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New Movies

A professor's wife meets a publisher. . . .

"The Men in Her Life."

If *The Feminine Touch* were not very funny it would be rather offensive. Dedicated to the proposition that all women are cavewomen longing for a caveman, it proclaims from bedroom to bedroom that there's no such thing as civilized marriage, and who wants to be civilized anyway; it's not half as much fun as throwing coconuts. But nonsense of this sort, written with the fine irrelevance of Ogden Nash, can have an authentic Alice-in-Wonderland flavor, while Miss Rosalind Russell as a combination of cavewoman and dumb bunny is enough to carry any story. This reviewer, indeed, inclines to the belief that no picture is bad if Miss Russell's in it.

As the wife of a psychology professor, she has her troubles. The man refuses to be jealous, refuses to lose his temper, refuses to sock anybody for making passes at his wife. When she gets jealous, he analyzes her. When she gets nervous, he analyzes her. When she gets socks people, he analyzes her; and the worst of it is, he's always right. Infuriatingly bland, he reads her a chapter from his book on "What the Well Civilized Wife Will Put Up With." It takes a chain of harrowing experiences at the hands of a New York publisher to humanize him. Then he begins to take pokes at people. He does it very badly, but his wife is happy; she cherishes each black eye he gets.

There is a good deal of gay satire in all this. The college football hero who would look like Gargantua if he were brighter; the intellectual publisher who makes passes at all the girls and blames it on his neuroses; the literary critics and others who decorate the background are all fun to know, if you've got your Flit gun. But, although literary critics and publishers talk a good deal in real life, in *The Feminine Touch* they surpass themselves. Never has such a welter of bright conversation overloaded a farce. When Don Ameche, as the articulate psychology professor, gets dragged after a runaway motorboat by his necktie, you hope he loses his voice—but in vain.

There are too many polysyllables, and there is too little action. Nevertheless, *The Feminine Touch* manages to move with the crackling speed which is the trademark of its director, W. S. Van Dyke. He has succeeded also in creating actors where there never were any before; Don Ameche is surprisingly deft as the professor, and that hardy perennial, Kay Francis, turns in an astonishing piece of work as the tough, slangy, but intellectual secretary of the publisher. She is a better woman with a snarl than she ever was with a simper. Van Heflin, with a goatee and a neurosis, is the quintessence of many publishers. And there is always Rosalind Russell. She cries like a spoiled brat; she has no dignity; she yawns loudly in your face; she ought to be spanked. There's nobody like her. She's beautiful, too.

WE ALL KNOW the opera singer whose love

life conflicted with her career, so that the poor girl had to renounce and renounce, first her men, then her golden-haired little baby, until the last tear was squeezed out of the audience and our heroine was free to retire from the opera and take up knitting. The movie producers, in their passionate pursuit of originality, have now made her into a ballet dancer. In *The Men in Her Life* you may see Loretta Young as a ballerina, through the kindly assistance of long shots of an anonymous woman pirouetting and closeups of the tips of Loretta's fingers quivering like a dying swan.

Loretta manages, however, to have her men and eat them too. The first, a great dancer growing old, teaches her all he knows, marries her, creates great ballets for her, then dies neatly and obligingly. The second, a millionaire, marries her, obligingly provides her with the golden-haired baby, and retires into the background. Then the third, her true love, (the others were just business) crawls back to her feet and is about to be gobbled when he accidentally breaks his neck. Slowly, but far from surprisingly, La Varsavina moves up on the escaped millionaire, recaptures him and her baby, and at the film's long-delayed end is happily putting that unfortunate child through a series of grueling ballet exercises.

Although beautifully costumed and photographed, the film is as dull as its own ballets. The presence of Conrad Veidt, Eugenie Leonovich, and Dean Jagger gives it a certain distinction. As the aging dancer Veidt informs his role with a passionate intensity; it is possible to believe in the threadbare stuff while he is there, and while Leonovich is standing in the background. There was once a great film called *Ballerina*; it came from pre-Vichy France, it used real ballet dancers for its performers, and it centered about a homely little girl with a devouring passion for dancing and a neurotic resentment of a star dancer. In comparison with that authentic treatment of the ballet, *The Men in Her Life* has all the spontaneity and honesty of a Japanese envoy.

JOY DAVIDMAN.

"Angel Street"

Patrick Hamilton's new play. . . . A flying crash.

THE critical boys on the daily papers have been so depressed by the current theatrical scene (*Sons o' Fun* excepted) that they whooped it up unceremoniously over Patrick Hamilton's new psychological thriller, *Angel Street*.

It would be incorrect to say that *Angel Street* (formerly known as *Gas-Light*) is a poor thriller; it's a good one. But it would be just as incorrect to say it put *Ladies in Retirement* in the shade. On the contrary, it cannot hold a gas-mantle to that chilling examination of demented mentality, economic oppression, plus crime.

There was a devil on *Angel Street*, and his

name was Mr. Manningham. As the curtain rises, you discover him in the amiable business of driving his poor wife insane—deliberately, consciously, maliciously. I was rather prone to sympathize with him through the first act; his wife was awful, anyhow, and there was a housemaid named Nancy swinging ample hips around the place. However, your sympathy (as mine) would have changed later on. For this Mr. Manningham was a pretty dreadful person.

Acts one and three of this Victorian drama are really quite good. The suspense is rooted in character, not the claptrap of the average murder mystery; there are ingenious twists that seem to grow out of the material itself; there is intelligent dialogue. There was one really exciting moment. And there was some excellent acting; a fine set (by Lemuel Ayers) that was extremely atmospheric.

For a better-than-average evening in the theater (on the light side) watch Miss Judith Evelyn apparently going stark raving mad. (She will be a rival of Ida Lupino and Bette Davis from now on). Or watch Mr. Leo G. Carroll. Or Mr. Vincent Price as the devil who tormented his angelic (and slightly sappy) wife. He's a smooth 'un; or, as the amorous housemaid said, "A rum toff."

WHAT airmen call "poor flying characteristics" were responsible for the crash of *Golden Wings*, an RAF play. This new drama by William Jay and Guy Bolton was, objectively, a gross libel upon the brave young men who daily risk their lives in the skies of Europe.

To judge by the play, there isn't a pilot officer, nor even a Wing Commander in the Royal Air Force who knows what it's all about, or cares terribly much. The authors of this piece have absorbed a great many motion pictures about the first world war, and reflected the sense of desperation and hopelessness the birdmen and common footsoldiers of that conflict experienced. These pilots spend a good deal of their time getting plastered, when they are not shooting down Nazis. They shoot the Nazis down, not out of too strong a conviction that it is the right thing to do, so much as that "it is being done." Their real bellicosity, according to the play, is reserved for each other; their real fighting spirit is manifested when, like a wolf pack, they are in full cry after the nearest woman.

Well, don't worry too much about it. You can be sure the RAF knows what it is doing in spite of the Messrs. Jay and Bolton. All reports agree that there's none of that We-who-are-about-to-die-salute-you stuff, none of that Let's-go-to-bed-baby-tomorrow-we'll-be-dead. For the thing about this play that is most impressive is the fact that it reflects *no* reality, reflects nothing that takes place outside the heads of its authors. It is *so* bad, dramatically, stylistically, humanly, that it bears no relation to humanity at all.

A host of earnest people were employed—last week. Notable among them was Lloyd Gough, an excellent actor who deserves a better job, and one that will last

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