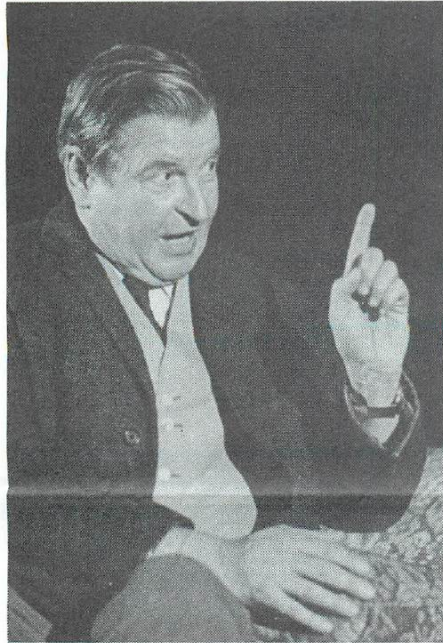


In the evening Lion that speaks to us

Hugh Manning as C S Lewis



D Channer

'IT IS the personal tug-of-war at the soul that gives this portrait of the writer and Christian witness, C S Lewis, its compelling power and edge.' So wrote Keith Nurse in the *Daily Telegraph* about *Song of the Lion*, the play by Daniel Pearce which opened last week at the Westminster Theatre. The play is produced by Aldersgate Productions.

'Quite the most revealing episode in this often poignant portrait occurs when Lewis, the don, unearths some revealing home-truths about himself,' the reviewer continues. 'The play tells us a great deal about C S Lewis. In doing so, it also tells us something about ourselves.'

The *Sunday Telegraph* described it as 'a model of dramatic biography', while *The Guardian* called Hugh Manning's 'measured, sometimes humorous and occasionally passionate' performance as Lewis 'no mean achievement.' In an interview with the Hampstead paper *Ham and High*, Hugh Manning describes the one-man play as 'the most arduous task of my career'. He took it on because 'when I read the play it gripped me'.

The many letters that have come to the author and producers since the play's tour earlier this summer, when 7,000 people saw it, shows how it has gripped people. Pauline

NEW WORLD NEWS

Vol 28 No 44 4 Oct 1980 1980 10p

Baynes, the illustrator of C S Lewis's Narnia books, described the play as 'complete magic, superb in every way... moving and perceptive.' Several wrote because the play had stirred in them a search for faith, and they wanted help to go further.

Last Sunday the London radio station LBC broadcast three interviews about Lewis and the play.

Song of the Lion will run at the Westminster Theatre until 18 October.

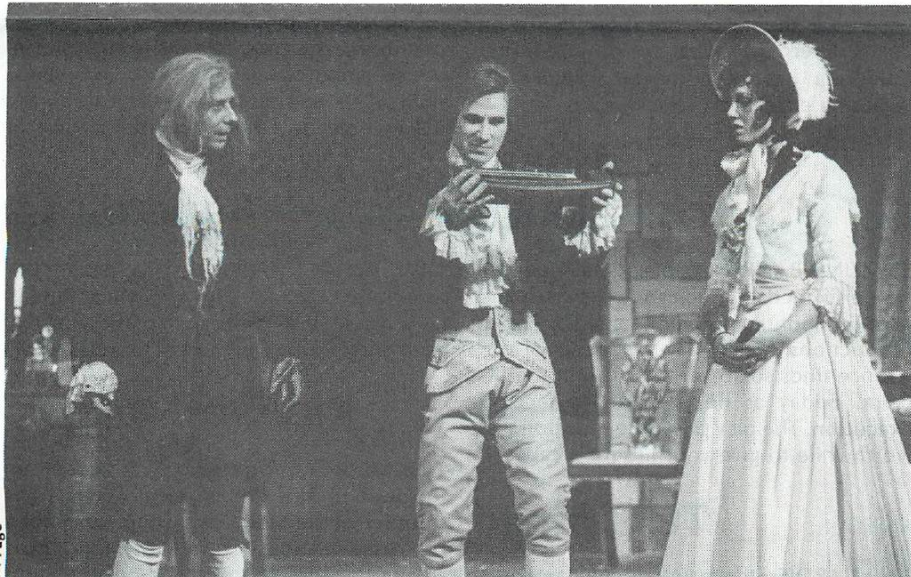
In the afternoon The impact of the visual

THE SLAVE SHIP heaves under the surging tide. Moans and wails from below are carried through the night. Captain Newton stands alone on the deck. Thus begins the play *Mr Wilberforce*, MP which opened last week at the Westminster Theatre for a month of matinee performances.

