

The Knowledge Bank at The Ohio State University

Ohio State Engineer

- Title:** The Engineer's Bookshelf
- Creators:** Dumble, Wilson R.
- Issue Date:** May-1938
- Publisher:** Ohio State University, College of Engineering
- Citation:** Ohio State Engineer, vol. 21, no. 6 (May, 1938), 4-7.
- URI:** <http://hdl.handle.net/1811/35534>
- Appears in Collections:** [Ohio State Engineer: Volume 21, no. 7 \(June, 1938\)](#)

THE ENGINEER'S BOOKSHELF

By WILSON R. DUMBLE

OF MICE AND MEN—By JOHN STEINBECK—*Triangle Book Edition*—49c.

DAWN IN LYONESSE—By MARY ELLEN CHASE—*Macmillan*—\$1.75.

Prize Plays

This is the time of the year that the Prize Committees get together in New York City, scratch their heads, and try to reach decisions concerning the best plays that have been seen on Broadway boards during the last twelve months. Sometimes the selection is a difficult task; other times it is not so hard to pick a winner. This year, however, the two Prize Committees who met to make their selections divided the honors.

Late in April the Manhattan Critics picked as the best play of the season John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men." Two weeks later the Pulitzer award went to Thornton Wilder's play, "Our Town." Quite a few in the Critic group held out for the Wilder play; but as the majority rules the Steinbeck play got their award with the Wilder play a close runner-up. I have not read the Wilder play, nor have I seen it in production; but I did read the Steinbeck play when it was published in novel form about a year ago.

The story, "Of Mice and Men," centers around two young fellows, Lennie, a half-wit, and George, a pal who had promised Lennie's mother that he would take care of Lennie. Their wanderings across the western plains lead them to a ranch house where they obtain work in the wheat fields. Lennie, through no fault of his own, is instrumental in the death of the wife of his boss' son; and George, cheating the lynchers' noose, kills Lennie just as the posse is closing in on him.

The locale of the novel is Monterey County, California, and the action takes place along the banks of the Salinas river, a valley which is one of the best lettuce-growing sections in our country. Mr. Steinbeck himself knows that country thoroughly, as he is a graduate of Stanford University; at present he is living near Palo Alto. His book contains some beautiful descriptive passages against which he etches his morbid story. Rather Marxian in temperament, Mr. Steinbeck has never seen his play, has remained in California during the last few months that the play has been "packing them in" in New York. Apparently he is not interested in the success of the production, but prefers to work in his native land, where, it is said, he is writing a new novel.

As I have said before, since I have not read "Our

Town" I am unable to pass judgment on the relative qualities of the two plays. But it seems to me that the theatre critics of New York newspapers would be better equipped to select the best play of the year than would be a committee such as the Pulitzer one, headed by Professor William Lyons Phelps of Yale University. The Critics chose in 1935-1936, Maxwell Anderson's "Winterset," and in 1936-1937, Anderson's "High Tor." Few people who know the theatre made an attempt to dispute these selections; and apparently only the members of the Pulitzer Committee in 1937-1938 are disputing their present choice.

How the Mighty Fall

There is an adage that gives out the idea that time does fly. Apparently this is true in the literary field, for, during the past few months, a number of novelists who wrote best sellers fifteen and twenty years ago, have published again, only to show that their stars have fallen. There are four or five well known authors in this group; so let us see who they are.

To begin with, there is the case of Ernest Hemingway. Mr. Hemingway dawned on our literary horizon shortly after the War. Several years later he wrote and published "Farewell to Arms," probably the best piece of literature that has come out of the World War. Hemingway had great promise, and all his followers entertained high hopes for his future. Last November, however, he published his first full length novel since "Farewell." He called it "To Have and Have Not"; but it was not favorably received by the critics. It did not live up to the promises he gave in "Farewell." Its high scene, the one with the death of Harry Morgan, could not equal the best in "Farewell," that beautifully moving account of the death of Katherine when Henry is standing outside the hospital door.

