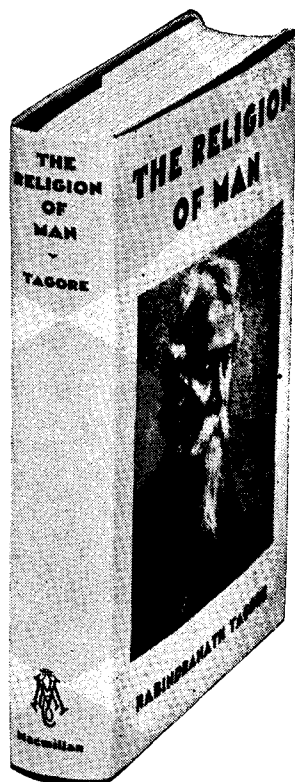


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## THE MYSTERIOUS MADAME

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## Round about Parnassus

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

THE most valuable American poetry recently revived, as one might say, is in Robert Morss Lovett's editing of the *Selected Poems of William Vaughn Moody*. It is hard to praise too highly what Professor Lovett has done. He has indubitably preserved the best not only of Moody's individual poems but also of the songs and lyrical passages in Moody's poetic dramas. He has written an introduction which gives us an intimate and vivid view of the man and places him definitely, both with reference to his own time and to the present. The editor notes that he has drawn freely upon Professor Manly's introduction to the two-volume edition of Moody and upon Daniel Gregory Mason's "Some Letters of William Vaughn Moody," but he has also conveyed with admirable clarity his own personal view of the man and the poet. And his tracing of the sources of many of Moody's poems, of his chief influences, of the lines along which his genius was progressing, is exceptionally interesting.

Professor Lovett's introduction is not rhapsodic, in spite of his deep affection for one who was an intimate and dear friend. He keeps the poet in perspective. He gives us the man as he lived. Moody was constantly growing in poetic power. Primarily a scholar, with the tendency to derive his themes from literature rather than from life, his life ended just at the time when he might reasonably have been expected to put forth his most significant and individual work; which is not to say that he did not leave us poems of distinctive craftsmanship and spirited nobility. His contribution to American poetry was a most notable one. Three American poets prior to him, and three only, may be called great: Emerson, Whitman, and Poe. There is the accent of greatness in some of Moody's own utterances. Moreover, he was a severe critic of his own work and has, as Professor Lovett notes, left us less dross amid the pure metal than several poets who were greater.

This single volume of Moody's best cried to be done, and we are fortunate to have it done so extremely well. It should be the definitive introduction to a poet who was also just coming into his own in the drama. One may then go on to read the delightful letters and the more extended work. Moody attempted greatly. Certain phrases in his rhetoric ring like old counters now, but the exercise of his imagination was a daring one, and again and again he snared the precise epithet, the distinguished expression of exalted feeling. Moreover, he communicated with perfect clarity what was in his mind and heart; and in a day when poetry was, or seemed to be, of but the very slightest interest to American readers, he persevered as one of the elect to perfect his own gift, driven by his genuine daemon. Houghton, Mifflin publishes this volume.

In *The Marriage Feast* (Macmillan), Alice Brown, one of our veteran writers, presents a fantasy of the struggle between soul and body as she conceives it in the life of a human being. Dealing with these personifications, and with a speaking Presence that she introduces, it seems to us that she lacks the power over extraordinary language which alone could render so phantasmal an argument successful in execution. Phrase, throughout, appears to us a mere "poetic" dilution. There is the almost constant use of expressions which in this day and generation seem to have worn away their significance. When the poet speaks, for instance, of "that sweet silvery boskage which is heaven," we cannot avoid grief at the inanity. This danger of the outworn "poetic" expression was one that even Moody himself did not always manage to avoid, but in most instances his power to vivid visualization and his sharp, discriminative ear saved him from it.

