

on Liberated Europe, "a loose net of phrases" as Mr. Feis says, proclaiming principles already proclaimed and being violated at the time they were being announced. The President and the Prime Minister were in no position to force Marshal Stalin to live up to the principles he was willing to profess.

In the circumstances the important question, as Mr. Feis sees it, was "whether the Anglo-Soviet attempt to limit the struggle by a division of spheres of influence should be discarded for excellent political principles which might, however, in the circumstances, have wayward results."

The Americans, Secretary Hull in particular but the President also, were opposed to recognizing spheres of influence in Europe. For various reasons, some of them related more to domestic than to foreign politics, Mr. Roosevelt found it easier to accede to Marshal Stalin's demands at the expense of China than at the expense of Poland. Here again in the light of the existing situation in the Far East and the best-informed opinion that it would take eighteen months more to defeat Japan after the defeat of Germany, could the President have made a better bargain? Mr. Feis suggests that if he had been "more stubbornly patient and more patiently stubborn" some of the Yalta agreements might have been clearer and more favorable to the West. But, he asks, would clearer and better agreements have affected later events unless the United States had been willing and able to land troops in China and Manchuria and keep them there?

THE conference ended in a great rush and in a warm glow of friendship, of satisfaction over what had been accomplished and with hope that the sense of common purpose and good will would carry over into the period after the victory that was then in sight.

Soon after Yalta came the great advances of the allied armies from east and west. A brief moment of jubilation was followed by sorrow and mounting suspicion and tension in the liberated areas. The President, who after Yalta seemed to Mr. Churchill "to be placid and frail" and "to have a slender contact with life," died in April. The Germans surrendered and the Grand Alliance swiftly deteriorated even as the delegates of allied nations were meeting in San Francisco to draft the charter of an organization designed to give effect to the "larger purpose" that Secretary

(Continued on page 38)

EUGENE O'NEILL

Small Touch of Genius

"A Touch of the Poet," by Eugene O'Neill (Yale University Press, 182 pp. \$3.75), is a play about an Irish innkeeper and his family who live in early nineteenth-century New England.

By Gilbert Seldes

ON the jacket of "A Touch of the Poet," Eugene O'Neill's just-published play, four respectable critics are quoted in praise of "Long Day's Journey Into Night" as "magnificent reading," as an "eloquent address to the reader, and so on. Even with the echoes of the stage production of that play still in my ears, I cannot understand what these critics are talking about. Before the play was produced I reviewed it in these pages and, having been caught out by O'Neill before, prophesied that it would act well, in spite of the flatness, the staleness of its prose. This time I shall take my chance and say that "A Touch of the Poet" is as weak dramatically as it is flat or foolish in its text. No work of O'Neill's should be left unpublished—but this reworking of old themes might as well be left unproduced.

The extraordinary dramatic strength of "Long Day's Journey" lay in the duplication of the characters. By drink, by dope, by frenzy, each of the principal characters flowed into his or her shadowy self, the *doppelgänger*, so imperceptibly that we couldn't be sure, at times, whether we were listening to the "real" or the "other" self. In "A Touch of the Poet" we have only one principal drunkard, but the other main characters are just as likely to say one thing and contradict it and then compromise the contradiction—and all without rendering the person either complex or interesting. It becomes a theatrical trick—the blurring out of the truth, the hasty cover-up, of old bad melodrama.

The characters and the setting are from nineteenth-century melodrama, too, and at times one gets the impression that O'Neill is intentionally using the form of "East Lynne," as if to prove that he can infuse life and reality into it. The villain with the mortgage isn't actually on stage, but you can easily imagine him hovering in the wings. Offstage, also, is Henry



—Carlotta Monterey O'Neill.

Eugene and Carlotta O'Neill, 1931.


David Thoreau, the poet-rebel. He hasn't yet discovered that most men lead lives of quiet desperation—and neither has O'Neill.