The story goes that Mr. Hemingway's publishers did not want to publish his book at this time, although they had the manuscript in their possession for several months before they consented. Mr. Hemingway, however, wanted money for his ambulance unit in Spain, and wished that it be put before his buying public. The result was failure; and that counts No. 1 literary star to descend from the firmament.

No. 2 literary star followed shortly. We will call him Sinclair Lewis, for that is the name attached to the title page of his new novel, "The Prodigal Parents." As in Hemingway's case, Mr. Lewis electrified the reading world shortly after the war with the realism in his novel of Gopher Prairie, "Main Street."

He followed shortly with "Babbit," and then "Arrow-smith," reaching, no doubt, a literary supremacy with his story of Martin Arrowsmith, as fine a literary portrait as any given us since the turn of the century. But with "Arrow-smith" Mr. Lewis went stale; or at least something happened.

His new novel, "The Prodigal Parents," takes a mighty upper-cut at dilettante radicalism and professional communism and does it with chuckling and grand humor. It is the story of Frederick William Cornplow, auto dealer at Sachem Falls, N. Y., and his wife, and their son and daughter. But in no place does the novel equal the story of Martin Arrowsmith, with Martin's adventures with the country folk at Wheatsylvania, nor with the members of the city council at Nautilus, nor with the wealthy patients at the Roncefield Clinic at Chicago, nor even with the natives on the little island in the West Indies where he went at the time of the epidemic. Lewis, I fear, must do a very fine piece of work very soon, in order to redeem himself with his reading public. And so, No. 2 star fell from the literary firmament.

No. 3 on the list—and I am sorry to say it—is Hervey Allen. You remember Mr. Allen's "Anthony Adverse" of the summer of 1933, a book of great length, and one that became a popular seller despite the depression and a falling market and a shaky Wall Street. Mr. Allen's new novel is "Action at Aquila," published the first of March, said to be the North's answer to the justly famous "Gone with the Wind." But something has gone wrong; it is good reading but it is not a great novel.

"Action at Aquila" is a Civil War story with its locale placed up and down the Shenandoah Valley, all the way from Winchester to Staunton. There are sallies into Pennsylvania, and the reader from time to time finds himself with army leaders in Harrisburg and Chambersburg and York. Specifically, it is the story of Colonel Franklin of Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, and Margaret Crittenden of Virginia. In a battle scene equal to any in Stephen Crane's "Red Badge of Courage," the author is at his best; but I fear his best in his new novel does not equal his best in "Anthony Adverse." The book proves one thing, no doubt: With its romantic framework it is an important link in the trend from realism to romanticism. But still, that alone, does not make it a great novel. So, No. 3 star has set. Will it rise again? That is difficult to say. With the promise that Mr. Allen gave in "Anthony," we can only say that we hope it will.

Last on my "fallen" list is William Faulkner. Mr. Faulkner is one author I like to mention in line with information I give out concerning the techniques of the American novel. His technique in writing, although all his own, is of high quality. His stories have always been fascinating, despite the fact that they deal with delinquent characters. I have always felt

that one or two of his novels at least should be placed on reading lists.

Last February Mr. Faulkner published his new novel, "The Unvanquished," in reality a series of short stories dealing with the latter days of the Civil War, when the Yankees were hourly drawing nearer to the Sartoris plantation. They deal with Granny and her grandson and his negro playmate who survive the war by many years, but never escape its influence. Some of these stories you may have met before, for a few of them were printed in the Saturday Evening Post and Scribner's magazine before the book was published.

But gone is the superb technique that Mr. Faulkner employed in "As I Lay Dying" and in "The Sound and the Fury." They are readable tales to be sure, but that is all. There is nothing distinctive about them to make you feel that some day this author will produce a really great novel.

And there we have them: new novels from men who fifteen years ago were promising literary material. Hemingway, Lewis, Allen and Faulkner have not lived up to their original promises. Time does fly and the mighty do fall.

