

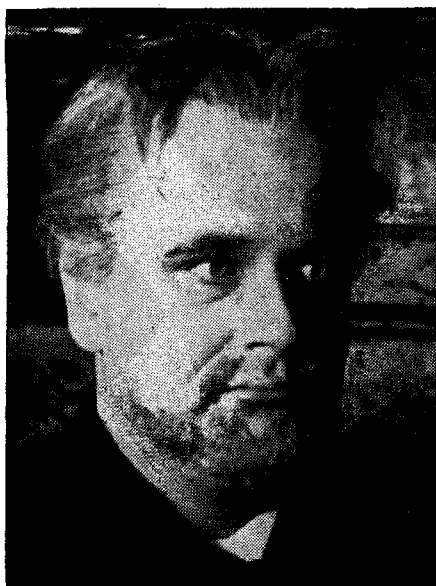
ever been more torn between "do" and "don't" in human nature. When she sings "Half of me says let's and salvation, half of me says let's be lowdown," she is summarizing that wonderful mixture of the spiritual and the earthy which has always been one of the sources of her genius. At present, however, there is a difference. The tempting "do" is for her now a grandmotherly memory rather than a serious threat; the tropical heat wave is merely warmish weather. Blame time for this.

BUT time cannot be blamed for some of the program's errors in showmanship. As far as I am concerned, putting her in evening dress in a drawing-room is not one of these. I think she is given too many songs to sing. Twenty numbers would tire throat. Asking her to sing them without the comforting aid of an amplifier seems to me inhuman. Although Reginald Beane is a superior pianist and does take over occasionally, the evening has an inescapable monotony. To avoid this, I wish Miss Waters had been granted a chance to prove her undiminished powers as an actress by playing scenes from "Mamba's Daughters" and "Member of the Wedding."

There must also be short stories, dealing with the tragedies of her race, which could be turned into monologues for her.

While Miss Waters cannot be expected to be the Ethel Waters of the Plantation Club days or of the earlier shows, she is by no means through. She has much to offer the theatre which she, and she alone, can bring to it. Indeed, she is far too good to be shown at anything except her best.

—JOHN MASON BROWN.



—H. J. Mydtskov.

Wieth—"most talented Danish actor."



The State of Denmark

IN COPENHAGEN the Tivoli Gardens are lighted," wrote Tennessee Williams during a magic wonderstruck moment in "Camino Real." Then he added, "Is this what the glittering wheels of the heavens all turn for?"

In selecting the Danish amusement park as a symbol of romantic pleasure Mr. Williams perhaps came closer to the truth in his tribute to Copenhagen than did the man who wrote the singing commercial for the Hans Christian Andersen film. For here in this park of multicolored lights and fizzy fireworks, of elegant restaurants and cheap dance halls, is all of the dreamy richness of life. Only occasionally does the terror-ridden sing-song horn of a passing ambulance threaten the illusion.

While everything that goes on at Tivoli is theatrical, the display of most interest to theatre students is the nightly performance of the Commedia dell Arte pantomimes. Balletmaster Poul Huld, who stages the fifteen different sketches at the open-air Peacock Theatre, claims that Tivoli is the only place in the world where Harlequin, Pierrot, Cassandre, and many other traditional Commedia dell Arte characters are preserved. The routines were brought from Italy by way of Paris in the late eighteenth century by a dancing master named Casorti, and although Mr. Huld has pieced together a couple of new pantomimes, all of the old ones have been kept intact. The performances themselves are played without words, but to a strict musical accompaniment by a company half of whom are pure actors and half pure dancers. Their borrowed art falls somewhere between the artistic mimes of Barrault or Marceau and the uncomplicated buffoonery of American burlesque comics.

Borrowing from the artistic traditions of other countries is inevitable for the tiny state of Denmark, situated as it is between so many other larger countries. In the case of the theatre, at least, Denmark's eclecticism has worked out well. A brief exposure to Copenhagen's drama leaves you with a very favorable impression indeed.