At the age of 25, William Wilberforce was a possible future Prime Minister of England, yet destiny had an even greater task for him. This is the story of fight, of defeat after miserable defeat, of almost unbelievable tenacity and finally victory. It took him 20 years of unswerving work to get a bill passed

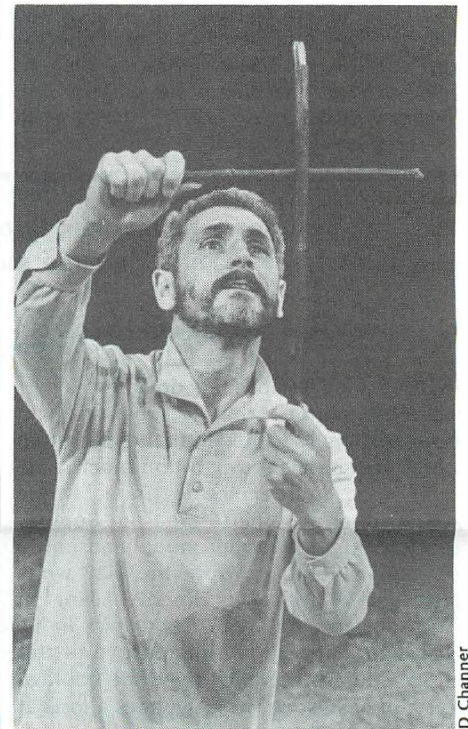
by Parliament abolishing the slave trade. On hearing the news that his bill was through, Wilberforce, now practically blind from endless nights of work, turned to his colleagues and said, 'What shall we abolish next?' From the very start Anthony Howden, in the title role, imparts Wilberforce's infectious zest.

John Newton, the slave captain turned minister, haggard and ascetic, is compellingly portrayed by John Justin. He is the father-figure whose moral strength is drawn on by Wilberforce. Sinclair, his mate-cum-verger, **VISUAL contd on p2**



M Page

Wilberforce (Anthony Howden) catches a new idea, watched by Sinclair (John Holden) and his wife Barbara (Judi Lamb).



D Channer

Michel Orphelin as Francis of Assisi

En pleine nuit Francis in Nantes

AN ENTHUSIASTIC AUDIENCE in Western France's industrial capital, Nantes, greeted the premiere performance of the tour of 'Un Soleil en Pleine Nuit' last week. The musical depicts the life of St Francis of Assisi in a 20th century setting. Singer and mime artist Michel Orphelin plays St Francis. After three performances in Nantes, the next will be in Lausanne, Switzerland.