Dawn in Lyonesse

One of the most interesting visitors to our campus this spring was Miss Mary Ellen Chase. Miss Chase, at least to the members of my classes, is known chiefly through her short story, "Salesmanship," which I never fail to either read or to mention. Yet, Miss Chase is, in reality, a novelist rather than a short story writer, and her new book, "Dawn in Lyonesse," demonstrates what really beautiful writing she is capable of.

Considerably shorter than "Mary Peters" and "Silas Crocket," her two better known books, "Dawn in Lyonesse" is the smooth story of the triangular love between Susan and Ellen, and their once youthful playmate, Derek Tregonny. Beautifully written, accurately conceived, and movingly motivated, it tells in variation the old love story of Tristram and Iseult and King Mark. The setting is Cornwall, England, and you find mention of such actual places as Lands End, St. Ives, Tintagel, and Trevos Light.

"Dawn in Lyonesse" follows the now popular pattern in the novelette type of writing, writing that spins a yarn much longer than one found in the short story but shorter than any in a novel. We hope that we can have more stories of this type from Mary Ellen Chase.

Again "Journey's End"

One night last week I sat down to re-read "Journey's End." I sat down to lose myself once again in that timeless war play by R. C. Sheriff, and to see once more the pale glimmer of moonlight filtering down the dug-out steps into a place that a small group of soldiers called home. I sat down to see if all the

reality that shattered my nerves on the first reading some nine years ago still remained. And—I was not disappointed.

Before I had gone many pages I had realized that this war play, probably more than any other one, retained its full lusty vigor. Immediately I was taken back to the cinema production in 1931; back even to a stage production in London in 1929, after which, with the other members of the audience, I had crept silently from the theatre into a clear London night, mystified and terrified; back even to a flaming sunset in September, 1918, when I saw lines of stretcher bearers carrying shattered human cargo over shell-torn terrain. For "Journey's End" is made of the stuff that lasts forever in the gelatin of one's memory, a memory that within the flash of an eyelash can transport a mind to the days when the world had gone berserk and when intelligent people had run amuck.

Yes, it still was all there: Raleigh and his fine youthful adorations; Captain Stanhope with his splendid sense of equality seen through shattering nerves; Osborne with his kindly sense of humor; and Mason who cooked for them, slaved for them, and finally when the time arrived, took his place in the front line along side of them. They had not changed a bit in the last nine years; and I'm sure that in nine years more, and in even nine plus nine plus nine, they will remain the true, staunch sons of England that Mr. Sheriff expected them to be.

All spots in the play are fine, but some, more than others, retain a luster that is spine-chilling on even

as warm a night as the one on which these lines are being written. I'm thinking in particular of Hibbert's attempt to feign neuralgia, and Stanhope's remarks to him:

"... I feel the same—exactly the same! Every little noise up there makes me feel—just as you feel. I hate and loathe it all. Sometimes I feel I could just lie down on this bed and pretend I was paralyzed or something—and couldn't move—and just lie there until I died—or was dragged away."

I'm thinking also of the scene following the raid in which Osborne is killed. Raleigh, stunned and bloody, retreats to sit on Osborne's bed in the dug-out. In a voice that is expressionless and dead, but with the passion of deep loss, Stanhope drones: "Must you sit on Osborne's bed?"

I'm thinking, too, of Raleigh's remark, when, following the same raid, he sees Stanhope drunk:

"Good God! Don't you understand? How can I sit down and eat that—when—when—Osborne's—lying—out there—"

Yes, we have had a fine list of serious war plays, but "Journey's End" with its single thread for a plot, its quiet characterizations, and its exemplification of man's incredible nobility rising above the reek of war, stands high on the horizon of plays that are plays. It will be revived, no doubt, on many occasions in the years to come, teaching, we hope, a lesson as dear as life itself; a lesson that is better than any ever preached from a Christian pulpit.

