

Here, it seems to me, is a current and downright proof that, whatever the definition of poetry may be, poetry itself has little to do with rhyme and metre. The first quotation, in spite of its determined form, remains plodding and awkward prose; the second, also, in spite or irrespective of its form, suddenly reaches another altitude. The lift (or intensity) of thought and feeling carry the words beyond thought, even beyond feeling; the words enter that other dimension which is poetry. Here meanings lie beyond "meaning," here sense and sound, sense and essence are one.

This poetic ascent is continuous in all of Robinson, in no work more pointedly than "Cavender's House." Behind the austere introspections, the half-lit silences, the syntactical convolutions, a richness that is part tone, part texture, manifests itself. It is a reticent color that, in the midst of darkness—a darkness in which this poem is dyed—makes itself somehow felt, now in a flicker of wit, now in a page of music, now in a philosophical aside like:

Sometimes a woman  
Will only smile and ask you to keep warm  
When the wind blows. You do not see her face  
When you are gone, or guess what's in her mind . . .  
It's a pity  
And a great shame, and a malevolent  
Extravagance, that you should find that out  
So often only when calamity  
Comes down upon you like a broken house  
To bring the news.

But more than any other feature, "Cavender's House" reveals Robinson's restless, uncertain but persistent search for moral values. This quest—and questioning—of ultimates runs through the story, as it seems to be running through an age no longer satisfied with skepticism. Even the brilliant discoverer of *The Wasteland* cannot live in the limbo he explored; it is significant that the same year should disclose Eliot turning to a faith beyond intellect and Robinson driving past reason to find

. . . there must be God; or if not God  
A purpose and a law.

There is still, though less disturbingly than usual, the grammatically involved Robinson, the Robinson who seems to have a perverse pleasure in writing sentences as contorted as:

There might be so much less for us to learn,  
That we who know so little, and know least  
When our complacency is at our best,  
Might not learn anything.

But this is an exceptionally calisthenic construction and, for the most part, the new poem proceeds without such verbal back-somersaults. Less panoplied than "Tristram," less dramatic than "The Man Who Died Twice," "Cavender's House" is simpler but no less characteristic of its author. It is, in accent and authority, essential Robinson, one of his major creations and one which has the deep breath of permanence.

## Passionate Action

**DARK STAR.** By LORNA MOON. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1929. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GLADYS GRAHAM

**P**LOTS and passions are coming into their own again. The smooth eventless surface of the psychological novel where everything that happened happened below the level of consciousness has finally cracked with strain. This season's novels, especially this season's novels by women, throw up a veritable barrage of passionate action. The response to life, in fiction, is no longer introspection and inhibition. Love betrays, children are nameless, the life of another or one's own may be repudiated with the slow pressed pillow or the quick leap from a cliff.

Of sharp objective happenings against which human passions break with the futile intensity and ephemeral beauty of sea-spray "Dark Star" is compounded. Fate is granted her part: she holds the tether ropes that uncoil so elastically at free will until a sudden shattering halt makes clear that so far and no farther man's little run extends. There is a clean-cut story in this first novel of Lorna Moon: the story of Nancy Pringle, from her too casual birth to her considered death,—Nancy who was born under a dark star and whose life was to be passed under its sombre radiance. But with Nancy's story comes also the story of her village, "the dour streets and

dour lives of Pitouie." The people of this squalid little town have superimposed on their quite modern realism a touch also of the legendary. Their names and their activities reach one as across an enhancing distance. They seem to have been long before "Dark Star" was written. It is perhaps this quality of remoteness that has thus quickly given the book a favored place rather outside the immediate intimacy of the usual best-seller.

The moving cause in Nancy's life, drawing the many and highly differentiated characters into a tightly bound whole, is her desire and need to know who her father was. Her mother had found, simultaneously, life, the young lord of Fassefern, and Willy Weames the groom, alike too fascinating to be resisted. Paternity became obscured. Nancy's life is a quest for spiritual heritage. Is she a Fassefern with a blood right to the pride that refuses life on life's terms, or is she the daughter of a Weames who leads, perhaps eternally, stallions from fair to fair?