VISUAL contd from p1

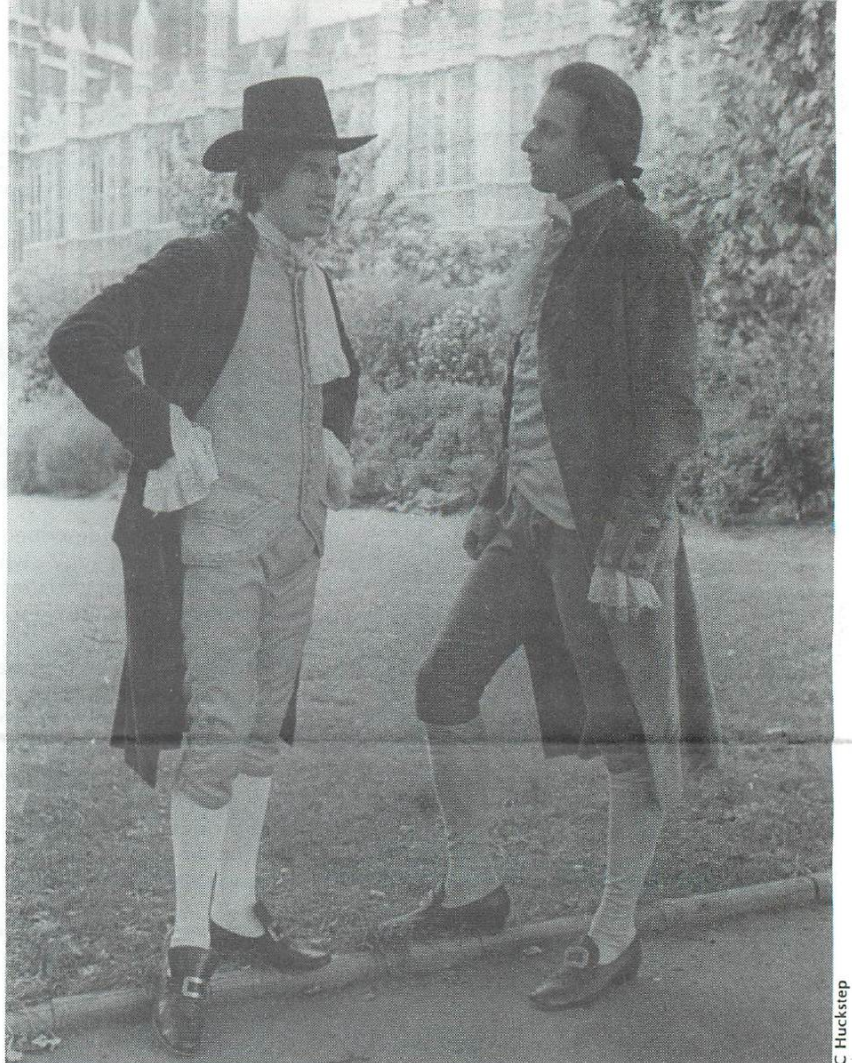
has an uncanny simplicity. At a time when Wilberforce is in despair, Sinclair's gift of a carved model of a slave ship awakens Wilberforce to a new means of arousing Britain—the impact of the visual.

The conflict between Wilberforce and Henry Dundas, a Scottish MP, played by Julian Battersby, portrays the struggle between Christian conscience and the philosophy that the end justifies the means. All this takes place against sets ingeniously designed by Bill Cameron-Johnson to accommodate the numerous scene changes, and in the crypt of the church one can almost feel the dankness.

Stone age on

This play is the climax of the 'Day of London Theatre for Schools' programme for which 3031 children are booked over the next three weeks. The programme starts with a slide presentation tracing the history of theatre from the Stone Age to the present day. This is followed by the demonstration of a play 'from page to stage'. Mock auditions and rehearsals are acted out and stage lighting, costumes and make-up are demonstrated. After the performance of the play students are invited to stay behind and meet the actors. 'In a historical play don't you feel trapped by having to stick to the facts?' asked one person. Julian Battersby replied, 'It is not just an historical play. Its relevance for today lies in the fight for right against wrong.'

Jackie Firth



The 'Evening Standard' was out to greet Wilberforce (left, Anthony Howden) and his friend Pitt (Philip Tyndale-Biscoe) when they went to the Houses of Parliament a few days before the run began.

Plays can be a powerful medium through which to challenge the wrong in society at its source—in ourselves—and point a way to faith. Here are some we have heard of recently that are doing this:

Courage to stand

INDIA'S long established dowry system—whereby a bride brings a substantial gift from her family to her husband, a custom which has often led to extortion and in some cases even murder—came under strong attack in a play performed in Bombay recently. Kiran, a former model and now a student in Bombay, wrote the play while attending a 'Course in Effective Living' at Asia Plateau, the MRA centre in India. Although many people disapprove of this custom, Kiran feels they need the courage to stand against it. The play takes a look at some of the entrenched attitudes which perpetuate it, and challenges people to change them. It was presented by students in Hindi to an audience of 400 workers and their families at a textile mill near Bombay. The play has also been performed for men of industry in Bombay.

