

pretty young girl whose mere appearance causes the audience's vitality to stir. Sometimes these charm girls elicit praise even from the supposedly hardened critics, but few indeed have a career after the first bloom is off. Actors are sometimes hired because they seem physically made for the role; these can really be a thorn in the flesh of the director. I remember a play a long time ago where Alfred Lunt, as director, was struggling with such an actor, who later became quite a personality in a non-theatrical career. "Believe me," he said, "that man actually does not know how to take his behind off his feet and put it on a chair." The most common failing is inability to listen. If you care to look for them, you will constantly find actors and actresses who are obviously paying no attention to the sense of a speech made to them, but are merely waiting for their cues.

THE actor who gives playwrights, producers, and directors the greatest headaches is "the ham." A ham actor may or may not know his scales; if he does, he is a greater headache; his vice is that he will disregard any requirement of naturalness in his part in order to gain personal attention. He, or she, will grimace, strut, roll his eyes, twist his body, or use any one of a hundred ways to attract audience notice; and frequently very successfully—he may draw belly laughs where another actor will hardly draw a chuckle. When he is successful, he may rightly ask why there should be any complaint.

The usual answer is that such over-playing ruins the effect of the play as a whole. From the modern playwright's view this is conclusive. However, the problem is not so simple. Theatre conventions change from age to age; in the modern theatre there is a general striving for realism and naturalness which makes the ham actor offensive to the serious playwright and producer. However, there have been periods when there was no such striving, and I have been told that there is little of it in the French theatre today. In such a theatre the tricks of the ham can become the earmark of the great star. Mr. Calvert, in his book, tactfully points out that Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, by our standards, would be the greatest ham actor alive. He also raises the question whether audiences, even today, would not get more enjoyment from vehicles written for such actors. But that is beyond the scope of this article.

Howard Lindsay, who has written, directed, produced, and acted in a

staggeringly larger number of successful plays than people commonly remember, once summed the matter up to me in this way:

There are two kinds of actors and actresses; the kind audiences care about and the kind they don't care about. It's like Maggie Tolliver's description of charm: it's something that if you have it nothing else matters, and if you don't, nothing else matters. Very, very rarely, although it can happen, will there be an actor or actress who can make an audience care, unless the performance is based on minimum technical efficiency, but the highest degree of technical skill will not alone make an audience care. Hence, the most important qualification for a part in any of my plays is the ability to make the audience care.

The "personality performance," which captivates an audience despite glaring lapses in technique, is probably the most confusing force in arguments about good and bad acting. I have seen playwrights, directors, and producers become emotionally overstrained because they could not see this confusion. I can recall a star who unquestionably conveyed to audiences the very essence of the character he was portraying and who was attracting capacity audiences, yet he would indulge in whispered personal gossip while another character was speaking. Arguments used to rage over whether he was a good or bad actor. Obviously, on the whole, he was good for that play, but you couldn't call his performance good by any esthetic standards.

Well then, you may say, the pro-

ducer's problem isn't so difficult after all. He merely has to find actors of high technical skill who can make audiences care about them. The technical skill will bring out the values of the script and the other quality will produce the emotional impact.

Quite true, but just how many of such creatures do you think there are around at any one time? The description just given is one that fits, not the good actors, but the really great ones. Even these cannot be counted on to produce the necessary impact in every style of play. Every star in the modern theatre has had his or her failures. It is doubtful if there is any single star today who can be counted on to attract an audience in the way Maude Adams or Richard Mansfield could. One team of stars, Mr. Lunt and Miss Fontanne, seem to be impregnable against complete failure; I think it is generally conceded that, in addition to their personalities, they have the highest technical skill of any acting pair alive today. It would be lovely if every production could have two Lunts in it; unfortunately, there are only two.

And so, I beg you, when you next read a savage and contemptuous review, remember that the art of writing and producing a play, and the art of acting so as to project those values, are not simple black-and-white problems, and the perfect solution is never just around the corner. Above all, remember that, as in all matters of opinion, one man's meat is another's poison. So don't be scared off a play by even your favorite critic's denunciation of an acting performance; that very performance may give you the emotional thrill of your life.

brown roses

By Luke E. Zilles

Slowly the garden sweetens as it dies
and closes with the closing of the year:
through leaves the somber moment of damp fire
undoes the herb of smoke, the heather spice

of summer, sweeter with its scented spire,
its thatch and chimneys than old villages,
being all flowers, all fragrance and no less
a crumbling masonry, a moldy jar:

change enters here as gentle and as yellow
as the moon that gives this earthly head its halo,
an archaic glory where the garden slowly

dies, scenting the brown pungencies
of clay with odors of old sanctities
until you shall believe that death is holy



SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

Audrey on the North Shore



—From "Sabrina."

William Holden and The Hepburn—"the ondine herself . . . the lovely languor."

THERE is a Nobel Prize, at the very least, waiting for the savant who can explain how it was that Paramount Pictures created only a fair-to-middling entertainment out of "Sabrina." Consider these golden elements which have been painstakingly transmuted into base metal. Paramount began with the playscript of "Sabrina Fair," Samuel Taylor's brilliantly successful spoof of the noble rich of Long Island's North Shore. Taylor's play was witty in conception and its dialogue leaped and gleamed like no talk that has been heard in these parts since the days when Philip Barry and Samson Raphaelson were at work. To insure the preservation of these lights, Taylor was cajoled aboard a DC-7 and set to laboring on the screenplay, partnered by Ernest Lehman and Billy Wilder.

And then, my friends, they added Audrey Hepburn. Yes, they enlisted the ondine herself, the enchanting sprite with the small head and the swan neck and the eyes as big as the Tower of London. They captured the girl whose single screen appearance in "Roman Holiday" won the Academy Award, whose single Broadway appearance caused the critics to sit cheerfully through three hours of Giraudoux jabberwocky, whose im-

pact on our national image of beauty has inspired ten million girls to hack off their hair and heavy up their eyebrows.

Having hired Hepburn, Billy Wilder proceeded to photograph her. He photographed her crawling under the seven cars in the Larrabee garage where her father served as chauffeur. He photographed her peeking through the trees at the party in the great Larrabee house where danced and flirted David Larrabee, the love of her secret heart. He photographed her at a cooking school in Paris, wistfully regarding a collapsed soufflé. He photographed her back at the Long Island railroad station, looking Parisienne and chic. He photographed her in a sailing costume, in an evening gown, in black matador pants, in a breathtaking black dinner dress. If you want to look at pictures of Audrey Hepburn, and I can think of less rewarding pastimes, "Sabrina" is the album of your dreams. Unfortunately, it is little more.

Will someone explain to me why they scissored out the sarcastic maiden aunt who dropped *bon mots* into the garden with Luella-Gear-like precision?

Why have they turned the magnificent old father Larrabee, lover of

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Music by GENE de PAUL
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