A Hymn to Spiritual Beauty

DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP. By WILLA CATHER. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1927.

Reviewed by LEE WILSON DODD

AFTER reading "Death Comes for the Archbishop," I indulged myself in a critic's day-dream; and found myself not too patiently trying to explain this book—so reticent, so distinguished, so beautiful—to a rebellious young person in very short skirts who rather petulantly had asserted that she was an incarnation of Average Public Taste in America.

"You say, my dear child, that Miss Cather's novel has bored you; that you couldn't get through it; that it isn't really a novel at all. When I ask you why it isn't really a novel, you maintain there's no story in it—by which, obviously, you mean there's no 'love story' in it. In this as in most things you are wrong and—don't bother to forgive me, sweet child!—rather pathetically stupid. There is a great, a very great, love story in Miss Cather's masterly, quiet narrative. It is a severe, purely designed chalice of hand-beaten silver, filled to the brim with the white essential wine of love—love of man to man, love of God to man, love of man to God.

"True, it nowhere lures you to identify yourself with some fair, and conceivably frail, heroine whose neurotic organism is asquirm with sexual desire. In this respect, I am forced to admit, it fails your instinctive expectations pretty badly; and unless you can (temporarily) free yourself of these anticipatory longings, this book is not for you. But if you can manage to survive this disappointment and attune your mind (may I daringly presume you have one?) to less customary harmonies, harmonies both throbbing deeper and lifting higher than the common range, I venture to assure you that you will soon forget to be bored."

However, not even in day-dream could I longer continue, for my rebellious young person in very short skirts had already vanished, leaving behind her merely an echo of jazz and faint whiffs of perfumed lip-stick, aromatic chewing-gum, and synthetic gin. . . .

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"Death Comes for the Archbishop" tells how a young man, Jean Marie Latour, once a seminarist in Auvergne, rode with difficulty into the newly erected territory of New Mexico as Vicar Apostolic, and of the wise and good works he wrought there for many years, until, mourned by all his people, "the old Archbishop lay before the high altar in the church he had built." Is it a narrative of fact—biography in the guise of fiction? Or is it an independent creation, a fabric woven of many colored strands, sombre or brilliant, drawn from the annals of our Southwestern frontier? I do not know; and while I shall be interested to learn, if I am ever to learn, I do not greatly care. For this much is certain: by putting unforgettably before us the life (actual, wholly imagined, or partly imagined) of Father Latour, Miss Cather has also given us *truth*, has brought to us a quintessence distilled from a given region, with all its forms and modes of being, throughout a selected, unifying stretch of years. No artistic purpose is more difficult of fulfilment; and to indicate Miss Cather's stature as artist, it is enough to say that in the present novel one such staggering attempt has been serenely and triumphantly carried through.

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But that is not all; it is far from all.

Range through the world's literature and ask yourself how many convincing portraits you can remember of a good and great man. You will not, I fear, recall many. . . . Well, here, at least, is one such portrait—winning, human, and complete. But no, there are *two* such in this extraordinary book, and they are finely differentiated! Father Vaillant and Father Latour . . . both living men, and utterly unalike, except in their central shining goodness—for I can think of no other word to express their quality. It is the love of these two men for each other, for their God, their Church, and their body-breaking and often heart-breaking tasks which makes of this book a grave, uplifting hymn to Spiritual Beauty. It is nothing less than that.

Nothing less . . . and it has, perhaps, turned one astonished reader a little giddy in the head. The whole thing was so unexpected. Intellectual and Spiritual Futility Blues have been so much more in our modern line. So if there are any artistic faults in this book (as there well may be, man being what he is) I confess that I was far too stirred to note them.

Whither, Life?

DUSTY ANSWER. By ROSAMOND LEHMANN. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1927. $2.50.

Reviewed by ELEANOR CARROLL CHILTON

Author of "Shadows Waiting"

Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul
When hot for certainties in this our life.

THOSE who read many novels usually fall into the necessity of helping the author out—pretending that his patched characters are of whole cloth, filling in the meagre outlines of thought, and recapturing from their memories the pictures which are only hinted at with descriptive words. Here, however, is a book which is glowing with life, with an exciting intensity of emotion; a book to which one abandons oneself, knowing instinctively that the author can be trusted to carry her story with a fine and delicate assurance.