From Cheshire House comes to us an exceptionally beautiful edition of Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, with an introduction by Edmund Blunden and illustrations by H. Charles Tomlinson. Mr. Blunden's introduction is, needless to say, admirable written. The romantic literary background of Coleridge's time and the history of the poem's revisions are described with shrewd though gentle humor. The implications of the poem for our own time are indicated intelligently. A passing tribute is naturally paid to Professor Lowes for "The Road to Xanadu." The peculiar style of Mr. Tomlinson's illustrations seems to us to sort with the nature of the poem. The cover of the book, also the work of Mr. Tomlinson, is particularly fine. Of course, like so many, we were brought up on Gustav Doré's illustrations for "The Ancient Mariner,"

and we never can think of it without seeing before us the work of that strange nightmare artist. The present volume is, however, one of distinction in respect to all those enlisted to make it a work of art.

From Harper & Brothers comes *Best College Verse 1931*, edited by Jessie Rehder. Christopher Morley has contributed to it a brief preface. He finds that

The women are doing better work (in this kind at least) than the men. Without any preconceptions of any kind I ticked off the things that interested me most in reading this book. I marked seventeen; and of these, thirteen were by women contributors.

He cites one particular poem without naming the author, a poem he read in *The Saturday Review of Literature*. We will name the author, who is Edward Doro, of the University of Pennsylvania, his poem being entitled "Tonight in Philadelphia," and of considerable originality. Also it is to be expected that we should like the two poems here presented by Frances Jennings of the University of Michigan, because we have a particular weakness for poems about animals. So we were drawn to her "Thunderstorm at the Zoo," and "The Heavenly Pagan." Also we have been taken by certain verses of Audrey Wurdemann's of the University of Washington, and feel the promise of Richard Ely Morse of Amherst and William Kimball Flaccus of Dartmouth. Maynard Mack of Yale, in his "Epithalamium," touches true beauty. Elsewhere there are other poems of promise. The book ends with a poem characteristically young, "I Remember," which yet contains an observation true to the nature of all poets. The stirrings of winged imagination cause the writer to declare, "I remember Things I have never known," which may sound like nonsense to the prosaic mind, but is the pith of much good poetry:

*But I remember the falling waters,  
I remember the funeral pyre,  
I remember the River's daughters  
Dancing to Phæbus' lyre,  
I remember the Persian slaughters,  
And Priam's city afire.*

It is, after all, as it was in our own time! Actual life will set other themes, but the drama of older history will still cause youth to exult.

We wish to list the following volumes as having been given our attention without their seeming important enough for extended comment:

THE ROUND TABLE. By GEORGENE DAVIS. Rutland, Vermont: The Tory Press. \$2.

This, the first publication of the Tory Press, is limited to 300 copies of which 200 are for sale. The author, a New Yorker, is nineteen years old and this is her first book. The play, which is closet drama, is in prose but is poetically conceived. Condensed episodes from the Arthurian story are handled in modern dialogue. There is no inconsiderable promise in the imaginative power displayed and the naturalness of the dialogue. The youth of the author is evident in the youthful psychology of her characters. Guinevere is but a charming girl, Gawain an equally charming and gallant boy. Arthur seems hardly older. Yet, anachronistic though it is, there is a refreshing quality to Miss Davis's writing, an originality of conception that argues well for whatever further work she may do.

ABDUL: An Allegory. By ARMISTEAD KEITH BAYLOR. Privately printed by Edna Ellis Baylor as a Memorial of the Author.

Set forth as an Eastern apologue, this narrative tells of the quest of Youth for Wisdom and Happiness, guided by elder counsel and taught by experience. The verse is monotonous.

CHISELED IN AIR. By CATHERINE M. BRESNAN. Literary Publications, 580 Fifth Avenue, New York. \$2.

Some of these poems have already appeared in periodicals. The general run of verses in the volume is mediocre.

WHISTLE OF DAY. By RUTH EVELYN HENDERSON. Atlanta, Georgia: The Bortz Press. \$1.50.