California sentence

THE AMERICAN PREMIERE of Malcolm Muggeridge and Alan Thornhill's controversial play *Sentenced to Life* took place at Seattle Pacific University. The Taproot Theatre Company, the university's resident

company, staged the play for 12 performances in July and again in August at the Lamb's Players Theatre in National City, California. More performances are planned for California in November. The play takes the issue of euthanasia and, through it, asks searching questions about the values of our society. The publicity quotes Mr Muggeridge: 'What we think and do about birth and death determines what we do about life.' California has been in the vanguard of legalising euthanasia.

Prisoner of conscience

EDMUND BANYARD's play *One Friday* will be performed in Auckland, New Zealand, later this month. It is being staged by Pilgrim Productions. In the play, a prisoner of conscience finds solace in the story of the first Good Friday as he prepares to face his execution. The play poses the question, 'Is it worthwhile to give your life for a cause?'

TUC fringe

'KEIR HARDIE—the man they could not buy', the story of the father of the British Labour

Party and the faith which inspired him, was presented by trade unionists as a fringe event at the annual conference of the Trades Union Congress in Brighton last month.

Seven nation ladder

'THE LADDER', by Peter Howard, has been presented in Melbourne by a cast from seven countries. The play, about the struggle between ambition and the Cross in a young man on his way to success, was performed to 150 people by participants in a course on Moral Re-Armament.

Bone on TV

'GIVE A DOG A BONE', the film of the pantomime by Peter Howard which ran for 12 years at the Westminster Theatre, has been shown on television in Oregon, USA.

Ride to Malaysia

THE MUSICAL *Ride! Ride!*, based on an incident in the life of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, has been performed in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It was staged by the Wesley Methodist Church there in August.

'A beckoning finger urged me'

Michel Orphelin and some of the company of *Un Soleil en Pleine Nuit* tell Jackie Firth why

AT 2am ONE MORNING a French actor stumbled across MRA. On top of his refrigerator, where the day's mail was put, Michel Orphelin found a booklet which fascinated him. He decided to meet the people who had written it.

Mime artist and singer, Michel was performing with a group called 'Les Trois Horaces'. With them he had toured France and 14 other countries. His encounter with MRA started a new direction to his artistry.

This summer saw the French premiere of a play written for Michel. *Un Soleil en Pleine Nuit* by Hugh Williams was first performed in English as *Poor Man, Rich Man* and toured Britain. It is a portrayal in song, mime and dance of St Francis of Assisi as if he were alive now.

The young Italian felt God calling him so urgently that he threw aside everything life could offer him. 'Now there's no one who can say to me, "You'll never know for sure what it's like to be poor",' he sang as he walked out of the comfort of his rich home and carefree life.

Furious

Michel identifies with Francis in many respects. 'I found life difficult when I was a teenager,' he said. 'I often felt inferior and didn't know where to find the meaning of life. So I understand why, when Francis's followers ask him why God chose him to do His work, Francis answers, "Because I'm the worst person He could find." I find peace when my talents are serving my calling. Music and dance have an extraordinary power.'

The music for the 20 original songs was written by Kathleen Johnson. She has helped create a variety of musical productions. 'But each song is like the birth of a child,' she said. 'I often start to get the ideas when I'm travelling and have to find a piano as soon as possible to try them out. Then it's hard to



Kathleen Johnson

wrench myself away.' At first, she said, she had been repelled by the poverty in which Francis lived, but the wholeheartedness of his love for 'Lady Poverty' had arrested her.

In the play the Italian public meets this eccentric young man through a TV chat show. This and other parts of the story are provided by slides projected onto a backdrop—the job of Annie Rabourdin from Paris. Annie had been working with MRA in different countries for some years and a few months ago she felt burned out. 'I thought I needed to take my life in hand, find a job and get married,' she said. 'In my grand scheme I kept one small place for God—to show me where and how. Then one day as I was walking down the road I felt God wanted me to continue working with MRA and to join this play.' Annie was furious and it took some time for her to accept it, but she says now, 'I was at the edge of a precipice and knew I was going to fall, but God caught me. Then I rediscovered His love and that is the thing I most want others to find.'



