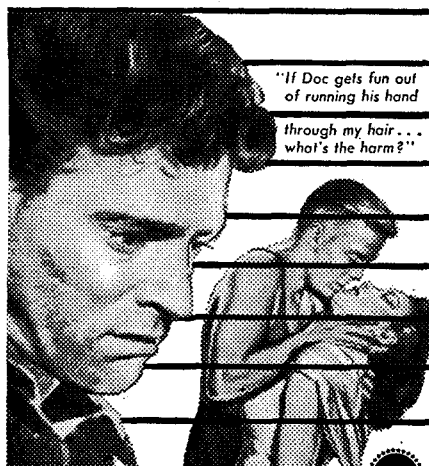


That girl in his house...
she spelled trouble!



BURT LANCASTER
SHIRLEY BOOTH

IN Hal Wallis' PRODUCTION

Come Back, Little Sheba

Doors Open
9:45 A. M.

Victoria
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SR Goes to the Movies

A BOUQUET FOR EVERYBODY

THERE is an important though strangely ignored distinction between great film acting and the work of most star performers. A movie star, almost by definition, is less an actor than a personality, a symbol. Gary Cooper is the strong silent man, Joan Crawford the lacquered lady with a past, Spencer Tracy a diamond in the rough. Each has his special set of mannerisms and speech patterns—plus that indefinable aura once called "It"—which, given the proper story and a reasonably good director, can create on the screen a persuasive, believable character. But Cooper in a drawing room or Crawford in a comedy are equally uncomfortable. And so stars tend to become "typed," not simply because type casting is easier but because, in most cases, typing is truer to their actual ability to project an imagined person in a fictional set of circumstances. Rare indeed is the movie actor who can change type and portray a wide variety of characters with equal conviction. Garbo, Chaplin, Bette Davis, John Barrymore, more recently Richard Widmark. These are the real film actors.

To them now must be added Shirley Booth, the star of "Come Back, Little Sheba" (Paramount). In just one film she asserts her consummate artistry, her ability to create and sustain a complex character through a wide variety of emotional conflicts and crises. Never typed on the stage, Miss Booth has played with equal skill the ex-Follies chorine in "Three Men on a Horse," the resourceful Ruth in "My Sister Eileen," the vicious magazine writer in "The Philadelphia Story," the understanding teacher in "Tomorrow the World," the romantic lady of the current "Time of the Cuckoo," and, of course, the good-natured prostitute in last season's musical version of "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn"—not forgetting memorable performances in innumerable less memorable plays. For years she was arranging curtain times so that she could also be the comic Miss Duffy of "Duffy's Tavern" on radio. Along Broadway you used to hear, "That Shirley Booth, all she needs is one good play." With "Come Back, Little Sheba" she got it. Her performance as Lola Delaney, the slatternly wife of an alcoholic, brought her not only tremendous public recognition but,

after more than twenty-five years in the theatre, stardom as well.

John Mason Brown has already written fully about the wonder of Miss Booth on the stage—"one of the most gifted actresses our theatre boasts," he said. The incredible thing is how completely, how devastatingly she has recreated Lola in terms of the camera. From the first moment we see her, waddling sleepily down the stairs, pausing automatically to adjust the clock in passing, we know the essentials of Lola's life—a shabby, somnolent affair to be gotten through as easily and painlessly as possible. Then deftly, subtly, come the added touches—the endless platitudes, her simple good-heartedness, her pathetic dependence on her husband, her romantic visions of the past. And ever and again, the reminder of her slovenliness—the broken bedroom slippers, the formless housedress, the hairbrush on the kitchen table. Slowly, out of a myriad of incidents and tiny actions, Lola Delaney begins to take shape. Not as someone you admire or love, but as a sad, commonplace woman whom you know and pity.

WILLIAM INGE asked nothing more from his play. He shows, almost as a case history, the heartbreak of little people, the frustration of their wholly conventional lives. He preaches no moral, points no accusatory finger. But implicit in his work is the conviction that people are important, and he makes his appeal for sympathy and understanding by plunging us beneath the cold surface of events. His Doc Delaney drinks, but he is not just a drunk. Behind the bottle stands a promising career blasted when he left medical school to marry the girl he had made pregnant. Nor is Lola simply a slattern. Too stupid to comprehend fully what has happened to

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S
KINGSLEY DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 978)

OGDEN NASH:
A CAROL FOR CHILDREN

Yours be the genial holly wreaths
The stockings and the tree;
An aged world to you bequeaths
Its own forgotten glee. . . .