Here again is verse that has appeared in a number of magazines. But the author knows something about the natures of children and occasionally has a nice humorous touch. The longest poem in the book is a "domestic epic."



## The New Books

The books listed by title only in the classified list below are noted here as received. Many of them will be reviewed later.

### Archaeology

THE CHILDREN OF MU. By James Churchward. Ives Washburn. \$3.

### Biography

PARNELL VINDICATED. By Henry Harrison. Richard R. Smith. \$5.  
SHERIDAN: A GHOST STORY. By E. M. Butler. Richard R. Smith, Inc. \$4.  
BULWER: A PANORAMA. I. Edward and Rosina, 1803-1836. By Michael Sadleir. Boston: Little, Brown. \$4.  
FLYING DUTCHMAN: THE LIFE OF FOKKER. By Anthony H. G. Fokker and Bruce Gould. Holt. \$3.  
WHEN DANA WAS THE SUN. By Charles J. Rosebault. McBride. \$3.75.

### Drama

THE DYNASTS. By Thomas Hardy. New One Volume Edition. Macmillan. \$4.50.  
SHORT PLAYS. Edited by Edwin Van B. Knickerbocker. Holt.  
THE CONTEMPORARY DRAMA OF ENGLAND. By Thomas H. Dickinson. Boston: Little, Brown. \$2.50.  
MIRACLE AT VERDUN. By Hans Schlumberg. Brentano. \$2.

### Education

"COPY!" By Donald D. Hoover. Crowell. \$2.50.  
YOUR SON AND MINE. By John T. McGovern. Stokes. \$2.  
WEAVING THE SHORT STORY. By Douglas Bement. Richard R. Smith, Inc. \$3.  
HORAS VIVIDAS. Selections from the Verse and Prose of Antonio Heras. Edited by S. L. Millard Rosenberg and Homer Price Earle. University of Chicago Press.

### Fiction

BLIND MAN'S MARK. By MARTIN ARMSTRONG. Harcourt, Brace. 1931. \$2.50.

Mr. Armstrong's previous books, "The Sleeping Fury" and "The Fiery Dive," have made him known as a writer who can command an emotional intensity, and who possesses a style which is poetic without being in the least mannered, which achieves the beautiful paradox of the clearest water, whose translucence, one would say, is so perfect that it is all but invisible, and yet one whose beauty is always perceptible. It is an enviable reputation; but "Blind Man's Mark," which would be a good novel if it were by a worse author, will not add to it.

It is another story of the sensitive, unusual, unhappy adolescent. There are various influences brought to bear on him; his grandfather is a celebrated poet, perhaps the last of the great Victorian literary figures, and tries to guide his mind; the hero all through his school days makes himself unhappy by a passionate yet inarticulate adoration for a fellow-schoolboy who has nothing in him but the mere animal charm of high spirits and a pretty face; and so on. There is plenty of material to form a character and to bring the character to a crisis, but not much is made of it. The hero remains designedly unformed, groping, fumbling,—the blind man of the title; it is not until the last few pages that he takes definite aim at his mark.

This theme of the ineffectual adolescent has been almost worked out in the last twenty years, and is by its nature especially unfortunate for Mr. Armstrong. His gift is for the definite, the clear, the hard; in the shadowy limbo of a troubled schoolboy's mind he is not at home. In some of its minor parts, the book manages to be excellent; some of the other characters achieve the vividness that the hero lacks, and there are many interesting ideas propounded in the conversations; but that is the most that can be said. Even the style, while quite unexceptionable, has lost its crystalline perfection. This is, perhaps, a book that many of our authors are bound to write, in order to clear their own souls and make a way for the next book; but in itself it is a disappointment.

MULATTO JOHNNY. By ALIN LAUBREAU. Translated from the French by COLEY TAYLOR. Dutton. 1931. \$2.50.