Su Richards

Su Richards from Cornwall is the Assistant Stage Manager. She recently resigned a highly paid secretarial job with Unesco in Paris to work without salary with this play. She laughed, 'When I heard people talking about the play I thought, "What a good idea, that's just what France needs. A very good thing for young people to get involved in." But then I felt a beckoning finger urging me to go and join them.' For several days she tried to forget it but the idea would not leave her. She says now, 'I'm not worried about living without regular money. I don't miss anything that really matters. Every time we do the play something different strikes me; something that is spoken directly to me.'

The pulse of the play belongs to the musical director. John Burrows, together with the director, John Dryden, worked on *Poor Man, Rich Man* and they both went to Switzerland to launch *Un Soleil en Pleine Nuit*.

John Burrows has directed the music of several successful West End musicals. 'I grew up with music all around me,' he says. 'At the age of seven I was playing Beethoven sonatas. Music can do everything for us—evoke joy, sorrow, pain, exultation.' Michel described him as 'a true musician'—who fights for the



John Burrows

essentials of the play. 'He is not always easy to live with, but he is often right!'

'The thing closest to my heart,' John continued, 'is that people should leave asking about themselves. The point is not to give a set of answers, but to make the choices in life more clear.'

Purity

For their tour of France, a Londoner, Peter Riddell, has taken over the job of musical director. Peter talked about the relevance for today of St Francis's life. 'He grew up in a period of great materialism which he rejected completely. He proved that happiness does not depend on money. Europe's standard of living is going to fall, but if we are to work out new ways we will need to take man's spiritual resources more seriously. I think the play can help to stimulate this.'

At the point when his Brothers chose a more comfortable life Francis felt the weight of his own sacrifice almost crushing. 'Then I understood his life's deeper meaning,' said Peter. 'Also there is his relationship with Clare.' Francis himself was taken aback when this famous young countess decided to give all and make Francis's life-style her own. 'Clare, so young and fair,' he sang, 'What price do you pay for this new life?... Your love will be for all to share, Clare.'

'There is no hint of possession or self-consciousness in their relationship,' continued Peter. 'Their purity meant that they had complete freedom.'

Michel gave one of his all-encompassing gestures. 'Through this play I aim to find the people who will create a new theatre for the French-speaking countries,' he said. 'Once when I was in India with a musical revue we presented a scene of reconciliation. Afterwards a young man came up to me and said, "I've decided not to kill the man who tortured my cousin." That scene, I realised, had been used to spare two lives. I am most interested in theatre that gives life.'

Alby James, the director of *Mr Wilberforce MP*, and his wife Vanessa, talk to John Bond

DIRECTING INTO DEVELOPMENT

BRITAIN is not an easy place for the black British. They have to make their way in a society of people who do not easily open their hearts to outsiders. Some bear the hurt of being treated as inferior. Others fight.

Alby James's first campaign for social justice—an attack on government cuts in school education—took place when he was at technical college in London; but when I asked him why he cared about school-children losing their daily half-pint of milk, he puzzled a good deal. A mixture of championing the underdog and rebelling against authority? 'All I know is that I cared about those children,' he said.

Certainly there is a zest for battle in his eyes, an enthusiasm which is refreshing in a society which mistrusts enthusiasm; a conviction that he has the ideas that are needed and the confidence to put them forward.

This, he believes, is what got him a job as an assistant director at London's Royal Court Theatre at the age of 25. 'At the interview I told them what I wanted to do. As I left, I was convinced that I had the job.'

But he had had plenty of rejections before that. For the previous three years he had gone from job to job—freelance writing, working in a bakery, and in an economic consultancy—seeking a break into theatre.