Suggested List for Summer Reading

MODERN AMERICAN AND ENGLISH FICTION

Allen, Hervey: Anthony Adverse; Action at Aquila
Bennett, E. Arnold: The Old Wives' Tale; Imperial Palace
Boyd, James: Drums; Marching On; Long Hunt
Bromfield, Louis: The Farm; A Good Woman; The Green Bay Tree; Possession; Early Autumn; Twenty-four Hours
Buck, Pearl: The Good Earth; Sons; A House Divided
Canfield, Dorothy: The Bent Twig; The Deepening Stream; Her Son's Wife
Carroll, Gladys H.: As the Earth Turns
Cather, Willa S.: My Antonia; O Pioneers; A Lost Lady; Death Comes for the Archbishop; Song of the Lark; Shadows on the Rock; The Professor's House; Lucy Gayheart
Cobb, Humphrey: Paths of Glory
Conrad, Joseph: Youth; Lord Jim; Victory; The Arrow of Gold
De La Roche, Nazo: Jalna; Whiteoaks of Jalna; Portrait of a Dog
Dreiser, Theodore: An American Tragedy; Sister Carrie; Jennie Gerhardt

Faulkner, William: As I Lay Dying; Sanctuary
Ferber, Edna: Cimarron; So Big; Come and Get It; Show Boat; American Beauty
Galsworthy, John: The Forsyte Saga; The Modern Comedy
Glasgow, Ellen: Barren Ground; They Stoop to Folly; The Vein of Iron; The Romantic Comedians
Hemingway, Ernest: A Farewell to Arms; The Sun Also Rises; Death in the Afternoon; To Have and Have Not
Hergesheimer, Joseph: Java Head; The Three Black Pennys; Cytherea; The Bright Shawl
Heyward, Du Bose: Porgy; Angel; Mamba's Daughters
Hilton, James: Goodbye, Mr. Chipps; Lost Horizon
Huxley, Aldous: Point Counter Point; Brave New World
Lawrence, D. H.: Sons and Lovers
Lewis, Sinclair: Arrowsmith; Babbitt; Main Street; Dodsworth; The Prodigal Parents
Locke, William J.: The Beloved Vagabond
Maugham, W. Somerset: Of Human Bondage; The Moon and Sixpence; Cakes and Ale

Morgan, Charles: The Fountain; Sparkenbroke
 Morley, Christopher: Parnassus on Wheels; Thunder
 on the Left; John Mistletoe
 Priestley, John B.: The Good Companions
 Rolvaag, O. E.: Giants in the Earth
 Sabatini, Rafael: The Sea Hawk; Scaramouche
 Santayana, George: The Last Puritan
 Stong, Phil: State Fair; Stranger's Return
 Suckow, Ruth: The Folks; Country People; The
 Kramer Girls
 Tarkington, Booth: Alice Adams; The Magnificent
 Ambersons; Seventeen; Gentle Julia; The Turmoil
 Walpole, Hugh: The Cathedral; Fortitude; Jeremy
 Wells, H. G.: Tono-Bungay; The War in the Air; The
 Time Machine; Mr. Britling Sees It Through
 Wharton, Edith: Ethan Frome; The Age of Innocence;
 The Children
 Wilder, Thornton: The Bridge of San Luis Rey
 Wolfe, Thomas: Look Homeward, Angel; Of Time
 and the River
 Woolf, Virginia: Flush; Mrs. Dalloway; The Waves

MODERN CONTINENTAL FICTION

Baum, Vicki: Grand Hotel
 Blasco-Ibanez, Vincente: The Four Horsemen of the
 Apocalypse
 Hamsun, Knut: Growth of the Soil; Hunger
 Mann, Thomas: Buddenbrooks; The Magic Mountain
 Remarque, Erich M.: All Quiet on the Western Front;
 The Road Back
 Werfel, Franz: The Forty Days of Musa Dagh
 Zweig, Arnold: The Case of Sergeant Grischa; Edu-
 cation Before Verdun