First there is the Royal Danish Theatre, which is best known to foreigners for its excellent ballet company. Not intensely creative, it features a corps de ballet which is probably lovelier and livelier than any in the world. Al-

ternating with the ballet company at the larger and older of two theatres is the Royal Dramatic Company. At this playhouse they present a classic repertoire, with its main ingredient the plays of Holberg. Also two productions that proved themselves last season when presented at the smaller theatre will be moved over. They are "As You Like It" and "Colombe."

The company is not large enough to play at both theatres simultaneously, and usually performs at the smaller theatre only when the ballet or the opera has taken over at the other house. But when they do play here they give modern plays or modern interpretations. The production of "Pygmalion" which I saw is splendidly produced and acted. Ebbe Rode as Professor Higgins and Bodil Kjer as Eliza Doolittle head an excellent cast, all of whom feel free to contrive artifices much as do the French, but on the other hand work together and never really lose the play's train of emotion. Miss Kjer resembles Olivia DeHavilland, but is a much superior actress. In the early scenes of the Shaw play she is just being inventive, but in the final scenes where Eliza becomes more than a caricature the Danish star comes to life and seems to do dozens of expressive and deeply felt things simultaneously.

UNFORTUNATELY, neither Poul Reumert nor Ingeborg Brams are with the company this month, and Mogens Wieth, who is considered the most talented Danish actor, is busy in London, where he has just scored a great success in a new English version of "A Doll's House." (Incidentally, the Ibsen play will be given by the Royal Dramatic Company at the modern theatre, along with "Mother Courage," "The Living Room," and "A Month in the Country.") Mr. Wieth, a personable young actor resembling Kent Smith, did take enough time out from rehearsals in London last month to tell me that the Finnish Theatre was very exciting (I couldn't fit it into my trip), that Bodil Ipsen was Denmark's greatest actress (she is no longer acting), and that he wanted to play Goetz in Sartre's "Le Diable et le bon Dieu" and "Hamlet" (both will be played in Copenhagen this winter without him). Mr. Wieth speaks perfect English, having joined the British paratroopers during the war, and can sing well

enough to do musical comedy, all of which make him an excellent prospect for American importation. The Royal Theatre hopes, nevertheless, to reclaim Mr. Wieth to its group some time during the 1953-54 season.

As for Mr. Reumert and Miss Brams, they will be seen in several roles. Their most exciting collaboration might well be the "Hamlet." Mr. Reumert should from all accounts make a strong Polonius, and Miss Brams with her hysterical and religious qualities should prove a truly strange and fascinating Ophelia. The title role will be assumed by the young Joergen Reenberg, and if this production lives up to expectations it may be moved to Elsinore next summer.

But it will have to be very good to survive the competition of the production in nearby Göteborg. There the brilliant young Swedish director Bengt Ekeroh has devised the most interesting "Hamlet" of the three I saw in Europe this past summer. Per Oscarsson plays Hamlet as extremely caustic, and at moments as violently insane. The innovations are numerous, although there is much that has been borrowed from the Barrault production. At the beginning Hamlet throws his cap after the departing Claudius, spits on the throne, and finally flings himself on the floor for his first soliloquy. In the play scene the prince does a mocking dance for the king and queen which occupies them during the dumb show, not only solving the problem of why they are not alarmed, but giving Hamlet a fine base on which to build after Claudius reacts to the spoken play. But possibly best of all, though not so sensational, is Hamlet's death. Claudius, Gertrude, and Laertes have all died within the confines of a semi-darkened stage. But when it comes Hamlet's moment the black curtains are drawn open for Fortinbras's arrival, and Hamlet dies in a gracious shower of sunlight.

The scenery at Göteborg is excellent in its economy, and director Ekeroh as often as he can places Hamlet downstage left while the rest of the actors are upstage right. In this way he approximates the illusion of distance for the soliloquy that the actor on the Elizabethan stage arrived at by merely moving downstage.

THERE seems to be no question about it that this kind of play is most effective when the setting is non-realistic and the actor can on occasion separate himself from the rest of the characters to address the audience directly. A startling and most effective proof of this theorem is currently being offered in Copenhagen. There, at the New Theatre, Corneille's "The Cid" is being presented within a unit set.

From the outset the audience is called upon to imagine that distances are greater than they are, that places that look very similar are in fact very different, and that the actors are illustrating a story for us rather than being the story itself. Accordingly our *illusions* are not shattered when a character suddenly leaves the stage picture and moves to the front of the stage and says to us what he cannot say to those in the play.