Judith Earle, the only child of a quiet and somewhat remote house, grows up companioned by visions and ghosts of the past. These dream children are real enough, in that they had once lived in the house next door, and had become so dear to her that she was never again able to disentangle their names and faces and personalities from the exciting patterns they wove in her imagination. Charles, the weakest and loveliest, who was killed in the war; his erratic brother Julian, passionate, awkward, and always defeating his own ends; and their cousins, Mariella the mysterious, Martin the faithful, and Roddy, who was the most puzzling and exciting and wonderful of all—these five playmates of a summer were a part of the very fabric of Judith's existence, growing up in harmony with her mind which had recreated them, and in this way preparing for her most of the tragedies of her youth. Because, of course, when they finally moved back to the house beyond the cherry tree they had grown up in their own way, and not in hers. They had become more irresistibly themselves, and very much less what Judith had made of them in her secret imaginings; and yet they were still so much the same, so like the old faces and personalities which had provided the materials for her dreams of them, that Judith inevitably fell to expecting of them a fulfilment of old, outgrown promises.

One other person assaults Judith's emotions, and is stamped ineradicably upon the unfolding outlook of her mind. This is Jennifer, whom she meets at Girton. The two girls become passionate friends and monopolize each other happily for two years. But the friendship is severed violently, and though it trails loose threads to the end of the book, Jennifer leaves Cambridge abruptly; leaves Judith with a lonely and restless desire which soon becomes love for Roddy—Roddy who was a dark dream that could never materialize, even for himself.

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The rest of the story shows the rise to effective tragedy of all the emotional complications which had been latent in the relationships between the four remaining "children;" the destructive and never-to-be-adjusted tangle which had been spinning itself from their most ardent desires. And Miss Lehmann abandons Judith, finally, leaving her still caught in the web which had woven about her; still held, but held only in the memories left behind by vanished lovers and friends.

The actual story of this novel is old enough. But "it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike;" and Miss Lehmann has a most rarely perceptive and delicate and fancifully humorous eye. It is a joy to read her prose, for she has the poet's gift of making a new experience of every familiar beauty, without in any way brushing off the bloom of its familiarity.

Yet the book has a fundamental weakness, and the mere fact that she has been able to invest its incidents with a lucid glow, an ecstacy of personal comprehension, does not in any way mitigate it. The beautiful moments build up toward nothing. The book never finishes. Judith, when we leave her forsaken and wondering what to do next, has not, it seems to me, received a dusty answer. The certainties of the soul concern the soul alone, and in loneliness we find or fail to find them. Judith, one feels sure, is intact and inviolable in apparent defeat. Herein lies her vivid reality. In the first dawn after her darkest night, Judith decided that she might write a book. "She was a person whose whole past made one great circle, completed now and ready to be discarded." And if Judith had written her book it would probably have turned out to be "Dusty Answer." If I have any complaint against the book it is that Miss Lehmann has not used her insight, her ability to freshen old words into new ones, her humor, and all her rare gifts, to make a book which Judith could *not* have written.

The Woods of Weir

THE DARK CHAMBER. By LEONARD CLINE. New York: The Viking Press. 1927. $2.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

IN this his third novel Mr. Cline attempts an experiment in horror. In a story which at times reminds us of the subtleties of "The Fall of the House of Usher" and at times of the crudities of "Dracula," he essays to create an atmosphere of ghostly terror. It is filled with violence—suicide, assault, battle between man and beast: it is overhung by a dark pall of the occult if not the supernatural. The setting is supposedly a gloomy estate in the Jersey woods behind the upper Palisades, but actually the events occur in some far off crepuscular land of romantic melodrama. All the elements, the style, the characters, the stage properties, are carefully selected to achieve an effect which at times seems coming within the author's grasp, but which in the end he unmistakably misses.

