

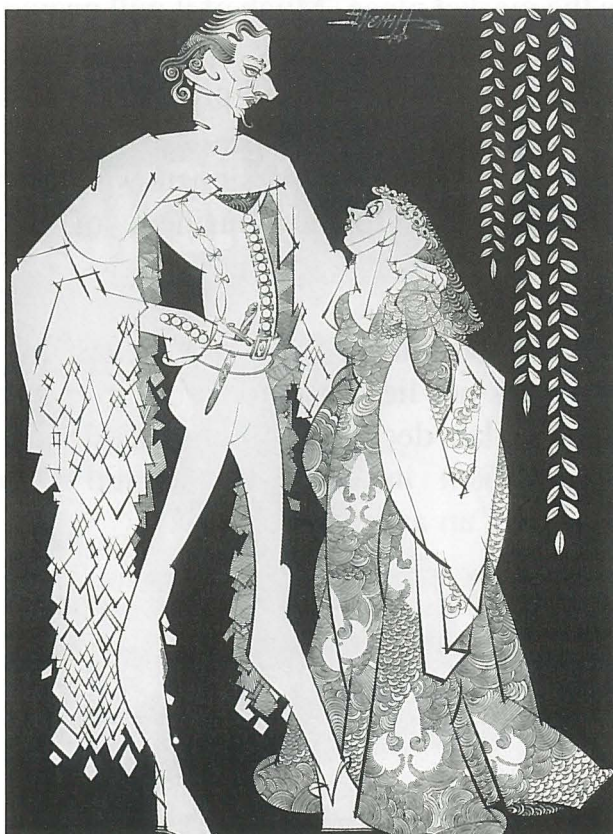
# The quest for yesterday's and tomorrow's theatre

FRANCIS REID visits Exhibitions in London and Oldham

I have been back to the Theatre Museum several times since reviewing the opening for Cue and it never fails to give pleasure. Admittedly at each visit the foyer seems more of a visual disaster and its waste of space more inexplicable, but once underground my theatric senses succumb. At each visit I find some new joys. It is not that the exhibits are constantly changing (they don't, although there has been some fine tuning including the implant of a C.D. lighting board into the Cafe) nor that there is too much to take in on a single visit (although there is). No it is because, although museums are essentially about discovery, the effect on the sensibilities of many of the objects displayed becomes enhanced with familiarity.

The Museum has its critics. Most of them are theatre people with narrow specialist interests and they delight in listing for me what is not there. My own concern is not so much the absence of specific items but of a lack of the gutsy naive tastelessness that was at the heart of so much of yesterday's theatre. (I, for one, lament its passing. But that is irrelevant.) Is the Museum's

Gielgud as *Hamlet*, New Theatre 1934. (photo by Yvonne Gregory)



Gielgud with Gwen Ffrangcon Davies in *Richard of Bordeaux*, New Theatre, 1933. (Caricature by Sheriffs)

approach to theatre history perhaps a little too over coloured by current views of what the role of theatre in today's society should be?

The Museum's two galleries for special exhibitions have made their first change-over. The Gielgud Gallery now appropriately houses **JOHN GIELGUD: A CELEBRATION OF HIS WORK IN THE THEATRE**, which will run until 28th August 1988. Only some of his roles (over 130) and the productions he has been associated with as actor, or director, or both (over 200) can be featured but the riches displayed encompass all the facets of his greatness. There is ephemera to help recall great nights that we enjoyed and ephemera to remind us of great nights that we missed. All the standard techniques of a theatre museum are deployed, including all the Ps (photographs, paintings, and all kinds of print including programmes and posters) plus set models and a carousel slide show. Accompanied by a taped explanation of just why it is so important to be Ernest. And there is an extended family tree which I found to be full of clarification together with some surprises. An exhibition as elegant and eloquent as Sir John himself.