The production has been beautifully directed by Gabriel Axel, a former associate of Louis Jouvet. Very probably he has employed a formula that can be applied to a great many plays of heightened language which the modern theatre has submerged in naturalistic scenery and acting. The formula might well be tried when the New Theatre produces "The Crucible" this fall. "The Crucible" is a play of ideas stated naturalistically. If it had been stated poetically—and it is reported that Arthur Miller's next play will be in verse—"The Cid" method might have been ideal. As it was, the New York production was considerably improved by the removal of scenery altogether. Still, before we write QED to the problem, we must remember that there are many poetic plays of pure emotion—not to mention farces, naturalistic plays, and spectacles—that benefit from having a great deal of scenery and being performed on the picture-frame stage. Shaw's "You Never Can Tell" and Elmer Rice's "Dream Girl" and either "Picnic" or "Come Back, Little Sheba" by William Inge are on the New Theatre's schedule and would all seem best with rich scenery, although the realistic Inge plays might be even more moving if performed in the round.

There are several other nonsubsidized theatres in Copenhagen, and choice items for the coming season will be "The Children's Hour," with Heller Virksted, regarded as Denmark's prettiest actress, "The Taming of the Shrew," with the popular and competent Lily Broberg as Kate, "The Fourposter," with the talented but easygoing Angelo Bruun, "Golden Boy," and a wonderful-sounding children's play called "Pippi Longströmpe," or "the Strongest Girl in the World."

Of course, here as in the other Scandinavian countries most of the best actors perform in the Government-

subsidized companies where the security of a pension and ten stick closer to a true repertory system. However, there are always excellent actors like Stockholm's Gunn Wallgren, Oslo's Lillibel Ibsen, and Copenhagen's Gunnar Lauring, who prefer to get choice roles in the freer private companies. The latter must, of course, do their share of bread-and-butter plays, for even such a magnificent production as "The Cid" will not pay back its cost. Yet the private theatres in Europe are not commercially minded. Barrault in Paris, Norman in Oslo, or Peer Gregaard in Copenhagen do not see the theatre as a get-rich scheme. As Mr. Gregaard says, "There is something else besides money. Part of our actor's wages is the opportunity to participate in fine productions of great plays."

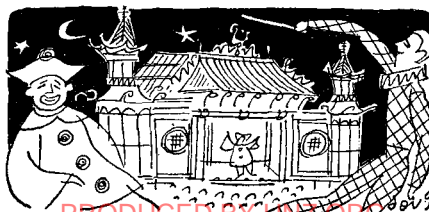
It seemed a happy thought with which to return to America.

TAKE a Giant Step," an autobiographical first play by the thirty-two-year-old Louis Peterson, is extraordinarily honest and strangely provocative. This is because the author has not let his story of a proud and lonely Negro boy in a white community become a thesis on race prejudice, and because he has refused to judge any of his characters. Thus, we are presented with a picture of parent-child relationship so true that the most biased person will find it difficult not to identify himself with it. The fact that Spencer Scott is a Negro only means that he is pushed into responsible adulthood a little earlier.

The acting is similarly honest. High-school senior Louis Gosset plays himself through six grueling scenes in which he is suspended from school, runs away from home, proposes to a worldly woman who turns out to be married (though available), spends a few terrified minutes in the room of a prostitute, returns home to quarrel violently with his parents, is overwhelmed at the death of his only real companion—his grandmother—makes love to a lonely young widow, and finally is unintentionally insulted across the line to maturity by one of his white playmates. Mr. Gosset is supported admirably by more experienced actors: Frederick O'Neal, deftly comic as the father; Estelle Hemsley, properly unsentimental as the militant grandmother; and Jane White, warm and understanding as the worldly woman. They help smooth the rough edges, as do Eldon Elder's poetic sets.

"Take a Giant Step" is perhaps more a novel than it is a play, and Mr. Peterson as yet lacks the poet's economy. But he has left the theatre-goer with something to chew on.

—HENRY HEWES.



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SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

Neatest Trek of the Week



—From "Mogambo."

