

NEW MORALITY IN GREENWICH VILLAGE

"Karen," by Hjalmar Bergstrom, a Post-Ibsene Play on Marriage.

A DANISH "WHY MARRY?"

The Village Players Give a Somewhat Heavy but Very Sincere Performance.

KAREN, a drama in four acts, by Hjalmar Bergstrom; translated by Edwin Bjorkman. At the Greenwich Village Theatre.
Kristen Borneman.....Frank Conroy
Cecilia.....Grace Henderson
Karen.....Fania Marinoff
Peter.....Edwin Strawbridge
Thora.....Helen Robbins
Dr. Schou.....Joseph Macaulay
Strandgaard.....Harold Meltzer
Hansine.....Margaret Fareleigh
A Living-Out Maid.....Mary Pyne
A Typist.....Louie Earle

Mr. Dooley has never explained what he meant when he said, apropos of cooks, "the Scandinavians will marry." The mystery was deeper than ever last night in Greenwich Village.

For the second time in this season's plays attention is called to the fact that, for people in the professions, marriage and children are increasingly difficult. In "Why Marry?" Mr. Williams discusses the subject with a gayety deeply grounded in human comprehension and moral feeling. And he answers his problem with an amusing if inconsequent "Why not?"

But Bergstrom is a Scandinavian; and that means, for one thing, that he is so far from gay as to be a redoubtable gloom champion. For another thing it means that he blinks at no consequence. When people of an age to marry can't marry, nature has a way of revenging herself. This Karen is 28, yet she has lived with a young novelist who died, and later with a sculptor in Paris, to whom she gave the sack for infidelity. She now regards herself as a "widow" and "divorcée." One of her sisters, whose engagement was broken off, went insane and is now in an asylum. Another, in short skirts, is carrying on a secret affair. The boy of the household has frightened away one housemaid, and is making eyes at her successor. What can Mr. Dooley have meant?

In mood and manner the play is what Maurice Barrymore once called Ibsene. The story is simply told, sincere, dramatic in its final development, and without a scintilla of humor—though the Greenwich villagers once or twice broke into tentative merriment for some reason of their own.

Though the manner of the play is from Ibsen, however, its morality finds its prototype in one of the essays of Ellen Key; but it may be doubted whether that great feminist would have countenanced the stress that is here laid upon it. For the question of children, and of the needs of a future generation, which bulk so large in Ellen Key, are here ignored, and indeed whistled down the wind. The emphasis is on the alleged right of the individual to live for his own development primarily.

In a word, not only the milieu but the morality is alien to our public. In Denmark the play was at first forbidden by the censor, and then played with great success. Our way is probably better—to permit the production and leave it to its fate—"Ibsene, but not heard," as Barrymore put it.

Hitherto it has been the custom of the drama from Washington Square and way stations to laugh at the supposed manners of the natives. That is the truer method, for they are very largely a matter of "Latin Quarter" pose. Director Frank Conroy and his associates, however, take this play with the utmost seriousness—which is, indeed, the only way, if you take it at all, except perhaps for the critic.

The performance is rather heavy and stolid, but nevertheless capable and on the whole adequate. Mr. Conroy is the paterfamilias, a professor of theology, who is comprehensibly shocked and baffled. Grace Henderson is his wife who, as it seems, has read Ellen Key and so understands her children. Both play with fine dignity, intelligence and feeling. Fania Marinoff as Karen and Mr. Meltzer as the sculptor characterize with vigor and effect.