

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MISS MONROE FOR OUR MOVIES

HOLLIS ALPERT is all wrong about Otto Preminger and his "Saint Joan" (SR June 29). Alpert is concerned about art and Mr. Preminger about money. The film industry is a business and not an art form, and we would get few such reviews if SR would understand that. For the people who want Shaw as he is written go see the play or read it. The mistaken idea that Hollywood wants to make art is the cause of all the howling and laments, and it is time the facts were put right.

Mr. Preminger is spending someone's money and he has to get it back, and a lot more. He is well aware, I'm sure, that "Saint Joan" is a great play, but also that the name Shaw is box-office. "Saint Joan" as a film theme has died three times, and there ain't a dime in her at the box-office. But Shaw will sell. The Catholics don't like the play. So you get a Catholic writer to get a seal of purity by rewriting Shaw. Great acting on the screen doesn't bring in the money, but publicity does, sometimes. Nobody in his sane mind is going to run a four-hour picture in his theatre, unless it's by DeMille, so you have to cut it down.

What Mr. Preminger has made is a fine this-year's model, all shiny and full of horsepower to make an honest buck. Shaw talks too much anyway, and what he says makes people think. Did you ever try to think with your mouth full of candy and trying to hold a girl's hand? Words are dangerous things. But real water and battle-scenes and burning a girl with real fire are something anyone can enjoy, especially in full color and wide screen.

I haven't seen Mr. Preminger's "Saint Joan." I am reading Gibbon's "Decline and Fall" all this season. If I can rework it to fit Sophia Loren and Kirk Douglas I know where I can sell it for a motion picture. Hollis Alpert must go. May I put forward the name of Marilyn Monroe as your next film critic? She writes like a mink.

STEPHEN LONGSTREET.
Beverly Hills, Calif.

BARBADOS IN DECLINE?

JEROME BEATTY writes well of Barbados (TRADE WINDS, SR June 29), which is, or was until a year or two ago, one of the few places left in the Caribbean area not impregnated with American cultural and economic poison, an island that is still, in the main, British. My information is, though, that it is rapidly going the way of Jamaica, the Bahamas, and so forth.

MARC T. GREENE.
Thomaston, Me.

LET'S FACE FACES

GILBERT SELDES's "America and the Face of N. Khrushchev" (SR June 29) wrings



THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

"But I've spent a lot of time carving this head—the least you can do is to let me try it on."

applause from this sector. Our anti-Communists seem to be so blinded by their hatred, so intent on continuing a Cold War, and seemingly so desperate for an excuse to make it a hot one, we have wondered if what they don't really need is a psychiatric examination. We can cope with problems if we're willing to face facts. I am glad Mr. Seldes has had the wit and courage to say so out loud.

East Chicago, Ind.

WHO'S CATTY NOW?

WHILE I AGREE in principle with almost every point that Mr. Ernest Earnest makes in his "The Catty School of Writing" (SR June 29), I cannot subscribe to the means that he uses to make these points. For his churlish diatribe, sensible though it may be in relation to the subject matter, is the very essence of "cattiness"; therefore, the author defeats whatever purpose he may have had in writing the article. Witness the following phrases and quotes from Mr. Earnest's literary homily: "the notorious unwillingness of educated American men to read modern fiction"; Helen Howe's "zoological preoccupation"; "that pretty much takes care of Joyce, Kafka, Proust, Marx, Socrates, Palm Sunday, and the Pope," etc.; "what can one expect of a character named Theodosia?"

Such petulant carping would be excusable, if not expected, except that Mr. Earnest makes the inexcusable mistake of considering Helen Howe, Jean Stafford, Nancy Hale, and Mary McCarthy as important writers—which, of course, they are not.

JOHN N. WILSON.
Rio Linda, Calif.

IT WAS CARLYLE

IN "THE CATTY SCHOOL OF WRITING" I find the following statement: "When Emerson heard that Margaret Fuller said that she accepted the Universe, he remarked 'Gad, she'd better.'"

It was Thomas Carlyle who made this remark, not Emerson.

G. PHILIP WARDNER.
Boston, Mass.

NO WARM GLOWS

AS EARNEST WRITES, it is almost impossible today to find a witty book by an American writer that approaches a warm glow of humanity. I imagined I found one in Robertson Davies's "Leaven of Malice" a couple of years ago, but even that could not hold up under the scrutiny of a second reading.

ALBERT M. COHN.
Providence, R. I.

WHO'S ALIVE?

HAVE YOU STOPPED reviewing all mystery and crime novels? Certainly it is as important an art form as jazz. Even granting that most mystery novels are bad books (which I don't), have you ever considered what would happen to the publishing industry (and you) if only worthwhile books were published? Can you imagine an industry founded on a dozen books a year (or less)?

Get hep, boys; it's the bad books which keep multitudes of printers, publishers, advertising men, agents, typists, secretaries, booksellers, truck drivers, writers, and writers' relatives alive.

WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT.
Pacific Palisades, Calif.



Master Hamlet and Saint Viola

STRATFORD, ONTARIO.

THE fifth summer of the Shakespeare Festival Theatre of Canada is notable, not only because the most unique and exciting theatre in North America has moved from a temporary tent to a beautiful permanent building, but also because it presents two stars many consider the finest classic performers of the younger generation. One, twenty-eight-year-old Christopher Plummer, is instantly recognizable as a potential Sir Laurence Olivier. He is even recognizable as such in this, his first "Hamlet," which, though deficient in some important respects, courageously explores the softer side of the role and its opportunities for humor.

