



from "Fragile Craft"

BY MARK RUDMAN

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There is no end to the torment that comes from watching dead actors
in old, and no so old, movies, and you always fall into the hole
of uncertainty; you know you don't know if they're alive or dead,
some of them look so radiant on films made not so long ago.
Richard Harris, the hero of *The Heroes of Telemark*,
is undergoing a second birth in old man roles,
while in the rockface rappelling, snow on castles
icecapade, *Where Eagles Dare*, two out of three leads,
Richard Burton and Mary Ure, are both quite dead,
as is her second husband, Robert Shaw.

A lot happens in *Eagles*, but what sticks
in my mind is the escape, where Mary Ure,
coifed, oblique glimmer of a smile,
cradling a machine gun
like a weightless toy on the caboose's deck,
bullets in mesmerizingly endless supply,
decorously mows down row on row of Nazi pursuers,
who drop into the white Alpine ridges
like knocked over counters in a game,
as if she were answering the blasts

from Jimmy Porter's trumpet as they merge
with a shrieking train whistle and screech of brakes.

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To St Paul's Church, Covent Garden, for Robert Shaw's memorial service. A beautiful, still day. There was a gathering of figures from the profession, plus friends and family. Harold Pinter gave a short address, stressing Bob the writer... It was a fairly joyful occasion, serious but not sad. I had my usual

bewilderment about our lack of ritual. We all huddled together in the sunshine outside the church —Paul Scofield, Kenneth Haigh, Harold, and many, many others. We all wanted to be together in Bob's memory. But what could we, un-Christian as most of us are, do? Off to the Riverside Studios to see *The Changeling*, beautifully staged by Peter Gill, precise and clear. But I had the impression of a not very talented cast dutifully following the conception of a quite brilliant director.

—1978, Saturday 7 October, Peter Hall's Diaries

I abhor assumptions but from the tension Robert Shaw emitted on screen and in his other incarnations, the athletic boozier's fatal heart attack in middle-age seemed at first less surprising than Mary's Ure's ambiguous end.

Shaw looks so painfully alive in *Jaws* as the shark-crazed minor Ahab it's hard to digest how quickly he raced toward a death from natural causes, so shortly afterwards.

There's much that could be said about Robert Shaw, a ubiquitous, menacing, explosive presence during the previous decade in British films before the American public began to pin a name

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