'Iguana' Dies Of Sun Stroke

BY STEVE THORPE

Hmm. Well, the little sign in the lobby was covered with what might be called all sorts of wicked and evil and obscene pictures of Richard Burton and what one scandal sheet called "his women." Mainly, these included the cast of "Night of the Iguana," Ava Gardner, Sue Lyons, and Deborah Kerr. Yes, and one other—the biggest woman of them all.

Myriads of fan magazines are pasted on this lobby bulletin board revealing the wondrous world of sultry Mexico, complete with sultry temptresses and sultry nights and sultry moons, etc., etc., ad infinitum, ad nauseum. Yes, the movie version of Tennessee Williams' play, "Night of the Iguana" certainly should be loaded with all sorts of flesh if nothing else.

Billboards Beat Movie

It's better to read the billboard than, perchance, fall into the movie.

First from the aspect of sex (which the advertisements have been unmercifully fanning — "One man, two women, one night"—etc.) — you can find more lurid accounts of such relationships in Mother Goose.

Now, with such trivia aside, one can attack the movie itself, primarily for what it does to the play. Oh sure, Burton is fine as a minister who has been kicked out of his church for "behavior unbecoming a man of the cloth" (note: the play listed the charges as "fornication and heresy, both in the same week"). The supporting cast, too, does credibly with what it has to work with. The problem lies more with the screenplay itself.

Minister Meets Artist

As Williams seems to have intended, in the play, Reverend Shannon is a man who comes to a hotel to have his semi-annual nervous breakdown. All well and good; more importantly, however, he is a man searching for communication with other individuals (he says he lives on the "fantastic level" and needs "human contact").

At the hotel, he comes upon an itinerant artist and her poet grandfather, and the real drama takes place between the female artist and the male minister.

Minister Loses Artist

Shannon tries desperately for some sort of rapport with the artist, and almost succeeds, but not quite. When she finally accuses him of wishing some sort of "voluptuous crucifixion" of himself, any rapport is impossible, for of all things, Shannon does not want to take the sins of the world on his shoulders; he wants more to talk to someone who will understand him.

In the play, incidentally, Williams succeeds in some points being subtle in meaning to the point of obscurity. Also, he is truly repulsive in his presentation of humanity at its worst, parading Nazis across the stage every time Shannon tries to communicate with the artist.

Minister Gets Artist

The screenplay does away with the Nazis; in fact, it does away with almost everything that made the playgoer sick of the world he lives in. Instead, it makes the accusation of the artist true, and Shannon in the end comes to accept it. Even worse, while Williams never has Shannon make real contact, the screen version has him drift happily off into the sunlight with his new-found friend.

Artistically, the play has been murdered, and stripped of what little message it once had. Where Shannon as Williams first conceived him is a Christ image abandoned by society, the movie paints him as man with a Christ-plexus who finds his way back to sanity.

Book Beats Movie

And, where Williams was subtle, the screenplay takes its meaning and beats the audience over the head with it.

As I said—read the billboard. Liz isn't in this one; maybe she

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should have been.

Of course, there will be some who feel that a movie does not necessarily have to relate to the play from which it purports to be taken. To those who haven’t read Williams’ play, and to those hardy souls mentioned above, the movie, for its own sake might well be considered worth seeing. Otherwise, it is not what it claims— it is not Night of the Iguana.

Hither and Thither

George Shearing, prominent jazz pianist, will be at the music hall October 2... Houston’s now got another cabaret theatre, called Kramer Cabaret... The Contemporary Arts Association is on its way to another interesting season— students invited at five dollars a throw for eight major shows...

Opera buffs (and they are legion) will like the “half-price for full time students” offered by the opera guild this season... offerings include “Madame Butterfly” coming in November... Shepherd School promises more of their excellent concerts starting October 14... First concerts with the Houston Symphony come up October 5 & 6.