

an African male protégé around the Native bazaar.

The error is hers, however, not her creator's. She is consistently believable; as are also the sad, sun-dried English men and women who have done, by limited but honest lights, an honest job in Africa all their working lives, only to see the little comforts of old age, the prize they gave their youth for, snatched by the cold hand of history. Surely, they think, for this injustice *someone* must be to blame?

On the inchoate aspirations of the evolving Africans the book is brilliant: on those who are not "been-to" (trained in England) and know all too well the huge obstacles in their path to the Promised Land; or who half-know them and hope or despair too soon; or those to whom civilization is a glittering myth, a god-given Cargo attainable by wishes, witchcraft, and prayer. All men are men, Miss Laurence gives us to understand, and no human aspiration is too high for any of us; it is not our aims but our self-ignorant means which betray us to Apollo's laughter. The passage where Nathaniel in his poverty accepts a bribe from two students who want a job, and is exposed to his arch-enemy Johnnie, is bitterly poignant. One sighs almost audibly with relief when, at the end, he inches up to a slightly wider toe-hold over the abyss.

A scholar and translator of African folklore and poetry, Miss Laurence has written a first novel of rare excellence. She has an impressive sense of the equatorial rhythms: the cruelty, the gay or the wistful resignation, the feckless humor, the splendid hymns. Her ear is so good that one cannot wish it less than perfect; someone should let her know that the English, for some occult reason, say "I suppose" instead of "I guess."

FRASER YOUNG'S
LITERARY CRYPT NO. 907

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Answer to Literary Crypt No. 906

Half the world does not know
how the other half lives, but is
trying to find out.

—EDGAR W. HOWE.



Heinrich von Kleist—
"ahead of his age."

Dark Side of Drama

"The Marquise of O—," By Heinrich von Kleist; translated by Martin Greenberg (Criterion. 318 pp. \$5), acquaints American readers with the shocking and suspenseful short stories of the Shakespeare of German drama. Bernhard V. Valentini is professor of German literature at Wayne State University.

By Bernhard V. Valentini

TO MY knowledge, these eight short stories have never been collectively published before so as to introduce the reader to the peculiar genius of Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811), whose eight plays have established him as the Shakespeare of German drama. Though isolated translations of some of the works have appeared periodically, dating as far back as 1844, Kleist's impact in America has been restricted to a few devout scholars. This is not surprising; even in his own age his unique ideas were too bold and advanced to gain acceptance. The classicists, Goethe included, were not prepared to embrace his startling attitudes, while the romanticists found him too individualistic and unorthodox.

Born into the privileged caste of Prussian nobility, Kleist soon became a renegade, rejecting his military career. A much discussed trip to Würzburg in south Germany is shrouded in fog. Thomas Mann and others speculated about the mysterious purpose of this trip, concluding that he was in search of treatment for psychogenic ailments. The growing intensity of his depressions made it necessary for him to seek refuge in a physician's home, and engagement to marry ended in the

escape of the distressed groom. Twice he contrived a suicide pact: the first, with a companion from his early youth, was never consummated; the second occurred several years later. On November 21, 1811, passers-by heard two explosions in a forest near Berlin, and the bodies of Kleist and a woman companion were found.

It is understandable that Kleist had difficulty being accepted in his own age. Only a post-Freudian mind would be adequately responsive to the psychological undercurrents of Kleistian situations. As Martin Greenberg remarks in his introduction: "Kleist was an avant-garde writer in the true sense of the term; he was not only ahead of the literary fashions of his time, he was not only ahead of his generation, he was ahead of his age."

In Kleist's own age the reader could register nothing but shock and horror at the brutal events of his plots. For example, the Marquise of O—, "a widow of unblemished reputation and the mother of several well-bred children," undergoes nightmarish experiences. Stupefied by a small, barbarous squad of invading soldiers, she escapes rape, only to suffer, while still unconscious, the same fate by the man who has come to her rescue. She is unaware of what has happened, but soon realizes that she is pregnant. And, protesting her innocence, she must bear the consequences of the evidence: the Marquise is disgraced and humiliated, cast out by her own father. Yet she fights her way back to rehabilitation.

In the other stories the plots develop in different corners of the earth: three in Germany, three in Italy, one in Chile, and one on Santo Domingo; in all there is a basic, recurring theme: the insistent struggle of man to maintain his dignity in the face of defeat.

Told with forceful craftsmanship, these stories keep the reader in relentless suspense; hence they do not give him time to be disturbed by their occasional inconsistencies.

At this point it seems necessary to question Mr. Greenberg's right "to put Kleist into a more or less natural modern English" and to avoid imitating "any period quality of his German." One wonders whether the loss of historical perspective that this necessarily entails is not too big a price to pay for a more readable rendering of Kleist's prose. This reviewer takes issue with the translator not so much over the modernization of language per se, but because he has not adequately conveyed the Kleistian peculiarities of style, which are essential to his art. A perusal of Emil Staiger's analysis of Kleist's dramatic style in "The Beggarwoman of Locarno" might have benefited him.

Parable of the Reluctant Apostle

"The White Stone," by Carlo Coccioli; translated by Elizabeth Sutherland and Vera Bleuer (Simon & Schuster. 271 pp. \$4.50), pieces together the fragments that explain a Catholic priest's shattered faith and his paradoxical regeneration of other despairing men. Albert Van Nostrand, who teaches literature at Brown University, is the author of "The Denatured Novel."