Plummer's Hamlet begins "too much in the son," a melancholy lad who weeps and whimpers every time he thinks of his mother's hasty remarriage. When his father's Ghost appears he is scared to look at it and swoons in the arms of his comrades. Instead of being resolved by the Ghost's tale, he is distracted to the point of suicide. Indeed, Mr. Plummer delivers his "To be or not to be" with knife poised in mid-air. And a little later he reminds us again of the childlikeness of his interpretation by beating a tiny drum in accelerating anticipation of his plot to catch his uncle's conscience with a replay of old King Hamlet's murder.

This first half thus serves as a petulant prologue in which Hamlet seems, more often than not, a spoiled, highly-strung mother's-boy. Such an interpretation is interesting, but because it does not balance physical cowardice with an admirable mental insistence upon the truth at all costs it tends to reduce a dramatic figure into a case study. The second half improves somewhat as Hamlet undertakes a more positive course of action. Mr. Plummer's most effective scene comes when he turns his anger and sarcasm on the court and on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. He gets marvelous humor as he plays hide-and-seek with the pursuing courtiers. And when Hamlet sees the admirable Fortinbras leading his army to fight in Poland, and realizes his own limitations, Mr. Plummer speaks "From now on my thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth" in self-mocking derision. Even in the death scene Mr. Plummer refuses to let Hamlet rise to a mature nobility. For when the dy-

ing prince hears the martial music of Fortinbras's approaching army he reverts to a moment of childish delight by playfully taking a couple of futile marching steps.

The production around Hamlet is splendiferous and ornate, underlining director Michael Langham's point that the court of Denmark has become rotten and corrupt. Desmond Heeley's costumes are lush and romantic, and the audience bursts into applause when a gold-fringed orange carpet is suddenly rolled out for the play-within-a-play scene. Mr. Langham also introduces the unusual notion that Ophelia's madness and suicide were prompted by pregnancy. While there is some internal evidence for it, this conception proves abortive because, even though it affords Frances Hyland the opportunity for a skilful operatic performance, it also weakens Hamlet's character still further.

This is a "Hamlet" more memorable for its touches of fresh interpretation and its production grandeur than it is for its impact on our souls. It is not fulfilment of Mr. Plummer's promise, but does constitute a welcome development of his instrument in the non-stentorian direction that may serve him well in future roles and, it is hoped, in a future "Hamlet."

THE second star, whose "Saint Joan" has already earned her stage immortality, is Siobhan McKenna. As Viola in Tyrone Guthrie's production of "Twelfth Night," Miss McKenna successfully applies some of the qualities that made her Joan so great. With economical grace and shining eye she creates Illyria out of bare boards as divinely as if she had had a vision of Heaven. When she disguises herself as a man or as half a man, there is the familiar boyish pleasure at being free of the necessity to act feminine. When she falls in love with Orsino it is as complete as a religious conversion, and when she prays that her brother may still be alive God would answer if Shakespeare didn't. Finally, when near the end of the play she volunteers to be tortured and killed by Orsino if it will bring him comfort she walks through him into the hearts of the audience.

Dr. Guthrie has astutely used the Irish actress's unrivaled capacity for sudden surges of spirit to transfuse high emotional voltage into a rather

arbitrary love-masque. He has bid her use a higher than natural voice, which helps us to differentiate between this role and Joan. Vocally, Miss McKenna is at her best in the short speeches which she fills with intense emotion and sadness. Her "Was not this love indeed?" is unforgettably moving. Somewhat less effective is her delivery of the famous "willow-cabin" speech, for by trying to fill each line with personal truth her own highly-individual rhythms and emphases sometimes clash with Shakespeare's measured lyrical flow.

With the security of Miss McKenna's power, Dr. Guthrie feels free to play his clowns as less silly than is the lamentable tradition. Sir Toby, Maria, and Sir Andrew are well-defined characters. In the latter role Mr. Plummer is again reminiscent of Olivier, as he balances comic tricks with a characterization we can believe in. Really funny is the moment when Sir Andrew says of fooling, "But I do it more natural," and involuntarily demonstrates by suddenly plummeting out of sight through an open trap-door. Making Shakespeare's clowns into real people instead of mere affectations has the advantage of keeping the audience ready to laugh as they see each new situation approaching. However, Dr. Guthrie does not completely abandon his predilection for the superimposed piece of farcical business. In this "Twelfth Night" his niftiest invention is a double stairway one-and-a-half take. By having Viola coming down one side while her twin brother is whisking up the other, and allowing Malvolio to see both just a fraction of a second too far apart to realize that he has seen not one but two, he creates a quick stunning laugh and adds a feeling of speed to the proceedings.

Another fine innovation is Dr. Guthrie's decision not to play Feste as an effete, prancing jester. Bruno Gerussi's wise fool is earthy and never lets us forget that he has a daily problem of earning food and shelter in a world that can be very cruel. Since the puritanical Malvolio threatens his livelihood, Feste is partially justified in his cruelty to him, just as Shylock was in his hatred of Antonio. Douglas Rain plays the pompous steward very straight, which though it detracts somewhat from the hilarity improves the balance of the play. When at the evening's end the cast joins with Feste in the singing of "the rain it raineth every day" (with new music by John Cook that makes it resemble a rhythmic Yiddish lament) we feel we are experiencing life instead of the traditional cultural exercise that Shakespeare's plays so often become. —HENRY HEWES.