Nancy's life falls into episodes. After a few years with her mother, terminated when the mother runs away with a golden-skinned medicine man who sells jujah and extracts teeth almost painlessly, there is a short little girlhood as the housekeeper for a querulous grandmother who pretends dead every morning until threatened with the loss of her tea. Then one morning she isn't pretending any more, and Nancy goes to the strange and warring household of the village clergyman.

With books and study, Nancy breaks mentally away from her environmental narrowness. People and scenes as frankly unadorned, as vengeful and as lustful as any in the wench and inn chronicles of the ale-stained eighteenth century, press upon her, but she walks a secret path. She meets love halfway as she has always met life. Refused one, Nancy refuses the other. In life it might be she must know herself a groom's bastard, with death she can finally achieve the legend of the Fasseferns.

## Of Love and Death

**THE HEAVEN AND EARTH OF DOÑA ELENA.** By GRACE ZARING STONE. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1929. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ERNEST SUTHERLAND BATES

**T**HE *Heaven and Earth of Doña Elena* must be read as a poem, with that "willing suspension of disbelief" which one readily accords to a beautiful work of the imagination. Outwardly a tale of the Caribbean, with seventeenth-century nuns and buccaneers as carriers of its romance, inwardly it is a song of love and death where demand for historical accuracy would be as irrelevant as in "The Eve of St. Agnes." Its island of Hispaniola is not the one charted on the map; its characters, in their action and speech, belong to no particular epoch; its plot, for all the brave array of action, is concerned with destiny rather than with deeds. Idealistic as it is, the book is too intensely conceived, its characters too vividly portrayed, to give any impression of thinness. Its style recalls that of "The Bridge of San Luis Rey" in its aristocratic fineness and luminous clarity; it is from Mr. Wilder, probably, that Miss Stone has learned the art of saying just enough and no more; but the source of her style is less important than the fact that she has made it indubitably her own and as pleasant to read as it is to gaze at some white city across Mediterranean bays.

Doña Elena, the youngest daughter of a large and impoverished noble family, has come from Spain to San Juan in Hispaniola as Mother Superior of the Convent of the Poor Marys, an order devoted to the nursing of the sick. She capably fulfills her duties among her nuns and broken-down Spanish adventurers who constitute her wards; the only sin upon her conscience is a certain "dryness of spirit" in her devotions. Miss Stone gives admirably the picture of little tasks quietly performed; of the spirit of security engendered by routine; of a serene body animated by a slumbering soul.

Into the peaceful intimacy of Doña Elena's life there drops casually one night the gallant young captain of an English buccaneering squadron who has come to spy out the city; they talk and he soon departs, leaving his reckless image lightly stamped on her mind but carrying her own more deeply cut. As the story tightens, the style becomes, noiselessly, more tense. There is a bold scene where Elena and her company, temporarily captured on a sailing-trip to a nearby town, are entertained perforce on the

buccaneer's flagship. Miss Stone permits her hero to become considerably drunk; she endows him in his cups with a little of that boastfulness pertaining, from Homer to Dumas, to great adventurers; and she gives him a chance mistress in a tavern-keeper's daughter who has accompanied him from Plymouth; but all this ribaldry, which might by a touch have broken the frame-work of romance, is kept by the cool, chaste, slightly sardonic style where it belongs—as external as the walls of Elena's convent, merely another part of the strangely patterned forms through which the characters move.

So the story goes on, with love, confessed in Dyke the buccaneer, hidden unconsciously in Elena, drawing them closer. Elena—and it is a delicate touch—while in concealing her knowledge that there has been a spy in the city she really betrays it to the enemy, feels little consciousness of guilt; the crime of political treason is not one she has been taught to fear. And the sin which, of course, she has been taught to fear, grows upon her treacherously, assuming the shape of an apparently religious ecstasy unknown before. Thus in the delirium of death—for the jealous fanaticism of a priest brings her "salvation by poison," as the jacket says—she can see, in the face of her lover bending over her, the face of the Redeemer. This, the final word of blasphemy according to a dualistic creed, has always been the final word in the romanticist's faith. But it is not Miss Stone's final word. That is reserved for Dyke, wandering, desperate and drunk, among the shadows. The Heaven and Earth of Doña Elena become one; but Dyke the realist will stumble henceforth rather drearily through a world that is neither.

