



Later Than You Think

I HAVE not done a re-make of "The Children's Hour," William Wyler declared recently. "This time, I have actually filmed Lillian Hellman's play, which we were not able to do twenty-five years ago." In 1936, when Samuel Goldwyn had purchased the rights, and Wyler turned the play into a movie called "These Three," not only was there no reference to lesbianism, but Goldwyn was specifically enjoined by the Hays Office from even indicating the source of his picture. "Audiences of today have matured," Wyler concluded. "Today we can handle such material quite openly, if we do it with honesty and good taste."

Honesty and good taste are abundantly present in this new version of "The Children's Hour." Although the specific nature of the charges against the two headmistresses of the Wright-Dobie school is concealed by whispers and by conversations glimpsed at a distance through doorways, Shirley MacLaine's passionate declaration to Audrey Hepburn that they might all be true leaves little room for ambiguity. But the startling thing is less what is said than the fact that, once said, it carries so little impact. What was considered too daring for 1936 is almost too tame for 1962.

Indeed, although set in the present, the entire film seems curiously dated, as if all the characters had been strangely insulated against any knowledge of modern psychology. Granted that a doting grandmother might believe the scandalous accusations of a ten-year-old without scruple or hesitation, but one might expect the child's teachers to have some awareness of her mendacious tendencies. One longs to see the trial for defamation of character, described at some length in the dialogue. Did no one there suspect the child was lying? Was she able to brazen her falsehoods through examinations and cross-examinations? Did the entire town, hitherto warm and friendly, turn against the two teachers simply on the word of an obviously neurotic little girl? By failing to anticipate these questions, the script strains the credulity of today's viewer, and seriously weakens the film itself.

On the other hand, in terms of sheer moviemaking, William Wyler again proves himself the master of the cinematized stage play. Whether his camera is still or roving, it invariably matches

the pace and tension of the scene being played before it. The precision of his shot-to-shot relationships is unexcelled by any other director. When he shows us a face at a window, for example, the reverse angle could have been photographed from no other position. He is still inventive in the creation of cinematic effects, as in the sense of panic he evokes with a rapid series of shots of Audrey Hepburn racing across a lawn to the locked room of Shirley MacLaine. Always a perfectionist, he obtains top performances from every one of his principals (although, in the interest of verisimilitude, Hepburn and MacLaine might well have switched roles). The hitch is that all this technique has been lavished on a story at once slender and remote. Not that Miss Hellman's theme, the power of a lie to destroy, has lost any of its significance. It simply needs new dramatic machinery to put it across today.

THE makers of "Black Tights," starring Jeanmaire and Roland Petit, would have us regard their presentation as a big musical, rather than a dance film; but since, apart from some over-determinedly charming introductions by Maurice Chevalier, it is composed entirely of four ballets, the facts might as well be faced. Petit's several visits here with his Ballets de Paris have clearly indicated both his virtues and his weaknesses as a choreographer—wonderful verve, an appetite for the chic, an electrifying precision in his dancers, a touch of wit, a lack of warmth. All are apparent in the ballets assembled for the film, and vividly captured by the wide-screen color cameras. Strongest remains Petit's adaptation of "Carmen," with its masterful *pas de deux* in the bedroom and outside the bullring; weakest is a gloss of "Cyrano de Bergerac" that is long on story and almost devoid of dance (and denies beautiful Moira Shearer the chance to be anything more than decoration). Most typical—and most fun—is "La Croqueuse de Diamants," an apache romp made sparkling by Jeanmaire's sheer exuberance and superb technique. Best of all, Terence Young's direction suggests how well ballet—at least the narrative ballets of Roland Petit—can be adapted to the screen. "Black Tights" is a big, stylish show, and a welcome experiment in a field neglected since Gene Kelly's ill-fated "Invitation to the Dance." —ARTHUR KNIGHT.

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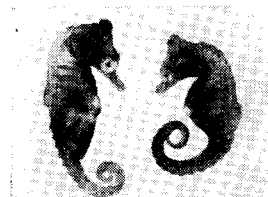
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Fiction

Continued from page 29

ing part in a pilgrimage, or they are not—no one is quite sure. They find a dead woman bearing the marks of the stigmata and a nobleman with his throat cut, lying in his wrecked carriage at the bottom of a gulley. Tobias kills his dog in a fit of fury. A mysterious arrow, aimed at Tobias, is intercepted by the aged harlot, who falls dying at his feet. Everything that happens, even the death of the Wandering Jew is senseless, beyond understanding, and yet absolutely convincing.

We watch fascinated while events of no consequence unfold, until quite suddenly, as though a process of crystallization were at work, we come to realize the truth of these adventures and their appalling significance. We are all pilgrims, decayed prostitutes, Wandering Jews. We have all seen the dead woman with the stigmata, and we have all kicked dogs to death, and we have all watched the arrow winging across

the empty spaces. But this is only a small part of what the author is saying. What he is saying is something almost beyond speech, something so tentative that it can only be implied. "No marksman was to be seen, nothing moved either here or on the opposite side; indeed nothing had moved at any time. An arrow had flown: that was all. That was the strange thing. Where from? From whom?"

