing and body contact and clang of armor and blade and cudgel on the Shrewsbury battlefield, we feel the chill of reality and hear the chiming away of time.

THE WELLES TOUCHES

Welles' directorial genius is evident in every scene, in the slugging fury of an unmantled battle, in a scurrying skirmish in the forest, in tomfoolery at the tavern or in the earnestness of a throne-room declaration. His casting—brilliant in Margaret Rutherford's Hostess Quickly, in Alan Webb's Shallow, Marian Vlady's

"FALSTAFF" LITTLE CARNEGIE THEATER

A screenplay written and directed by Orson Welles, based on the works of Shakespeare, produced by Emiliano Piedra, directed by Mr. Welles, presented by Harry Saltzman, released by Peppercorn-Wormser, Inc. Film Enterprises. Running time: 115 minutes. With the following cast:

Jack Falstaff.....Orson Welles
Doll Tearsheet.....Jeanne Moreau
Hostess Quickly.....Margaret Rutherford
Henry IV.....John Gielgud
Kate Percy.....Marian Vlady
Prince Hal.....Keith Baxter
Henry Percy.....Norman Rodway
Justice Shallow.....Alan Webb

lovely Kate Percy—is off only in Jeanne Moreau's Doll Tearsheet, a fortunately minimal role in which the actress makes a sultry French-accented mondaine of the shrewish shopworn doxie. But the damage is slight on the large canvas.

For in this first of his own films since "The Trial" in 1962, Welles does justice to his own genius and that of Shakespeare. One could not ask more of "Falstaff."

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