

# The New Criterion

## Features

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### The play's the thing

by [Jeffrey Meyers](#)

On Olivia Manning's *The Great Fortune*.

Olivia Manning's *The Great Fortune* (1960) is the first novel in her masterly series of six (*The Balkan Trilogy* and *The Levant Trilogy*), the most underrated novels of the twentieth century. Like Tolstoy in *War and Peace* and Hemingway in *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Manning created characters swept up in a cataclysmic European war, and her descriptions of battle and the suffering of civilians are as thrilling and poignant as those of her great predecessors. Though the core of the novel focuses on the developing relationship of a young married couple, Guy and Harriet Pringle, they are surrounded by a cast of fascinating minor characters, a shifting society of locals and expatriates. The world-shaking events around them form a dramatic counterpoint to their lives. The story is told through the eyes of Harriet, and her struggle to adapt to life with Guy continue ...

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