On stage is Cornelius Melody, once praised on the field of Talavera by Wellington, now an innkeeper in Massachusetts, despising the slattern whom he married because he had got her with child, despising the child but slyly suggesting she get herself with child by the poet, and an assembly of riffraff, all going to vote for Jackson whom our hero despises. He quotes Byron—not the best of him—and dresses in his regimentals, and pretends to have been of noble stock. The poet's patrician mother and the family lawyer descend upon the inn to prevent a marriage, there is an off-stage brawl, Melody gives up his fantasy of himself and symbolically destroys the one thoroughbred in his family—his mare—and announces his conversion to the common man and Jackson. His daughter has meanwhile seduced the poet—offstage, but the report on stage isn't pleasant. The end of the play is quite touching. The daughter is saddened because her father has given up his illusions:

Sara: May the hero of Talavera rest in peace! (She breaks
(Continued on page 41)

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How to Taste a Book

WHEN I was a beginning instructor in Columbia College the common complaint was that freshmen couldn't write. Now it seems to be that they can't read either. And thus we dispose of Progress in Education.

In all seriousness, there is probably this much in it: As the number of technically illiterate people diminishes, the proportion of the technically literate who can read in the fullest sense of the word has decreased. The proportion, that is to say, of those who are both capable of and willing to make the effort of attention required if one is to follow anything more complicated than the simplest statement is smaller than it was when it was so difficult to get schooling that only those who really wanted it were likely to get it at all. Moreover, the present tendency of our society is to accept the fact of minimum literacy and to devise "visual aids" and simplified texts instead of trying to teach real reading to more than the select few.

For at least 100 years—witness J. A. Etzler, with whom Thoreau was momentarily taken—prophets have been telling us that the Age of Universal Leisure was just around the corner and that, when it arrived, everybody was going to devote his life to art, science, and philosophy. Actually, of course, most people really do have more leisure than they used to have and they may be about to get still more. Just how much of their increased leisure they will spend as prophesied is an open question, but I am convinced that it would be worthwhile for the schools they are com-

pelled to attend to make a greater effort to teach as many of them as possible to do more than skim over newspapers and leaf through picture magazines.

Moreover—and on the basis of a few experiments I made many years ago—I believe that, within limits, it can be done, even as late as the college years. The process is rather hard on the dignified teacher who likes to think that he should concern himself with less elementary matters. If the assignment is, say, Arnold's "Culture and Anarchy," this man wants to "supply the historical background," discuss the relation of Arnold to T. S. Eliot, or what not. But if he will stoop to taking a few sentences one by one, and ask a student just what the devil Arnold seems to be trying to say, he may be saddened to discover that said student hasn't the foggiest idea and doesn't really believe that Arnold is saying anything at all. But then our teacher may also be gladdened to learn that when the same student has had his nose rubbed into the text he quite often begins to appreciate that from Arnold's wordy puzzles it really is possible to extract an intelligible meaning.

On their own initiative a certain number of people have always taught themselves to read in this sense. But the majority still do not. The process of learning is too strenuous for the lazy; they must be encouraged (often also forced) to the trough. But if they ever do learn to read (either of their own accord or not), then most of "the problem of leisure" is solved already.

Suppose, now, that a given individual really does know how to read. How shall he practise that skill to get the maximum of pleasure and profit out of it? One answer, I think, is that once the skill has been adequately developed he may trust himself to read what he likes and in the way he likes. But perhaps that statement will stand a little amplification.

Mortimer Adler, in his well-known "How to Read a Book," describes a process which might better be called "How to Study a Book." He recommends much underlining, reviewing, etc. That is the way to learn to read and also the way in which certain books should be read by everybody. But not all reading should be study of that kind. Bacon's chestnut, "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed," is still the most important thing ever said on the subject. As a matter of fact, more of this chestnut should be included: "Some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly with diligence and attention. Some books also may be read by deputy, and extracts made of them by others."

Which books are to be read in which way is not a question to be answered once and for all. It depends not only upon the book but also upon the reader and even upon the moment. It is a question of what we want to get out of a particular book, and no man who has never read any book except carefully and all the way through can possibly have time to acquire that acquaintance with the prodigious number of books every intelligent man should, for his own satisfaction, know something about. So far as the great works of the imagination are concerned, the best advice is often that of Samuel Johnson: "Let him that is yet unacquainted with the powers of Shakespeare . . . read every play from the first scene to the last, with utter negligence of all his commentators . . . Let him read on through brightness and obscurity; . . . let him preserve his comprehension of the dialogue and his interest in the fable. And when the pleasures of novelty have ceased, let him attempt exactness, and read the commentators."

BUT this, of course, assumes that the reader already knows how to read. If he does not then the first thing is to learn, or to be taught. And that may require, as the elements of most skills do, labor. The danger always is, that in an Age of Leisure no one will want to labor, although without labor there can be no proper leisure.

—JOSEPH WOOD KRUTCH.