It is the style which is the most distinguished feature of the book: a style marked by genuine artistry in words and by a true poetic vision, yet often by an inability to distinguish between what is beautiful and what is merely precious. He writes of "the trusting of young plumules of corn in the dun fields of early June." He says of his heroine Janet that "there would be a lecherous muted whine in her orchestration." He describes midnight in the grisly old mansion as "gushing in, tripping up the yellow flame of the candle on the dresser, which wrestled gallantly with the dark invader, until in every corner of the lofty wainscoted chamber shadows hunched and reared and panted waiting their moment to pounce." As one dead body is carried away he speaks of "the coroner's grandmotherly clucking care." He describes how "in orpiment and filemot the pageant woods glowed"; how a girl sang a song that "fell in languid portamento through green chromatic intervals." It is striking, it is not infrequently effective, but its total effect is a bit false, and for those who regard style as something more than filigree-work with words, it is often more than a bit irritating.

So all-important is the atmosphere of brooding, phantasmal terror which the author invokes, that any brief summary of the action does a certain injustice to the book. It is sufficient to say that the central figures are the dark, necromantic master of Mordance Hall, named Richard Pride, its passionate, vehement, wanton mistress, his wife Miriam, their young daughter Janet, and Pride's assistant, Oscar Fitzalan, who tells the story; and that the element of mystery is furnished by Pride's secret wizardries in his hidden laboratory, while the element of conflict springs from Fitzalan's lustful intrigue with Miriam and his spiritual love for Janet. Pride is ostensibly carrying on an investigation into the subconscious memory, and trying to fill serried shelves with a record in minute detail of all his past sensations, emotions, and ideas, gleaned from the memory of seventy active years. We are given to understand that in reality he is experimenting not only with drugs, as a stimulus to memory, but with black art. In Miriam and Janet there crop out diverse traits of deviltry. To enrich the plot we have several hangers-on, including an assistant of Pride's who kills himself at a crucial moment, and a great dog Tod—"Tod. Death. What a forbidding name for a dog!" cries Fitzalan—who in the end fights a battle to the death with his master Pride. The final scene shows the indomitable Pride, the passionate Miriam, and the ugly brute Tod all stretched out stiff and stark, with Fitzalan (still uttering bursts of rhetorical preciosity) clasping Janet in his arms. We half expect Mordance Hall to sink, like another House of Usher, into some gloomy tarn, but it does not.

For reasons not difficult to analyze, the book

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does not quite come off. It is too obviously a hollow contrivance, a thing of stagey devices and artificial style. It fails to achieve a climax, for the reader quickly perceives that there is nothing really awe-inspiring in the activities of Pride in his "secret chamber." Yet even in its failure the book has qualities which inspire unusual respect.

Wives and Husbands

THREE WIVES. By BEATRICE KEAN SEYMOUR. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1927.

Reviewed by ELMER DAVIS

HERE is reason to be thankful for the stupidity of censors. "Three Wives" is one of the best novels that will be published this season; one does not need to read the others to predict that. Mrs. Seymour unites a bitterly clear perception with an exquisitely civilized sense of balance; she knows exactly what she is doing and exactly how to do it; her theme offers temptations to mawkish or hysterical excursions but she never loses her head. And she handles all her characters with a scrupulous, clear-eyed fairness; there are wives and husbands in this book for whom one is inclined to prescribe the sashweight as the only remedy, yet she forces the reader to confess that the worst of them are caught in a net not of their own weaving. Dreiser does this too, and perhaps more powerfully; but some of us are antique enough to prefer Mrs. Seymour's suave clarity to Dreiser's turgid flounderings. At least it is no crime to like them both.

Yet, if our watchdogs of public morals had any intelligence, they would suppress this book as tending to corrupt not only the morals but the morale of youth. For it is a critique of love and its workings, from which one is forced to draw the conclusion that the course of evolution which made the human race bisexual was a terrible mistake, that love is the gravest affliction that has ever befallen mankind. That will discourage romantic young people, if there are any of them left; and this dutifully anti-romantic generation will be equally distressed by the news that even though love is as bad as that you can't do without it—not mere casual passion, but the headlong, devastating, absolute love.

It is hard to imagine a more subversive doctrine. If young people believe this and act on it—and the whole justification of obscenity laws lies in the supposition that the behavior of young people is determined mainly by what they read in novels—they will either stop loving and reproducing, or at least will stop going into their love affairs with those high expectations whose momentum is responsible for most of what actually manages to get done, in this wasteful world. But fortunately our censors are concerned only with suppressing reports of the pleasure of love, not its pains, so Mrs. Seymour is safe from their ministrations; as far as reticence of language and situation goes "Three Wives" might have been written in 1899.