The chief character of this bizarre South Sea tale is Johnny the half-breed, son of a French sailor and the Kanaka girl with whom he lives in the village of Noumea, principal settlement of New Caledonia. As Johnny grows to robust young manhood, the heritage from his mother's race dominates over that side of his nature which stems from the paternal strain, and he attains his illiterate majority in every respect, physically and mentally, the embodiment of a

full-blooded savage. Ignorant, unmoral, and impulsive, he kills a man in a brawl, and in consequence is forced to flee the island. He is stranded among cannibals in New Hebrides, with them unwittingly eats human flesh, falls in love there with a captive half-breed girl and is at length transported with a labor battalion of aborigines, recruited by the British, to Australia. In Brisbane, his immense strength attracts the attention of a high civil official with sporting hobbies, and by him Johnny is groomed as challenger of the Australian heavyweight boxing champion. But the momentous meeting between the two fighters ends abruptly in Johnny's attacking his opponent jungle fashion, and being barred thereafter, in disgrace, from ever re-entering the ring. Still untouched beneath the surface by his contacts with white men's civilization, as completely primitive as when he left Noumea twelve years before, Johnny seeks refuge in his birthplace and gratefully reverts to the level of his mother's people. As it is developed, the basic idea of the story seems to lose significance and suffer from frequent heavy-handedness of treatment, which deprives the book of full effectiveness and discredits the suggestion of inevitability which the author obviously intended to convey.

JOHNNY BOGAN. By LEONORA BACCANTE. Vanguard. 1931. \$2.

This is a story of consuming passion, sparingly told, exciting, intense, and convincing. In a dreary town where intelligence rates low and small conventionalities establish social standing, Johnny Bogan, son of a slattern and a shoemaker, braves his way through school without a friend—without any one to speak to outside his unbelievably ugly home, until after his futile father kills his mother, when he doesn't have anyone to speak to even there. Stared at and steered clear of, he stays on proudly in the shanty at the edge of the town. For lack of another home, he lives alone in the room where the murder was committed.

That love should come to him in his fearful isolation is like the heavens being rent apart, and an angel descending. Disorderly houses, the excitement of debauch, the satisfaction of repairing a car in the garage, were all that Johnny had come to expect of life. But a certain sensitiveness to beauty, buried deep within him, had never died. As a child he had wandered by the river's edge, and delighted in the reeds and the soft splash of water, the overhanging trees and the birds. In books he had found something that nourished it. So that now, at twenty, when a girl from the town, a "nice" girl, small, delicate, clear-cut like a cameo, thrusts herself into his existence, his fervor, once roused, rises to the heights of poetry.

It is his worship and passion for her that makes up the novel. The girl has picked her perfect mate with unerring directness. And for the boy the dimly imagined beauty of life becomes actual. For the first time he knows companionship, fun, merriment, the exquisiteness of fire and the coolness of peace, intimacy of mind as well as body. Every night is happiness undreamed of. . . . And every day is the same old ugly town—where she passes him by without recognition.

While the girl with the calmness of a deity thus arranges order and peace to please herself, jealousy and rage tear the boy's life apart. Ungovernable words and a rash irrevocable marriage hasten on the tragedy. For all her sureness of herself, her aloofness and her intelligence, the girl can go only so far. Against such a heritage of intensity and uncontrol she is eventually impotent. She has breathed magnificence into an animal, and when she withdraws it, the animal devours her.

The story remains realistic throughout, never melodramatic, nor sentimental, its clarity blurred only in the girl's swift twist at the end—which it is hardly fair to the reader to disclose. One has to pause over that end—and even then one does not know. Maybe it is inevitable.

THAT ROYAL LOVER. By KONRAD BERCOVICI. Brewer & Warren. 1931. \$2.50.

Writing as a fervent and embittered Rumanian patriot, Konrad Bercovici here scathingly arraigns and condemns the misrule and exploitation of his native land by the successive sovereigns of the Hohenzollern dynasty who, beginning with King Carol I, have occupied the throne of Rumania during the past fifty years. But it is

(Continued on next page)

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