

## ▶▶ The Latest Plays ◀◀



"**M**OURNING Becomes Electra," or *The Greeks Had a Word for It*, is Eugene O'Neill's fourteen-act trilogy on the classic theme of the doomed family. You go to the Guild Theatre at five-fifteen and, with an hour off for dinner, the thing is finally finished at about eleven-thirty. On account of its length, it is the easiest play in the world to make gags about (see above), but it is impossible to laugh it off completely. Mr. O'Neill says everything in the play at least seven times, but so powerful is his pounding that about the fifth time he repeats a point even those of us who prefer neater playwriting are willing to cry "Kamerad!" and admit that what he is saying is worth saying. It is, furthermore, eminently actable and of the theatre. A captious Russian gentleman of my acquaintance, who attended the same performance I did, had occasion to observe that the author had put an example of every sort of bad playwriting from the Greeks to the present day into *Mourning Becomes Electra*. That is not true. He does not use asides and this time leaves it more or less up to the actors to show us what they are really thinking. But he does use soliloquies and his building for an entrance is naively crude. His two attempts at comic relief are anything but comic. Editing would unquestionably improve the play, etc., etc., etc. If one says that it is not a play to be thought about, but to be half thought about, it can be replied that that is no valid criticism of a work for the theatre.

I say again that *Mourning Becomes Electra* is actable and of the theatre. That is all that really matters and it is the first play this year of which that can be said without reservations. Alla Nazimova, Alice Brady, Earle Larimore and Thomas Chalmers all do the best acting I have seen them do, but it is because Eugene O'Neill has given them something to act. Robert Edmond Jones is given an opportunity to design significant and symbolic settings and he, too, rises to the occasion. Philip Moeller, the director, must have had misgivings when he approached his task, but he has been

gloriously successful in overcoming the difficulties of the unwieldy manuscript with vigor and fine understanding.

The essentials of the story of *Mourning Becomes Electra* can be compressed into a few words: The Mannons are a New England family destined by fate to self-destruction. The daughter, corresponding to Electra in the old stories on the theme, makes life intolerable for everyone, including herself, but after the mother has killed the father, the mother herself and the younger brother himself, she is both strong and weak enough to have to live the rest of her life in the accursed house. Gruesome and unnecessarily revolting though the action is, especially the gratuitous incest motif in the last play of the trilogy, it must also again be repeated that the performances of Nazimova as the mother, Alice Brady as the daughter and Earle Larimore as the son are rare experiences in the contemporary theatre.

*Wonder Boy*, which Jed Harris is currently presenting, is a combination of *Merton of the Movies*, *Once in a Lifetime*, *The Man on Stilts* and a few other plays which have satirized the movies and the publicity racket. It contains several very funny scenes, a lot of good Yiddish dialect and a deal of coarseness of speech which is insisted on apparently solely to find out if there are any words left which will make people walk out of a playhouse. As a reporter, I must say that nobody seemed very shocked on the second night. Everybody appeared to think that one more slap at Hollywood was in order.

John Galsworthy has not finished his job in *The Roof*. It has an interesting technical device of showing what goes on in several rooms in a hotel at the same time, but by the time he is through playing with it the author hasn't left himself time to prove his point of the effect of a crisis, such as a fire, on his characters. Mr. Galsworthy clings to the old-fashioned notion that three hours in a theatre is enough. *East Wind* is another routine operetta with a score better sung than it deserves.

OTIS CHATFIELD-TAYLOR.

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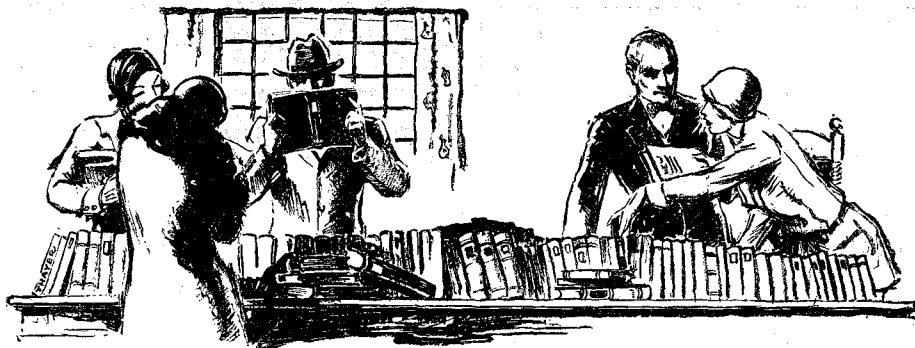
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## ►► The New Books ◄◄



### Some Fall Novels

**"MAID IN WAITING,"** by John Galsworthy (Scribner's, \$2.50). The arch-chronicler of the well-bred, sensitive and distinguished middle class in England has unearthed another quiet drama. The maid in waiting, your heroine, a young woman none too eager for the seasoning of life and quite content to loiter out of love's reach, is a cousin, by marriage, to Fleur Forsyte. Altogether paler than Fleur, and less able to stir her onlookers, this Dinny moves through family crises generously, yet somehow impersonally enough to keep your sympathy in bounds. You live through the crucial moments of the story at second hand, always hemmed in by Dinny's personality. Adrian, Dinny's subtle, weather-stained, anthropological uncle, loves a woman whose husband has been, for four years, insane. Hubert, Dinny's brother, is a soldier who, venturing to go with an American professor on an expedition to Bolivia, has queered himself with both the professor and all Bolivia by shooting a native who tried to knife him in a row over the maltreatment of some mules. This quixotic behavior of Hubert endangers his career, his honor and even his life. Through Adrian's sad love and Hubert's unjust disgrace, Dinny meets raw experience, for the first time, face to face. The American professor, made to fall in love with Dinny, shows up a curious blindness in Mr. Galsworthy's apprehensions. He does not come to life, in the tale, but serves, instead, as a peg on which his creator hangs various generalities about Americans and Englishmen, their differences and their kinship. Apart from the pure tone of realism and of dignity which you can always trust Mr. Galsworthy to produce, *Maid in Waiting* suffers, in comparison with many of its predecessors, a certain loss of vitality. A tired note seems to underlie this last novel. It wakes you to memories of moving moments, yet somehow fails to achieve, anew, your intimate response.