## Censorship

(Continued from page 993)

him form his literary judgments first and his moral judgments afterwards, instead of in the opposite order. Let him read with less concern for what damage a book may do to others, and more concern for what it really means to himself. Then if he objects to free discussion because his convictions are against free discussion, he will know why he disapproves; and if he is hurt by frank language because he is not accustomed to frank language, at least in print, he will know why he objects. What censorship needs is psycho-analysis. Let one hundred thousand readers read disputed books this way, and we shall soon progress to a better understanding, and get the only kind of censorship that is good for anything—a resultant of the wills of individuals acting for themselves.

In every instance where opinion is involved there are sure to be four parties: the obscurantists who wish to stifle every change; the libertines who desire a reckless freedom, usually for profit; the conservatives who wish to hold fast to tried experience; the liberals who wish to open new paths through convention toward truth. Legal censorship is usually concerned with the first two, and, being set in action by extremists is itself irrational and extreme. But if the controversy can be kept to the parties of the third and fourth part, no one need fear, though he may not like, the results. For the vast majority of readers, when they stop to think for themselves, are neither libertine nor reactionary. They can readily settle the case, and out of court.

In a letter to *The London Times Literary Supplement*, Clement C. J. Webb remarks that William Blake's well-known lines upon holding "Infinity in the palm of your hand, and Eternity in an hour" echo a phrase from Jeremy Taylor's "Ductor Dubitantium." Did Blake know Jeremy Taylor's writings?

## The Saturday Review of Literature

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## An Alexandrian

PSYCHE. By PIERRE LOUYS. With a conclusion and notes by CLAUDE FARRERE. Illustrations by MAJESKA. New York: Covici, Friede. 1928. \$10.

HAS Pierre Louys missed forever, outside of France, his meed of fame? It is an irony of literary history that this exquisite writer, essentially aristocratic and disdainful of popular favor, should be known chiefly as the author of a supposedly sensational novel, incredibly vulgarized on the American stage. His "Aphrodite," rightly welcomed by Francois Coppée as a great historical romance of the Alexandrian period, fell into the hands of the pornophiles for whom any description of sensual love, however beautiful, is simply something "spicy." Then, too, Louys suffered by comparison with his more robust contemporaries, Remy de Gourmont and Anatole France, whose paganism, less pure than his, contained immeasurably more elements of intellectual interest. Finally there is the fact that just as he was coming to the full maturity of his powers, Louys was stricken by a fatal disease, and during the last fifteen years of his life published practically nothing. Certainly his death in 1925 caused no stir in the literary world. And yet he was one of the great stylists and great romancers of the last generation. One who has not been charmed by the delicate chastity of style in "Les Chansons de Bilitis," or by the irony and wit in "Les Aventures du Roi Poussole," or by the sheer narrative skill of "La Femme et Le Pantin," has simply failed to drink of three clear springs of literary delight.

"Psyche," published posthumously from an unfinished manuscript, is easily the masterpiece of Pierre Louys. In his earlier works, even when as in "La Femme et Le Pantin" he was writing of the "Femina," well understood, Louys was at heart the "Femina." His erotic inspiration, his love of "Femina" beauty, his preference for simple "Femina" pleasures, his untroubled by moral scruples, his tragic "Femina" poignant brevity of life, all marked "Femina" fully a pagan of the decadence. But "Femina" his last important work, written at intervals between 1905 and 1913, there is a new and deeper note.