MODERN DRAMA—ENGLISH AND AMERICAN

Akins, Zoe: The Old Maid; Declasse
 Anderson, Maxwell: Queen Elizabeth; Valley Forge;
 Saturday's Children; Mary of Scotland; Winter-
 set; The Wingless Victory; High Tor
 Anderson, Maxwell, and Stallings, Laurence: What
 Price Glory?
 Barrie, James M.: Quality Street; Dear Brutus; What
 Every Woman Knows; The Admirable Crichton
 Barry, Phillip: Animal Kingdom; Paris Bound
 Besier, Rudolph: The Barrets of Wimpole Street
 Connelly, Marc: The Green Pastures; The Wisdom
 Tooth
 Coward, Noel: Cavalcade; Design for Living; Private
 Lives
 Crothers, Rachel: Nice People; Mary the Third; As
 Husbands Go; He and She; Let Us Be Gay
 Drinkwater, John: Abraham Lincoln; Marie Stuart;
 Robert E. Lee
 Fitch, Clyde: The Climbers; The Truth; The Girl
 with the Green Eyes
 Franken, Rose: Another Language
 Flavin, Martin: Children of the Moon; Criminal Code
 Galsworthy, John: Strife; Justice; Escape; The Silver
 Box; Loyalties

Gale, Zona: Miss Lulu Bett
 Green, Paul: The House of Connelly; In Abraham's
 Bosom
 Heywood, DuBose: Brass Ankle
 Howard, Sidney: Ned McCobb's Daughter; The Silver
 Cord; They Knew What They Wanted; Yellow
 Jack
 Jones, Henry A.: Mrs. Dane's Defense
 Kaufman, George: Merton of the Movies (with Marc
 Connelly); To the Ladies (with Marc Connelly);
 Beggar on Horseback (with Edna Ferber); The
 Royal Family (with Edna Ferber); Dinner at
 Eight (with Edna Ferber); Of Thee I Sing (with
 Morrie Ryskind)
 Kelly, George: The Torch Bearers; Craig's Wife;
 Daisy Mayme; The Show Off
 Kingsley, Sidney: Men in White; Dead End
 Maugham, W. S.: Rain; The Circle; The Letter; Our
 Betters; The Constant Wife
 Milne, A. A.: The Dover Road; Mr. Pim Passes By;
 The Ivory Door; The Truth About Blayds
 O'Neill, Eugene: Strange Interlude; Mourning Be-
 comes Electra; Days Without End; Anna Christie;
 The Hairy Ape; Dynamo; Beyond the Horizon;
 Ah Wilderness; The Emperor Jones; Marco Mil-
 lions; The Straw
 Pinero, Arthur W.: Mid-Channel; The Second Mrs.
 Tanqueray; Trelawney of the Wells
 Rice, Elmer: The Adding Machine; Street Scene
 Shaw, George B.: Man and Superman; The Doctor's
 Dilemma; Pygmalion; Arms and the Man; Can-
 dida

Sheriff, R. C.: Journey's End
 Synge, John M.: The Playboy of the Western World;
 Riders to the Sea
 Thomas, Augustus: The Copperhead
 Walter, Eugene: The Easiest Way
 Wilde, Oscar: Lady Windermere's Fan; The Impor-
 tance of Being Earnest

CONTINENTAL

Andreyev, Leonid: He Who Gets Slapped
 Capek, Karel: R. U. R.
 Chekhov, Anton: The Cherry Orchard; The Sea Gull;
 Uncle Vanya; Three Sisters
 Hauptman, Gerhart: The Sunken Bell; The Rats; The
 Weavers
 Ibsen, Henrik: A Doll's House; Rosmersholm;
 Ghosts; Hedda Gabler; The Wild Duck; An
 Enemy to the People
 Maeterlinck, Maurice: Pelleas and Melisande
 Molnar, Ferenc: Liliom; The Swan; The Guardsman
 Pirandello, Luigi: Right You Are!; Six Characters in
 Search of an Author
 Rostand, Edmond: L'Aiglon; Cyrano de Bergerac;
 The Romancers
 Schnitzler, Arthur: Anatol; Light o' Love
 Sudermann, Herman: John the Baptist; Magda