**The Waves**  
By Virginia Woolf  
Harcourt, Brace, \$2.50

Life washes against the shores of time with the slow immutability of the sea. People, in their development, have a flux like the rising and the ebbing of the tide. Their days, their years, their experiences pile upon each other, cumulative, foreseen, perhaps, yet impossible to deflect, till, at a given moment, the waves break, and darkness falls, and death. So much of a philosophy, so much of a deep-seated resignation underlies Miss Woolf's book. Three men and three women, various as the patterns of Nature are all various and united, as all living things are united by the impetus of life, span the scope of their existence from childhood till middle-age. The mould for each is set from the start. Each speaks for himself, voicing the cloudiness and the incertitudes and the accent peculiar to his personality. There is neither an interchange of talk nor of action. The background emerges only when a detail is needed to clarify your picture of the spirit. A stream of articulated reverie flows from each of the characters. Nothing happens, yet everything happens. Love, birth, death, achievement and failure run through these lives, but without pattern, in the formless accidental rhythm of actuality. Life does not take the shape of stories, Miss Woolf maintains. It is a succession of experiences acrid enough, to be sure, yet ultimately confused. So she pours upon you a deluge of implications, intuitions, and halfspoken dreams which comes, not from the people in whom she asks you to believe, but from her own interminable questioning. Her sensitized, syncopated prose lulls you into a stupor from which you emerge, at the end of the book, feeling that she hitched her wagon to a star too remote and illusory.

**Two People**  
By A. A. Milne  
E. P. Dutton, \$2.50

Marriage, says Mr. Milne, in this first novel which he has attempted, can continue, if properly sheltered, to flower. Keep the world and your neighbors outside the gate. Check your

ambitions at the front door. Make few engagements and see that these few are jointly held. Remind yourself, rather regularly, that the greenness of new pastures is only a mirage. Do not withhold your dreams nor let a secret creep between you. Armed with such sagacity, you may be as happy as were Reginald and Sylvia. They were living in the country when Reginald wrote his novel, which he called *Bindweed*. Having wound up the last sentence, he went to tell Sylvia that he was an author. "Fancy!" she said, and gave him a lovely smile. Nevertheless their routine of gardening, lawn-tennis and tenderness might never have been interrupted and, you gather, their story might never have caught Mr. Milne, had not Reginald's novel become a best seller. But *Bindweed* achieved fame. Reginald and Sylvia had to go to London, had to have pictures taken, had to attend dinners, had to lunch in chic little places with florid people. Reginald became a figure at his club. Sometimes he stayed out for dinner, so Sylvia took to making her own plans. One night, when she stayed out till after twelve, the slumbering beast of doubt reared up in Reginald's breast. So the two went back to their house and garden. Mr. Milne, with deft fingers, restores their bloom and leaves you, like them, charmed, cheered and quiescent.

VIRGILIA PETERSON ROSS.

**Flight into Darkness**  
By Arthur Schnitzler  
Simon & Schuster, \$2.00

**Katrin Becomes a Soldier**  
By Adrienne Thomas  
Little Brown, \$2.50

Some unusual creations are coming out of Europe. Arthur Schnitzler's *Flight into Darkness* (Simon & Schuster, \$2) is one, Adrienne Thomas's *Katrin Becomes a Soldier*



### What to Read

#### FICTION

**Sparks Fly Upward**, by Oliver LaFarge: Houghton Mifflin. Love, revolution and caste-conflict in Central America; by the author of *Laughing Boy*.  
**Night at Lost End**, by George Agnew Chamberlain: Brewer, Warren & Putnam. A credible and exciting romantic mystery.  
**American Beauty**, by Edna Ferber: Doubleday, Doran. A story of early Colonial settlement, its growth, decay, and final replacement by the new order.  
**First Person Singular**, by Somerset Maugham: Doubleday, Doran. Worldly and brilliant short stories.  
**Finch's Fortune**, by Mazo de la Roche: Little, Brown. The third book about the Whiteoaks family of Jalna.

#### NON-FICTION

**The Epic of America**, by James Truslow Adams: Little, Brown. The growth and prospects of the American dream; an interpretation of the rise of American civilization.  
**Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw, A Correspondence**: Putnam. Interesting, charming, witty.  
**Savage Paradise**, by Margaret Matches: Century. An American girl in New Guinea; something really different in a travel book.  
**America Weighs Her Gold**, by James Harvey Rogers: Yale University Press. For those who want a clear explanation of the effect of the gold supply on economic problems today.  
**Mahatma Gandhi at Work**, edited by C. F. Andrews: Macmillan. The second volume of Gandhi's autobiography, giving a complete view of the man and his philosophy.