God rest you merry, Innocents,
While innocence endures.
A sweeter Christmas than we to ours,
May you bequeath to yours!

her life, she shuttles between a romanticized past, when she was the most popular girl in town, and a hopeful future when "everything will be all right," trying to ignore the unhappy present in which Doc is struggling against liquor with the help of Alcoholics Anonymous.

ALL of this, the heart of Inge's play, has been translated to the screen with a rare fidelity. There is perhaps a more hopeful final scene than the stage suggested, a few minor changes in incident. At the same time, a number of important sequences have been added—notably an A.A. meeting and a harrowing few minutes in the city hospital where Doc is taken after his bout with the bottle. Completely within the spirit of the play, these additions amplify its crucial points. There is no more telling example of Lola's extreme insensitivity than when, after Doc confesses to his fellow A.A.'s that he never thought he could keep away from liquor for a whole year, she loudly whispers to a neighbor, "Neither did I." There is nothing more moving than the single line, spoken by an intern at the hospital over a huge, anguished close-up of Shirley Booth: "He keeps calling

for Lola, pretty Lola. Who's Lola?" Ketti Frings's screenplay brilliantly holds to the action of the play, but her approach is decidedly filmic.

It is to the credit of young Daniel Mann, the director of the stage version, that he has completely realized the potentialities of her script. Mann, directing his first movie, has somehow sensed the difference between the two forms. He freely gives his cameraman, veteran James Wong Howe, much of the credit for the fluidity, the intelligent camera set-ups, and lighting of this picture. But Mann himself has done a magnificent job of matching camera placement against the emotional tensions of a scene. There are relatively few large close-ups of actors talking back and forth. The camera moves in only for such climactic moments as the scene at the hospital, or Miss Booth's heartbreaking, half-articulate telephone call to her mother asking if she might come home for a while after the tragedy. For the rest, the camera remains discreetly close without being obtrusive, swinging nimbly to follow action through the narrow confines of the Delaneys' shabby rooms.

The performances right down the line are beyond reproach, another

THE STAR: Shirley Booth, an actress of overwhelming talent who, in the past two-and-a-half years of her twenty-seven on Broadway, has made a clean sweep of almost every stage award in the theatre, is at last on the screen. "Honestly," Miss Booth reminisced self-effacingly the other day at her place on West Fifty-fourth Street, eleven stories up, "it didn't occur to me that Hollywood would be interested in me." A toy poodle—ten-weeks-old, the color of apricots, and named Prego after an all-round Italian word in "The Time of the Cuckoo," Miss Booth's current hit—galloped happily around the living room as Miss Booth discussed Miss Booth of the film, "Come Back, Little Sheba." "People took it for granted from the beginning that I would do Lola. I didn't. I had done other Broadway plays—'Three Men on a Horse,' 'My Sister Eileen,' 'The Philadelphia Story'—and hadn't been asked when they were made into movies." It was Hal Wallis who finally did ask for a test. "Well, I was sort of curious to see what I'd look like on the screen," Miss Booth owned up enthusiastically. "It was a pleasant surprise. And they were so very much impressed. Well, maybe they really want me to do this, I thought. So I overcame my scruples. I'd thought all along that I was far too frightening to be seen head-on." Scruples, it turned out, had something to do with "looks." "I never thought pictures would be for me," she said, a smile on her merry, expressive face, as she resuscitated her c. 1940-thinking. "I didn't have the big eyes, the lovely nose, the dazzling smile. People never came up to me and said, 'You should be in movies.' It was only later, when Hollywood went somewhat off the 'looks' diet, that I got interested." Once in Hollywood, Miss Booth said, "I had a charmed existence. Making 'Sheba' took on an aura of rearing a love child. Lola took readjustment from stage to screen, to keep her in tune with a younger Doc. Sidney [Blackmer] was more comfortably mature. Burt [Lancaster] was like a sabre—tall, forceful. I couldn't lie back on that character and be his little girl, like I was Sidney's." As to how she found Hollywood—"I," she said, "was too busy to find it for a couple of months. Then, I found it most kind, most generous," Miss Booth added, leaning forward and sweeping Prego off the floor.

—BERNARD KALB.



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