So, very brilliantly and very quietly, Pär Lagerkvist asks his casual questions which are also answers, and tells in an impeccably restrained prose a story that is at once wholly incredible and only too credible. You will not easily forget Diana, Tobias, and Ahasuerus, and even when you have forgotten them they will remain.

Pär Lagerkvist should be proud of his translator, Naomi Walford, who has somehow contrived to make the reader feel the book must originally have been written in English, and of his illustrator, Emil Antonucci, who has caught in his drawings the eerie and legendary qualities of the story.

mouth. Married some twenty years, Roberte and Milan have recently come down from Paris for a prolonged stay in the country. Now in the pale dawn they breakfast on cigarettes and a few fingers of alcohol, before setting out with decidedly mixed emotions for a morning of hunting. Even more mixed are the emotions of Hélène, the pretty assistant schoolmistress, as she becomes increasingly intimate with the wise and worldly couple. She has so much to learn, this young woman who hitherto had merely dabbled in the ways of Eros with her staid and fumbling fiancé.

All this is told deftly and with a neat economy of words that reveals not only the artist in Vailland but also his years of discipline as a highly regarded journalist. It is often excellent reading. Its defects are those of his other novels: the transitions are poor and the flashbacks contrived; the protagonist is invariably trite and pretentious in his allusions to France's philosophical and literary past. Then, too, there is the author's compulsion to preach and to offer gratuitous little essays on a wide variety of subjects. In the present book readers will doubtless find the most interesting of these Milan's terminal letter to Hélène on *amour-passion*.

The verdict is self-evident. Those who have enjoyed Vailland's other novels in translation will read "Turn of the Wheel" with relish; those who have not will find it reasonably detestable.

A Miss and a Snoring Wife

"Turn of the Wheel," by Roger Vailland, translated by Peter Wiles (Knopf. 179 pp. \$3.50), affords another glimpse into the French novelist's private world where men are men and women are untamed animals. Otis Fellows edited "Tournants Dangereux," an anthology of stories by Georges Simenon.

By OTIS FELLOWS

IT WAS André Maurois, I believe, who once held the Middle Ages responsible for the invention of two of the greatest evils of modern times: gunpowder and romantic love. Though there is every indication that Roger Vailland can take gunpowder in stride, his acceptance of romantic or sentimental love is quite another matter. And that is perhaps as it should be for a writer who prides himself on being the spiritual heir of Laclos, Sade, and Stendhal in the ways of love.

"Turn of the Wheel," written in 1948, is one of Vailland's earlier novels. Except for that fact, it could be striking evidence that the author is up to his old tricks again, those that in "The Law" and "Fête" have more re-

cently filled readers—depending upon the temperament involved—with curiosity, pleasure, or dismay. For M. Vailland is a literary "tough" whose heroes are lean and sinewy both physically and morally. They are heavy and imperturbable drinkers, daringly skilful behind the wheel of a fast car, and close to the earth, whether tending to growing things or slaughtering creatures of the woods and fields. Women, too, like the uncultivated plant or untamed animal, are wildlings. But through knowing persistence they can be brought to terms, for they are, to the deserving man, primarily instruments of pleasure, to be taken with ease and discarded with aplomb; they will have had, however, an enriching experience for which they may or may not be eternally grateful.

The fictional world of Roger Vailland is indeed a man's world—provided that the man is virile and articulate, in his forties, anti-bourgeois, and, by certain standards that remain ill-defined to the reader, of superior intelligence.

Milan is one of these. "Turn of the Wheel" opens with the alarm going off, the forty-year-old husband staring at his snoring wife and, before awakening her, studying the pouches under her eyes as well as the bitter twist of her

OF GOURMANDISE AND GOUT: Tempting as it is to sing in culinary metaphors the praises of "The Passionate Epicure," by Marcel Rouff (Dutton, \$4.50), I shall abstain. The publishers have beat me to it on the jacket flap. But let me, without benefit of image, vouch for what they say in witty formulae: this little book should indeed prove a delight for all *bons vivants*, whether they actually indulge themselves in the good things of life or—perhaps a more delicate joy—savor them in imagination, like the lonely diner at his kitchen table reading recipes for pheasant pâtés while munching on a hamburger. Take this book into the kitchen, then, or anywhere else, for there is no room in the house that its French gaiety will not delicately complement or make you forget.

The mood is already struck by Lawrence Durrell in his Introduction when, after properly commending the translator, Claude, for bringing to light this long-forgotten work by the table companion of Curnonsky and collaborator on "La France Gastronomique," he gets off a couple of Brillat-Savarin anecdotes as good as can be found.

The work itself, pleasantly illustrated