There are in fact four wives in the book, as well as a couple of widows, several mistresses, and some husbands; indeed "Three Wives" might well have been called "Dreadful Husbands" but for the fact that a title with women in it sells better. It is a matter of taste whether you find Michael Ross or Theodore Warren the most dreadful husband in the book; their faults were opposite, they are the North and South Poles of marital dreadfulness. Yet where is the perfect husband who stands precisely astraddle of the Equator, with not a touch in him of Theo Warren or Mickey Ross? Stella Halsey fell in love with Mickey so hard she never could fall out; and Mickey, with his "genius for collecting the second-rate," his need of feminine adulation, nevertheless loved nobody but his wife, as he always assured her after each of his affairs. Mickey was constantly unfaithful but never wanted to be; Stella, after she saw through him, wanted to be but never was.

Stella's sister Tony was hard and modern; she didn't believe in love, even before she saw what it was doing to Stella; yet she discovered eventually "that marriage without some justification, some passionate, adequate reason, was unbearable and always would be; that nothing would make up, no amount of mental sympathy or human friendliness." Her husband discovered that too; Mrs. Seymour seems to think better of Tony than of any of her other characters yet she is candid enough to make it clear that Tony was a good deal of a hellcat. Whereas Stella, the outmoded sentimentalist—just modern enough to know that she is a sentimentalist and that nothing can be done to bridge the gap between facts and her illusions—is the most admirable person in the book.

There are other wives and husbands, bound like Ixion to their respective wheels—and then just to prove that Mrs. Seymour, like her characters, is human and imperfect, there are the extra-marital admirers of Tony and Stella, who alone among the figures of the story look like something painted in because the composition required them at that point. But this, perhaps, was shrewd insight. One needs the relief of these sentimentalized characters in a book where all the other people are too real for comfort.

A Virile Talent

THE SENTIMENTALISTS. By DALE COLLINS. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1927. $2.

Reviewed by AMY LOVEMAN

MR. COLLINS has a fresh and vigorous talent, a swing of perception and a robustness of outlook that will not be denied. "The Sentimentalists" is in many ways a brutal book, but its brutality is relieved by an abiding belief in the propulsive power of sentiment, and lies in an unvarnished portrayal of surface uglinesses and not in sordidness of fancy or feeling. An admirable descriptive ability piles up a succession of sharply defined and pregnant impressions and conveys intangible values as certainly as concrete ones. There are pages where Mr. Collins's narrative fairly races, and where the swift sentences project upon the consciousness of the reader the very smells and thickness of the seething Malayan air, the brooding darkness of the tropical night, the immense silence of the sea. Personalities stand out with as powerful vitality as background, taking on bulk as well as character. The coarse, sweating, inarticulate Captain, the unwashed baby whose limpness surprises the hulking man into the one great tenderness of his life, the bleached mate whose drabness serves as foil for his arrogant masculinity, the girl whose better self yields to his surprising discernment of her character—these as well as minor figures that enter into the story are vividly and convincingly portrayed.

Where Mr. Collins is weakest is in the coincidences that carry his story to its resolution. This tale of the domination of a man and a woman by their mutual devotion to a baby, and of the crystallization in them through its influence of the sentimentality which in the case of the man lay unsuspected beneath the ruthlessness of his nature and in the woman had survived the hazards of a completely unmoral life, cuts through its difficulties a little fortuitously at the end. Life rarely produces so neat a conjunction of circumstances as that by which the Captain is enabled to retain his infant the while its mother still possesses it, and the girl whose affection for it went down before greater love for a man is enabled to reconcile surrender to the latter with duty to the former. It is not the emotions of the characters that are unconvincing, but certain of the situations into which they are forced. The sentimentality of his personalities Mr. Collins always make plausible; by frankly attaching a label to them he cuts the ground from under any criticism of them on that score. They are sentimentalists as are Bret Harte's rough miners of Roaring Camp, and like them convincing in their softer emotions as in their grosser ones. His story is occasionally far-fetched, and towards the end too obviously manipulated, but it is strong, honest, and virile.