Clark Gable with company, discussing the day's duties and other matters.

APPARENTLY bent on demonstrating how the wide screen can add a new dimension to an old property, M-G-M has exhumed a 1932 Clark Gable-Jean Harlow classic, "Red Dust," and, suitably refurbished, now sends it forth as "Mogambo." The principal refurbishment, aside from the new screen shape, is Ava Gardner, acid and amusing in the once-famous Harlow manner. Clark Gable, on the other hand, repeating his original role, remains very much as he has always been, the tough, assured, half-humorous he-man who can take his women or leave them alone. It is a role he has done so many times since 1932 that he could play it in his sleep (which may account for his lack of animation here). Even so, the film itself is lively enough and, in a silly sort of way, quite engrossing, the unpredictability of Africa's wild life more than compensating for the predictability of John Lee Mahin's script.

"Mogambo" casts Gable as a big-time hunter, who after a bit of preliminary sparring consents to lead a pair of anthropologists into gorilla country. (Anthropologists in general have been taking a beating from the movies ever since the appearance of Hortense Powdermaker's unflattering

study of Hollywood.) Mrs. Nordley, however, a pretty blonde, quickly makes it clear to Gable that, while science may be her husband's sole passion, it isn't necessarily hers. Also along on the expedition, for reasons too complicated to go into here, is Kelly, a party girl from New York. Kelly views the growing attachment between hunter and lady anthropologist with alarm and considerable sarcasm, mainly because she has designs on Gable herself. Indeed, so serious are her designs that just before the trek begins she ducks into a convenient Catholic mission in order that she might pursue her big game with a clear conscience.

Fortunately, all of this romancing has been handled with considerable humor, for since Kelly is played by co-star Ava Gardner the outcome is scarcely a surprise. What is surprising is the way Miss Gardner, aided by bright, crackling lines, keeps her synthetic role vivid and alive. But the picture is essentially an adventure tale in the tradition of "Trader Horn" and "King Solomon's Mines." Photographed in splendid color in Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda, and French Equatorial Africa, it has frequent and thrilling passages involving snarling panthers, ululating natives, and those

inevitable crocodiles. A cloud of pink flamingoes rising suddenly off the gray-green surface of a broad African river provides one of the handsomest single shots of recent years. And the climax of the hunt, with huge (and real) gorillas charging directly into the camera lens, provides some of the most exciting. Their shrieks, amplified by stereophonic sound, are enough to flatten you in your chair. Incidentally, "Mogambo" seems to be the first film actually composed with the wide screen's aspect ratio specifically in mind. The sweeping veldt, the bounding animals, the long lines of bearers threading through the bush on safari—in short, the accent on horizontals—lends some justification to this shape of things to come. John Ford's direction is capable, but lacking completely the stamp of individuality that once characterized his films.

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"The Titfield Thunderbolt" (U-I) is another of those quiet, unpretentious, but deliciously funny spoofs of national types and customs that the British do so well. As in "Passport to Pimlico" and "Tight Little Island," earlier efforts from the resourceful Ealing studio, all the comedy stems from a perfectly possible and logical situation. Here it is the closing down of an antiquated and unprofitable railroad, the pride of the tiny town of Titfield, its service to be replaced by a modern, efficient bus. The Titfielders rise to the support of their train, winning a month's respite from a marvelously mustachioed Minister of Transport to master the operation of the road on their own. The local vicar takes over as engineer, the ladies sew curtains and doilies for the compartments, and the town tippler puts up the required capital on the assurance that the club car will open hours before the nearby pub. Even the skull-duggery of the bus company doesn't keep these amateur railroadmen from maintaining schedule. T.E.B. Clarke's screenplay seems a bit more cluttered than absolutely necessary, but the English countryside through which the little train chugs its way is miraculously beautiful in Technicolor, the actors—such regulars as Stanley Holloway, George Relph, Naunton Wayne, and Godfrey Tearle—are completely delightful, and the Thunderbolt has a real charm of its own. So does the film.

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Adria Locke Langley's novel "A Lion Is in the Streets," which appeared soon after, and concerned itself with Huey Long's timely demise, has finally reached the screen with the same title (WB). Unfortunately, the film is about twenty years too late,