Theatre had been his passion ever since schooldays, when his school had done a production based on Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *1984*. At technical college, then university, he took part in many productions. But when he tried for the professional theatre, they all told him he needed a degree in drama or English literature. And he had done development studies.

Hyde Park Corner

Why development studies? 'I felt a drama degree was self-indulgent. I am one of the privileged of my people—my parents had enough money to see me through university. I felt I had to help those less well off.'

So why did he pursue a career in theatre? 'I had thought of an academic career. But no one listens to academics. I did a dissertation on international monetary reform, then found that all my ideas had been thought of by other academics, and had never got further.'

'Drama, I felt, could be a facilitator of change. As the playwright Roger Howard said, "If there's a revolution, it will have been partly prepared by the cultural changes that we're taking part in."

'Also, I wanted to do something about the attitudes to black people in Britain. It annoys me when I am asked, "Where do you come from originally?" I was born in Britain—I

have no other home. People need to stop treating us as if we don't belong. I want to encourage the developments in theatre that will facilitate this, that will treat black people as human beings and not as stereotypes.'

Were these the ideas he had told the Royal Court directors? 'Yes. I felt that the Royal Court should be a new writers' theatre. I wanted to help writers from the minority groups to write plays which would make people think.'

It was while he was working there, he told me, that his life had radically changed. Though he had been brought up in the Christian faith, by this time it had little effect on the way he lived.



D Loughman

Then, last year, he met Vanessa. She had been to art college and, tired of the social whirl, had started searching for something deeper. 'Please Jesus, help me come to you,' she had written in her diary in February last year. Three months later, after hearing a speaker at Hyde Park Corner, she went into a church and there asked God to come into her life.

Soon after she met Alby. Despite her new resolutions she became pregnant. This shattering realisation set her searching for a deeper experience of God, and during the succeeding months she found an experience of forgiveness and a power greater than anything she had imagined. 'That alone enabled me to cope,' she said.

She wanted to marry Alby. But she knew that unless he came to the same commitment they would be on totally different wavelengths. Alby was scared that giving God control of his life would mean an end to his ambitions in the theatre. 'But I could see the difference between the truth Christ

offered and what I believed in,' he said. 'After six months of turmoil, I surrendered my life to Him.' Both of them knew they were meant to marry, and so they did.

'After this decision,' Alby continued, 'I came to see that the revolutionary politics I believed in, and which directed all my opinions and actions, were destructive and negative. I started to have a very different attitude. I also decided not to do the plays that didn't accord with my new way of life. People sneered, and told me that I had ruined a promising career. It was pointless me being there full-time as a director if there weren't the plays I wanted to direct. So I worked out my contract and left.'

America and Zimbabwe

'I had been praying to find a new purpose in life. Then a friend took me to meet a group of Christians who were creating and producing the kind of plays they believed in. I began to see that God wanted to use my theatrical experience in the service of Christian theatre.'

'For me, it opened up many new thoughts. I saw the link between my theatrical experience and my "development" studies. Development means people, it means meeting people's needs. I saw the need for the kind of plays that can help encourage this kind of thinking, the need to take productions into the communities normally starved of drama. I saw the need for this in America, where black dramatists are becoming divisive in society; in Zimbabwe, where development will only be positive if the Government takes advantage of what each of the cultures can contribute. This is what I wanted to have a part in.'

'Some of this group were from the Westminster Theatre. When I left the Royal Court they asked me to direct *Mr Wilberforce MP*.'

What do you think of the play? 'I enjoy it. Most of the actors in the company are committed Christians, and we get on well. Also, we believe this play can wake people up. It focusses two philosophies—that of Wilberforce, who believed that there is an absolute right and wrong and you must fight for the right, and that of Dundas, who believed that there is no such thing.'

'Wilberforce was compassionate. He suffered with the people who suffered. He was not perfect—he hurt his wife by ignoring the love she tried to shower on him. But because he let God use him, a great wrong in the world, the traffic in slaves, was abolished.'

'He chastised the nation, demanding that they face up to their actions. We in Britain continue to need strong words—too many of us stay quiet in public and let wrong go on.'