By Albert Van Nostrand

"THE WHITE STONE" is the story of a man's struggle to convince himself that he has lost faith in God, and to replace that faith with something else. It is a fantastic and persuasive novel—and an exciting mystery, as well.

The anomalous hero is Don Ardito Piccardi, a priest in an Italian village. His struggle begins on the morning of December 8, 1943, after he has been brought before the German firing squad. He has prepared himself to die, is even eager to die, but the Wehrmacht officer senses this, and, wishing to impose his own miracle over Piccardi's God, he sentences the priest to live. So Piccardi becomes an exile in search of belief.

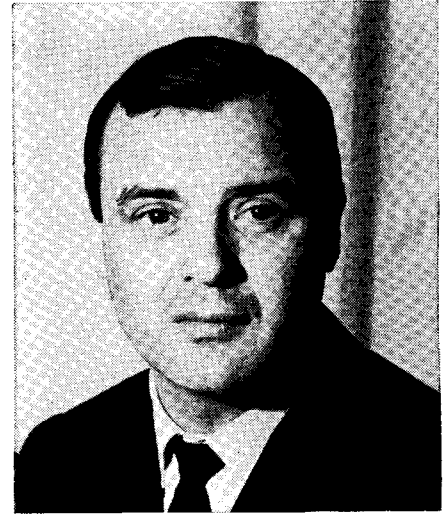
Piccardi's search is itself the subject of another search. One of his parishioners—whom Carlo Coccioli identifies only as "C"—is bent upon discovering the essence of this strange, humble, powerful man. What really made Piccardi lose his faith? Has he prevailed over his lost God? If so, how can one explain the rumors of miraculous regeneration he has since caused in other men? Is Piccardi able to account for himself? Indeed, is he even still alive? These questions begin to plague "C" after he learns that Piccardi did not die when he was supposed to; so eight years after the crisis of the firing squad "C" sets out to solve the mystery.

He recovers fragments that testify to Piccardi's amazing career—letters mostly, from men who encountered this renegade priest: from the Wehrmacht officer who sentenced him to live; from a Frenchman in the German camp where Piccardi was imprisoned; from a Sardinian soldier who, after Piccardi's escape from the Germans, lived with

him in hiding; from an Italian bishop, and from a Dominican who took the priest on a mission to Mexico. These testimonies piece out Piccardi's story, always bringing "C" closer to him in time and place, and in understanding.

But the priest's exile and struggle are primarily recounted by Piccardi himself, through two fragmentary journals which "C" recovers. These are the heart of the novel. The first journal recalls Piccardi's primitive existence with the escapees from the prison camp; the second concerns the temptations of Satan, in the guise of a businessman, who urges Piccardi to change his status from being "free" of God to being generally "available" for other service. What these journals dramatize is the paradox of Piccardi's failure. Having deliberately and rationally given up God, the despairing priest has been driven, unwittingly, to the regeneration of other despairing men.

This is a resonant novel. Its parts echo and amplify each other. Its episodes, in the testimony of a half-dozen different narrators, repeat Piccardi's journals in such various ways as to suggest that Piccardi's conflict defines the whole state of Christ's church and possibly of the world. Together these epi-



—Jean Marquis.

Carlo Coccioli—"a resonant novel."

sodes dramatize an idea. Like the author of the Acts of the Apostles, who represented the Holy Ghost as the real hero of his saga, Coccioli perceives a greater presence dwelling in his own reluctant apostle.

The novel's title, from the Revelation of Saint John, denotes God's recognition of the man who can conquer in his struggle with disbelief: "I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it." But the knack of this novel lies not in a fact of revelation; it lies rather in the circumstantial evidence which gradually reveals the mystery.

Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

TWO ON A TITLE

Each of the titles in Column One below has been used by at least two authors, one group of whom appears in Column Two, another in Column Three. Elizabeth Mills of Springfield, Missouri, asks you to assign correct titles to each cluster of authors, keying both Columns Two and Three on Column One. Answers on page 34.

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|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. "Amelia" | () Nicholas Rowe | () William Ainsworth |
| 2. "The Winter's Tale" | () William Faulkner | () Abraham Cowley |
| 3. "Cynthia" | () Oliver W. Holmes | () Benjamin Disraeli |
| 4. "Endymion" | () Joseph Addison | () John Drinkwater |
| 5. "Mary Stuart" | () Thomas Otway | () Henry Fielding |
| 6. "Milton" | () William Hazlitt | () N. Hawthorne |
| 7. "Morte D'Arthur" | () Alfred Tennyson | () Reginald Heber |
| 8. "Rosamond" | () A. C. Swinburne | () O. Henry |
| 9. "Table-Talk" | () Andrew Marvell | () James Joyce |
| 10. "The Garden" | () John Keats | () Thomas Macaulay |
| 11. "The Last Leaf" | () Richard Barnfield | () Sir Walter Raleigh |
| 12. "The Marble Faun" | () Henry Carey | () Samuel Rogers |
| 13. "Ulysses" | () William Blake | () A. C. Swinburne |
| 14. "Windsor Castle" | () D. H. Lawrence | () Dylan Thomas |