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BROADWAY POSTSCRIPT

Shallow Are the Roots

WITHIN a period of eight days Broadway has had three plays concerned with the home life of those who work in the souped-up world of publishing and advertising. Is this a trend? Perhaps Madison Avenue with its expense accounts and hoopla is taking over. Unfortunately, however, for purposes of the stage the talk and actions of these people tend to be smaller, duller, and less dramatic than the high society now found only in British plays, revivals, and "Sabrina Fair."

The excuse is, of course, that writers must write about what they know best, and that too many of our modern playwrights in order to live near the theatre also find it necessary to join this new society which Louis Kronenberger in "Company Manners" calls "The New New-Rich."

The first of the trio is "The King of Hearts," discussed last week. The second is "Anniversary Waltz," a comedy by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov which deals with the difficulties of married love in an age when intrusions on privacy are no longer accidents but invited guests. It shows Mr. and Mrs. Walters, played as naturally as possible by MacDonald Carey and Kitty Carlisle, who after fifteen years of marriage are still passionately in love with each other. But they are battling tremendous odds. As Walters puts it, "Marriage and Love are ships that pass in the night—with the children firing at the lifeboats." At another point a four-time divorcée is told, "You've got the right idea about marriage. Get in, take a quick profit, and get out."

The old symbol of intrusion was inevitably the in-laws and the snooping servant. A more recent development was the children raised at a progressive school (one that "runs from October to May with two weeks off for Halloween"). But the latest and most appropriate instrument of interference is the TV set. Taking no chances, "Anniversary Waltz" brings in all three, and Bud Walters comes explosively but resignedly to terms with the lot.

However, the resignation outweighs the explosion and the comedy is for the most part a dreary business. Except for a hilarious bit in which husband and wife sneak off to the Fernando Arms with their fourteen-year-old son's ice skates in a valise as ballast for a suspicious bellhop, and

a little ribbing of TV commercials, the jokes and the story have a singular lack of excitement or originality. While this fault is partly in the writing, it may have its roots in the people it is so naturalistically writing about.

THE other play, Julian Funt's "The Magic and the Loss," would seem to bear out this hypothesis. Here the same class of people, only with a dash of culture and idealism added, are mirrored in a problem play. A beautiful woman whose pursuit of self-expression has led her into the real competitive world of the New York ad-creating business is divorced from an equally idealistic husband who has abandoned the rat race to teach English at a small Pacific Coast College. Their fourteen-year-old son, who collects folk songs, suffers an insecurity from the absence of his father. During the course of the drama the mother and the boy lose a few illusions about themselves and are brought closer together by a truer understanding of their own dependencies.

As a play, "The Magic and the Loss" must be respected for its honest drawing of characters and its facing of the facts. Uta Hagen as the ex-wife, Lee Bowman as her cautious suitor, and Charles Taylor as the young son all give sincere performances. Robert Preston as the husband has a leading-man facility that gets in between him and the character. However, Edith Meiser is telling in a brief appearance as a washed-up advertising executive. "I've pushed too hard. I make too many jokes," she says, giving a concise portrait of a woman who has lost her illusions too late.

Yet despite the good intentions of the play, its color and impact are weak. Perhaps our new society itself lacks strong personality, tradition, and manners. But writing interesting plays about such a group is difficult, particularly if done by those who have elected to continue as part of it without really respecting it.

—HENRY HEWES.





SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

A Long Wait Between Trains

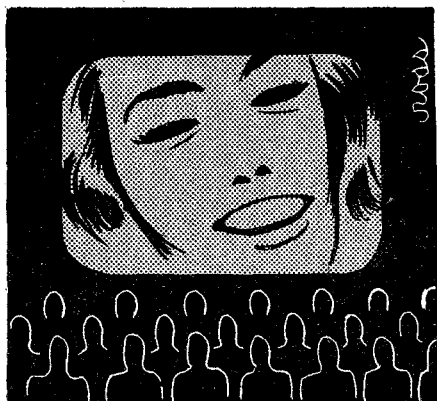
WHEN "Terminal Station" was first announced, well over a year ago, its alignment of both production and literary forces generated more than ordinary interest. The script, based on a story by Cesare Zavattini (who wrote "Bicycle Thief"), had been adapted by Alberto Moravia. At one time or another Carson McCullers, Paul Jarrico, and Truman Capote were all drafted to contribute to the dialogue. Perhaps the most arresting feature, however, was its odd combination of producer David Selznick and director Vittorio De Sica. It was easy enough to see what had brought the two men together. For Selznick, "Terminal Station" afforded an opportunity to combine top stars, Jennifer Jones and Montgomery Clift, with a top director in a novel and highly photogenic setting—Rome's new, de-luxe depot. For De Sica, undoubtedly, it was the station itself that proved so intriguing—the steam and clangor of trains pulling into the platforms, the flurried arrivals and departures, and through it all two lovers' desperate search for seclusion.

What happened between the announcement of "Terminal Station" and the completion of "Indiscretion of an American Wife" (Columbia) is also pretty clear. The setting proved merely a point of departure for two radically different concepts of film making. De Sica's neo-realism, which has produced such works as "Bicycle Thief" and "Shoe Shine," quickly degenerated into a series of vivid background vignettes of scurrying priests trailing columns of schoolboys, of marching guards and harried commuters, of a pregnant woman in the third-class waiting-room and a bullying waiter in the first-class restaurant. The background serves less as a dramatic

force in the film than as shifting, colorful, kaleidoscopic "atmosphere." Selznick, on the other hand, mustered his high-priced stars and writers to create a slick story of frustrated love, a "Grand Hotel" without bedrooms. Somewhere along the line it must have become apparent to both gentlemen that they weren't getting what they wanted. More writers were called in. Selznick himself, it is said, took a hand in the scenario. Oddly enough, although the finished picture emerges as more Selznick than De Sica, it is De Sica who receives both the direction and production credits. And Truman Capote, who claims that he wrote only two scenes, is finally credited with the flowery, uninspired dialogue. Selznick's name appears nowhere.

Certainly "Indiscretion" seems neither slick enough nor strong enough to have warranted all this effort. The giants labored and brought forth a muzzy little affair about an attractive American housewife (Miss Jones, beautifully gowned by Christian Dior) who feels that it's time she returned to Philadelphia and family when she finds herself falling in love with a young Italo-American professor. The teacher, played with a slightly glazed expression by Montgomery Clift, discovers her just as she is about to board the 7 o'clock *rapido* and persuades her to remain the hour and a half until the next train. Together they haunt the various corners of the vast station, mooning, quarreling, losing each other, and coming together again. When all these moods have just about been exhausted, they steal a moment of solitude in an empty sleeping car standing off on a spur. The moment is uncensorably brief. There is a knock at the door. Clift hastily straightens his tie. Miss Jones arranges her hat. And the Italian officials, apparently shocked beyond words, haul them before police commissioner Gino Cervi. His decision on this grave indiscretion, however, could scarcely matter less. By arbitrarily limiting the action to the station, the characters have been deprived of all dimension. We can't feel deeply for people we scarcely know, and well before the film is over Clift and Miss Jones have become simply a singularly ill-matched and uninteresting couple. That 8:30 express seems a long time coming.

—ARTHUR KNIGHT.



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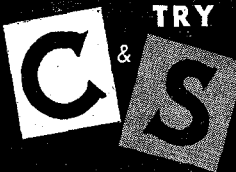
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