The earlier elements are still present in this tale of contemporary France, there is the same classical concentration, the same exclusion of irrelevant material, but there is an unwonted interest in the more complex psychology of characters in whom Christian renunciation battles with instinctive passion, and in the strange manner by which both fuse in the white heat of a love unknown to Greek or Roman. In "Psyche" Louys parts company with Meleager and Theocritus, and even with Catullus, to write a romance of love which Gottfried von Strassburg or Wolfram von Eschenbach would have understood more easily than would the pagans. It has the breathless expectant quality of all high ecstasy, the perfection of a mood which a single jarring word would destroy. The completed outline of the story, supplied by Claude Farrère from memories of a conversation with Louys, is so infallibly right as to rouse the hope that M. Farrère is not deceived in his belief that Louys had written out the whole romance and that the entire manuscript may yet sometime be found. Even the present torso, however, such is its integrity of form, gives no real sense of incompleteness; perhaps it hardly matters whether we take leave of Psyche as the happy mistress of the Castle of the Sleeping Beauty, or, years later, find her lying frozen in the snow at its threshold; dead or alive, she lives equally in her enchanted realm of love. The publishers are to be congratulated for providing a casket worthy of the jewel within. "Psyche," beautifully printed, bound, and illustrated, is a joy to the eye as well as to the mind.

The death of Mrs. W. K. Clifford has recently been announced in London. She was the widow of W. K. Clifford, the brilliant mathematician and philosopher of the nineteenth century, whose ideas are now in renewed currency among the new school of physicists. He was "Mr. Saunders of Oxford," the red-headed youth of Matlock's "New Republic." Mrs. Clifford had a long career of authorship behind her.

*The*  
**BOWLING GREEN**

## Granules from an Hour-Glass

(Reprinted By Request)

## I. THE LONGEST PARENTHESIS

“CHANCE,” published early in 1914, was the first of Conrad’s novels that reached a large public. This was not due to any specifically popular virtue in the book itself, but to the fact that his publishers, particularly in America, made for the first time a serious and careful attempt to “put him over”—to cross the Shadow Line. The book was well merchandised and had a large sale. Thousands of copies must have been sold to people who were unfamiliar with his oblique narration, who were puzzled, and perhaps disappointed. There are still some troubled souls who have a pride in remarking that they “can’t read Conrad.” These are the inheritors of that unfulfilled renown caused by the paradox of *Chance* having been oversold at the start.

The story of the book, as it might be gossiped about in a gathering of publishers, is a long and curious one—too long for discussion here. The fact that its first appearance in print, in 1912, was as a serial in the New York *Herald* (where it began to run before the author had finished the MS) is not the least surprising in its history. But in talking about Conrad with many people in recent years I have observed that *Chance* is nowadays one of the least known of his books. It remains, to any serious amateur of fiction, one of the most remarkable and enchanting.

If I should recommend any one to read *Chance* I should want him to realize that I was paying him a compliment. For it is a very singular book, told in a manner which is theoretically preposterous. Many critics said so, as can be seen by the charmingly ironic preface Conrad wrote in 1920 for the Concord Edition. One is fairly safe in saying it would be impossible for any story to be actually told, *viva voce*, as that story is told by Marlow. But the question in art is not whether things are impossible, but whether they succeed. This does. There are various ways of diagramming the story of *Chance*—which is, in essence, merely the old, old plot of *The Wife in Name Only*—but the simplest is to describe it thus. You have a group of people, the central creatures of your story, to whom strange things have happened. Outside these central figures you have always a double lens for the readers to see with. This double lens is made up of (1) a simple-minded observer who has been in contact with the crisis, and (2) a subtle commentator who was not present at the crisis but has the requisite background for understanding the simple facts. This subtle commentator (Marlow) hands on the story, enriched with his own temperamental comments, to the colorless "I" who serves merely as proxy for the public. What it amounts to is this, that every scene, every gesture of the story comes to us colored by at least one hearsay and often by two. It is a form of distillation.

Now perhaps you take your literature seriously; or perhaps, you don't. But if you do, you can see that this distiller's method of telling a story gives infinite scope for surmise, and for the diffusion of delicate personal vapors. We are not told baldly that A did this or that. We hear from C that B told him that A did this or that. And so A's action, though perhaps inaccurately reported, comes to us carrying also the verisimilitude of both B and C, who are equally integers of the situation.

