

entire play has a distinction which I had not fully appreciated before this reading.

Mr. Miller preoccupies himself with mass hysteria as it manifested itself in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692. We see this Puritan society in its decadence. The candle they had lit 70 years before to light the world with a faith and a vision, by whose tiny but pure light they came thousands of miles across the Atlantic to found a new life, has guttered. Discipline has become repression; dedication, prejudice; humility, pride. If the candle flares at all in Salem, it is to show each man the frightened, suspicious eyes of his neighbour. In this atmosphere, hysteria takes root and engulfs the town. The test of a man's character ceases to be his deeds, but his thoughts, and the best minds of the time, as well as the worst, are set to ferret out these thoughts, label them, and judge them. Mr. Miller everywhere implies parallels with contemporary manifestations of the evil eye, and the apparatus which exists in many countries for their recognition and repression.

When I saw the play, I did not find these parallels very striking; having read it, I find them all too compelling. That frightful perversity in human nature which makes the routing of the Devil so much more beguiling than the love of God which would render him powerless, is a perennial theme, running through history in a wave of blood and grief. Mr. Miller has stated this theme, if not in universal terms, then in very powerful ones, and his recent appearance before the Un-American activities committee in Washington makes piquant counterpoint with the substance of his play. His vivid characterisations are most rewarding to actors and his dialogue, as solid, clean and satisfying as good wholemeal bread, makes a most agreeable diet after the rice bubbles and saccharine of most contemporary playwrights

—Bruce Mason

## THE RIGOURS OF WAR

*YOUR OWN BELOVED SONS*, by Thomas Anderson; Victor Gollancz, English price 12/6. *THE MAGICIAN*, by W. Somerset Maugham; Heinemann, English price 15/-. *THE SPRINGBOARD*, by John Fores; Hodder and Stoughton, English price 12/6. *THE LOVELY CREW*, by Daniel Nash; Jonathan Cape, English price 13/6.

THOMAS ANDERSON has written his first novel about Korea. To those who have sampled recent American novels of

war, these facts would be a major deterrent, but they need not fear. There are no women, they are seldom even discussed. There is no constant spitting, barking and snarling; no tedious torrent of vulgarity. Apart from the curious habit of drinking Aqua-Velva, these characters fall into no pattern other than one would expect from a conscript army anywhere. *Your Own Beloved Sons* makes the point that war novels often miss; that adaptability and the power of forgetting the worst horrors are human faculties of great power; and that good soldiers are usually friendly, solicitous and have an admirable sense of duty. They accept the rigours of war cheerfully, they refuse to allow its brutality to depress them; and the truth is that they don't hate war as much as they should. The "classic" novels of modern war spring to mind. This is the best so far.

Why Somerset Maugham should allow the re-publication of this Edwardian chiller about the evil tricks of an obese sorcerer, his ravishing of a fair young maid (already bespoken) by occult means included, is hard to understand. Maugham's preface ("autobiographical fragment") tells the reader how he came to write the book, and from where his inspiration derives, but it does not explain how this poor work comes to be reprinted and offered for sale with a new jacket. *The Magician* has a plot crude enough for the worst of horror comics, with fitting embellishments, such as homunculi in bottles, and the death of the villain by extra-sensory strangulation. Not a bad idea, that.

*Springboard* is not a very good novel, although the central idea, to write a story around life at a great international airport, is a promising one. Mr. Fores has unfortunately overdone it. There are too many people, too many stretched metaphors, and not enough restraint.

*The Lovely Crew*—all about the mixed crew of a war-time Greek freighter—provides an excellent evening's entertainment. In every way a tale well told.

—Edward Malone

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

*THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD*, by Charles Dickens; Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, English price 10/6. The latest title to be reissued, with plates remade from the original edition, in the New Oxford Illustrated Dickens.

success. The opera now exists in both three and five act versions, both of which have been performed in various parts of the world. Adelina Patti sang Mireille in New York in 1865 but it was not until 1919 that the work was first performed at the Metropolitan when it served as a vehicle for the brilliant Maria Barrientos. This was the first New York production in French but even a cast that included Barrientos, Kathleen Howard, Charles Hackett and Leon Rothier could not keep it in the repertoire for more than five performances. In the late 1930s the Opéra Comique staged a revival prepared by Reynaldo Hahn from Gounod's original production and it is this version, produced at the 1954 Aix-en-Provence Festival, that listeners will hear. The performance took place in the open air at Les Baux in the Val d'Enfer where part of the opera is set.

*Mireille* is not a tragic opera in the serious sense but it is, with its sunny overture, pastoral scenes and traditional dances a work of considerable freshness and charm.

## OPERA GUIDE

This is the first of a series of programme notes designed to introduce listeners to new or unfamiliar operatic broadcasts from NZBS stations. The first is the little-known "Mireille" by Gounod which will be heard from the YC stations at 7.0 p.m. on Sunday, February 17.

GOUNOD'S other operas, of which he wrote many, have never been as successful as *Faust* but in France there is one work, which still holds its place in the repertoire of the many opera companies. This is *Mireille*, a tragic opera with a libretto based on a poem by the Provençal poet Mistral. It was written in Provence while Gounod was staying with the poet, and in his memoirs Gounod describes how easily the ideas of the opera came to him and how stimulating he found the atmosphere of Provence. The first performance took place at Saint Rémy-de-Provence in 1863 and the following year it was introduced to Paris. Here the work failed, so Gounod reduced it to three acts and made other changes which in the end brought him

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