

Bios of theatre royalty superficial

By JIM ZARROLI
Daily Collegian Staff Writer
"Damed in Paradise: The Life of John Barrymore" by John Kobler, Atheneum, 400pp., \$12.95.
"Vivien Leigh: A Biography" by Anne Edwards, Simon and Shuster, 310 pp., \$9.95.

Watching great talents debasing themselves is intriguing and satisfying in a morbid way. The Tallulah Bankheads, Truman Capotes and Orson Welles of the world may have become wild, grotesque, self-parodies but we keep watching them on "Dinah!" DeHavilland, Crawford and Davis also understood this when they made those horror pictures back in the 60s.

But of all the self-parodists, none did it better than John Barrymore. His talent for acting never deserted him, but in the years before his death, the aged playboy became a laughingstock and buffoon. Now there's a biography out which can tell you all about it.

"Damed in Paradise" by John Kobler, lifts its title from one of Ahab's speeches in "Moby Dick": "Gifted with the high perception, I lack the low enjoying power; damned, most subtly and malignantly! Damned in the midst of paradise . . ."

Barrymore's "High perception" was

his unflinching ability to add honesty and weight to any role he tackled. He could take an indefatigably "little" picture like "The Great Man Votes" and give it substance and immense style; with good material, like "Twentieth Century," he was thought to be the greatest actor ever to work in films.

Barrymore's very best work was probably his portrayal of "Hamlet" on stage in 1922 — it is still among the best on record. But after conquering both the stage and motion pictures, says Kobler, he grew bored with acting.

It was a pattern he repeated all his life. Like his elder brother Lionel, he originally wanted to be a painter, but the craft was one of the few things he never mastered. For many years he seemed to have everything — exceptional looks, talent, charm — but in his final years, says Kobler, he fell to burlesquing his own reputation.

There was a sorry incident when his fourth wife, Elaine Berry, staged a passion campaign over the radio to try to get him back after he'd left her. And his last stage appearance in "My Dear Children" was a series of bad jokes about his own public image, which everyone but the critics flocked to see.

Kobler's book is more valuable as record than as a comprehensive portrait

of Barrymore. Surely it would be easier to get an accurate idea of Charlemagne's personality than of some Hollywood movie stars. Everyone who was anywhere near the place in the old days likes to tell often-conflicting stories, and we may never know the truth about a lot of the ugly rumors about Barrymore.

In a similar vein is "Vivien Leigh" by Anne Edwards. Miss Edwards is currently working on a sequel to "Gone With the Wind"; she also wrote the bestselling biography, "Judy Garland."

Everyone who ever wrote a book on Judy Garland found someone to blame for the way, the actress-singer turned out. The scapegoats in Edwards' book were Louis B. Mayer, head of MGM, and Garland's mother.

In "Vivien Leigh," the scapegoat is the tuberculosis which struck Miss Leigh. It's another see-how-the-great-tumble book: Here's a beautiful, gracious, talented woman, married to one of the all-time giants of the theater but see how her life was ruined!

I can't help thinking that the fan magazine approach to the subject of "Vivien Leigh" could only be an embarrassment to Miss Leigh if she could see it.

Nevertheless, Edwards treats Leigh

with a great deal of sympathy, and it's a touching, though simplistic portrait. While Lord Olivier grew in prominence as an actor during the years of their long marriage, Leigh lacked his range of ability. Their joint theater projects were almost always dominated by Olivier and it bothered her.

If Edwards had concentrated more on this, a very human lady might have emerged from this book. But this isn't a biography — it's an extended magazine article capitalizing on a heretofore little-known personal tragedy.

'Romance' to be shown tonight

The Comparative Literature Film Series presents the film, "Romance and Reality," one of Kenneth Clark's reflections on civilization. In this film, Clark examines the high Middle Ages and the concept of courtly love. The film will be shown tonight in 217 Willard at 8.

A program of musical contrasts will be performed by cellist Leonard Feldman of the Penn State faculty. Selections will include solo suites by Bach and a Chopin sonata. The free concert is sponsored by the Music Department and will be given 8:30

tonight in recital hall of the Music Building.

Vocal students of University choir director Raymond Brown will present a varied program including pieces from many musical periods representing a variety of musical forms and composers. The recital will be presented 4 p.m. tomorrow in the recital hall of the Music Building.

Paintings and prints by Joan Brechin Sonnenberg are on display in the HUB Gallery through Nov. 30. Works are varied in acrylic paintings and etchings.

Orchesis group shows promise

"Orchesis" radiates its enthusiasm through dance, and it is no wonder why. If it continues at this level of creative choreography, it will be presenting quite a fine presentation with its major spring production.

"Orchesis" movement, always dynamic, was complimented by the performers in some dances more than in others. For instance, "Won't You Come Dance With Me," made effective use of the percussive and swing motion characteristic of jazz movement (inclusive of funk and disco) but was much less on

tempo than the successor number. Therefore, "Ondulations," the second number, appeared more fluid to the eye.

Thematically, two dances were of high quality. "Puritan Preacher" explored the ideas of what is historically perhaps the food or religion, discipline and fear. The dancers used kneeling and floor-level movements to depict their humble worship before God as the congregants (represented by a group of four female dancers) huddling when reprimanded. The dance ends in a powerful outreaching of the body, symbolizing the

reverence of God. "Ballezz" also deserves recognition in its effort to embody all of the elements of dance. The combination of music by Claude Bolling which juxtaposed classical and blues sound and the costumes, white evening gowns, heightened the graceful and flowing quality in this piece.

The group became primal in its final dance, "Salute to the Drum." The dancers were energetic in their performance of the rhythmic movement called for in this return to African origins.

—by Jacqueline Lear

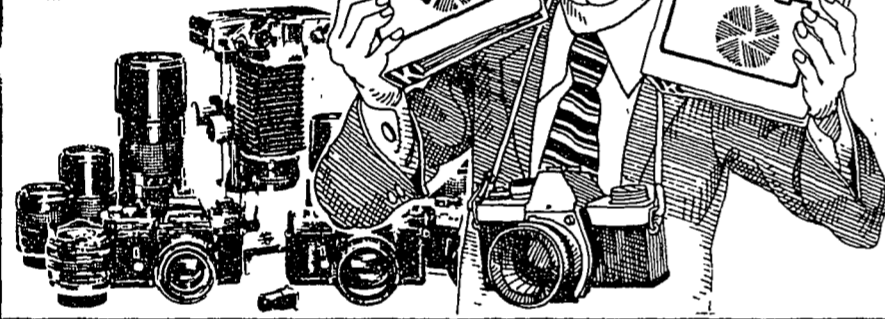
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