I had thought that perhaps I'd give you, just for fun, a synopsis of the plot of *Chance*. I shan't do it; it would make this note too long. Let me just give you one warning. The book contains what is I dare say the longest parenthesis in fiction—some 250 pages. From the point in the very first chapter where young Powell comes aboard his ship and hears the captain's wife is on board, down to the beginning of Chapter 2 in Part Two, is all a "cut-back" to earlier events. And then again Part Two, Chapter 4 and most of Chapter 5 are again a cut-back. Then suddenly, after all this delightful and perplexing delay the action suddenly tightens. No man ever lived who could write more immediate heart-stopping narrative than Conrad, when it served his intention. You'll find a bit of it, for example, in Chapter 3 of Part Two. And when you come to

the totally unforeseen crisis, in that last chapter, so thrillingly entitled “A Moonless Night, Thick with Stars Above, Very Dark on the Water,” you will have, I think, one of those half hours of immortality that fiction was invented to bestow.

It would be fun if we could go on talking about *Chance*. It would be fun to gossip about the scope that Conrad's device of the mouthpiece Marlow gives to his tender and sardonic humor. Marlow's "neutral bearing and secret irritability" are found at their fruitfulest in this book. I am not saying that in all respects *Chance* is a success. I don't know that Flora's intention of suicide is made quite credible. There are other doubts, of situation and motive, that will present themselves. But in many respects it seems to me almost more brilliantly Conrad the artist than any other book. The sheer virtuosity of the performance staggers one. It contains also some of the most memorable bits of haphazard beauty and candor that Conrad ever uttered. It thrills me to think of the astonishment, the rumination, the intellectual delight, that the fit reader will experience in this book.

Mind you, therefore, I'm not necessarily recommending it. I don't insist on your rushing off to buy it. I will only say that wherever people gather who are interested in literature as a sincere form of trickery, *Chance* will always be spoken of with amazement. To use one of Conrad's favorite phrases, it is *très chic*. By heaven, it is!

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## II. ACROSS CAMDEN BRIDGE

When you see the great stride of the Camden Bridge, and look up at it from below, along the Philadelphia docks, you have already crossed it in your mind. That is the joy of bridges, crossing them before you come to them.

Bridges are well guarded: the Camden crossing has not only its uniformed toll officers, but also some mysterious Supervisor of the Yellows who keeps tab on taxis, to prevent Pennsylvania cabs from poaching on New Jersey; or perhaps vice versa.

Early in its difficult story society learned to guard bridges. All great crossings are watched and tariffed by prudential pontiffs, worldlywise or otherworldlywise. When men cross bridges they breathe a new air, have a sense of translation. Such men are dangerous. The state guards well its bridgeheads; for there are always a frantic few who, after crossing bridges, burn the pontiffs behind them.

In Harleigh Cemetery. When Walt took cover at last he did not rest on the earth, he burrowed into it. There is nothing Quakerish about that grave: it is pagan, palaeolithic. The massive cromlech tomb is dug into the hillside; it is piled together of huge unsmoothed granites. He was called a cave man, but he did not become so until he was dead. In an age of decorated urns and weeping marble angels he built this little stronghold in the forgiveness of earth—the earth of whom we ask so many questions; and who troubles us because she tells us so few lies.

Always tribal, he took his clan in with him. The niche you see plainest is, I think, his mother's. His own is almost behind the door. He left the door half open, and so it always stands. He can pass unquestioned out and in. I think he is more often out. So it is not really a tomb but a cenotaph. Perhaps every grave is. Every grave is an unknown soldier's.

Above that green hillside is some sort of stone-cutting workyard. "Here comes one among the well-beloved stonecutters," as he wrote once with perhaps a touch of that quaint Hicksite humor that it takes us so long to catch the slant of. Slabs of plain stone lie about under the trees. They are waiting for names.

Walt was called a loafer because he liked to watch others work. What they forgot was that his work was the kind that cannot be watched. No one except God ever watched a poet working.

His work had been called a shout, a yawp, an outcry, but inside all the ejaculating, promulgings, effusings, was a core of quiet. If you cut open any of his greater poems, to study the concentric grain-ing and pattern, you will not only find a delicately wise artist, you will find at the center a germ of silence.

That he was a great terrene creator, casual, fecund, and sparadic like earth herself, is admitted by most; that he was a precise artist in detail is more often questioned. Yet even his catalogues, much reproached, are often marvels of cinematic portraiture and studio technique.

—CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.