Royalties received by an author from the selling, leasing, or renting of an intellectual product do not come within the legal meaning of "earned income," and are therefore not entitled to the 25 per cent reduction allowed by the law on "earned income," according to a ruling by A. W. Gregg, general counsel of the Internal Revenue Bureau, just announced.

Authors' earnings, Mr. Gregg held, must be classified for tax purposes as "unearned income" and must bear the full burden of taxation.

Money derived in the form of salary from newspapers is "earned" and the 25 per cent reduction applies to it.

Right of Sanctuary

THE BRIGHT THRESHOLD. By JANET RAMSAY. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1927. $2.

Reviewed by Nathalie Sedgwick Colby
Author of "Black Stream"

SINCE "Ulysses" put the material world out of fashion, the Stream of Consciousness novel has become more and more fluid. Frequently its processes are inchoate, resolving into a mess of words, out of which the reader is left to fish the plot and set the scenery.

As a relief it is good to turn to Janet Ramsay's second novel, "The Bright Threshold," whose lucid and well chosen English is unobtrusive—imposing no burden on the reader. Miss Ramsay does all the work for us, and moves Natalie Parkhurst, her heroine, in beautiful gradations from the tragic episode of her life in Paris with her mother, an American prima donna, to her struggle some years later in New York. There, in the home of the gentle egoist Mrs. Henry Warner, "who turns unpleasant truths into pleasant fallacies, and of such strawless bricks builds her false Paradise," Natalie's fate is entwined with that of Barclay Hammond, a pseudo-artist in life as well as in music. The letting-things-slide policy of Barclay takes its toll of Natalie: "Can't you understand . . . there's such a thing as spiritual rape?" she cries in despair, explaining her intimacy with him to Murray Abbott, who alone comprehends her artist's nature with its quick sympathies and its necessity for an austere retreat.

There is a vein of poetry running through this book, essentializing the people for us, and we build them for ourselves on their exposed skeletons; it gilds the commonplace so that a walk through the street on a hot summer day becomes a hymeneal with all of life, and it lifts an evening concert at the Metropolitan Museum, which Natalie shares with Barclay, very nearly out of prose:

> When the symphony began, faces lifted—clay flowering under a bright shaft of sound. The music seemed to draw its loveliness from all form and color gathered here; harmony flowing from curves of Grecian marble; twisted melodies like arabesques in chrysoprase and jade; pauses with the stern calmness of a bronze Buddha squatting on his pedestal; wood wind phrases breathing the color from a case of ancient Chinese pottery—tones glazed with violet, apple-green, and plum.

This book can be read aloud with profit, for there is no snag or hitch from beginning to end, with such golden intricacy do the words blend aspects with significance. Parallel with the circumstance of Natalie's life goes the spiritual equivalent of her passionate soul, searching always for the integrity of the inner chamber of herself, over whose bright threshold she can only cross when illusion is left outside. There she must always be alone. And it is on this haunting note of eternal solitariness that the book closes.

The Albatross Afoot

MARCO MILLIONS. By EUGENE O'NEILL. New York: Boni & Liveright. 1927. $2.50.

Reviewed by MARY CASS CANFIELD

EUGENE O'NEILL exists in our theatre as a creative talent with some of the unconsciousness and even awkwardness which often accompanies the gestures of those whom Emerson calls "the self-moved, the absorbed." His blasting sincerity, his passion and understanding, expressed in high and tense dramatic form, must mark him as an artist who stands alone; behind his bitter poetry, his turmoil of feeling, his sense of the strife and search in living, we see a fire that perhaps cruelly consumes him but is at the same time a beacon light to those who watch. However, it is noticeable that his productions have been uneven, the fitful flame burning now high, now low. His dark absorption flows naturally toward the morbid and grotesque; and there are moments when his intensity scarcely avoids the ridiculous.

One is reminded of Baudelaire's symbolic poem "The Albatross." Here, the poet is pictured as akin to the great white bird, so beautiful in flight, so hampered and laughable when, once captured, he must tread the earth among men.

> Shelley, the star enchanted, stumbled when he walked.

The parable can apply to O'Neill. It is useless to expect from this urgent and single-minded talent that balance which we call taste or that careful sophistication which avoids excesses; useless to hope

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