

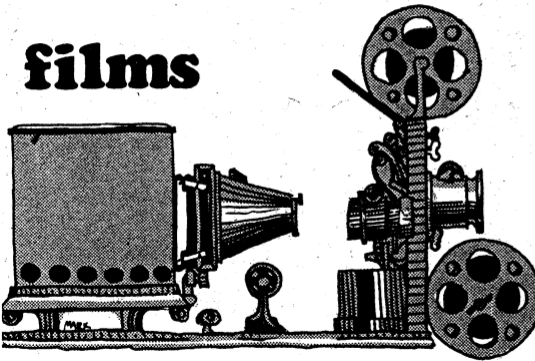
3-8-1972

A Man for All Seasons [A review of the film *A Man for All Seasons* at the Esquire Theater, Milwaukee]

Curtis Carter

Marquette University, curtis.carter@marquette.edu

films



A Man for All Seasons

by Curtis L. Carter

The film revival of **A Man for All Seasons** at the Esquire Theater is timely. It provides yet another detail of the fascinating era of Henry VIII in 16th Century England, which is so vividly on our minds from the Channel 10 Masterpiece Theater episodes of **Henry VIII** and **Elizabeth I**.

Thomas More, Henry VIII's Lord Chancellor refuses to acknowledge the

legitimacy of the King's divorce from Catherine and is charged with treason. Paul Scofield creates in More a character of stature and dignity. More, a man of conscience, walks a delicate line seeking to be true to himself and also a loyal subject. Avoiding the treachery of Cromwell and the King who would lead him into outright treason, and keeping his own counsel, proves to be impossible in an age of absolute monarchy.

In contrast to the work of Scofield, Robert Shaw's Henry VIII is very thin. He comes across as a mindless overgrown child, totally lacking in stature, intelli-

gence and depth so well portrayed by the Henry in the Masterpiece theater series. Leo McKern's Cromwell is more suited to a cheap circus barker than to the clever and complex Cromwell. His prosecutor's display at the trial can be compared to the worst of television courtroom trivia.

On the other hand, the artistic quality of image making in **A Man for All Seasons** is exceptionally high. It frames elegant picturesque shots of gargoyles against the sky. There are truly magnificent shots of the king's boats streaming full speed on the river with the symbolic

golden lion in the forefront. Interior lighting in certain scenes is also noteworthy. This is particularly so of the rich tonal gradations in the scenes where More appears before the tribunal at Richmond Palace. Also striking for visual effect are the final scenes where More is condemned. Splendid red gowns of the judges and the colorful, multi-shaped figures in the courtroom galleries are comparable to scenes depicted in paintings of the Flemish masters.

Despite the excellent photography and the acting of Scofield, the film is not strong for its dramatic qualities.

