

Fable, Fantasy, and Pagan Pipes

GARGANTUA'S MOUTH. By Royal Murdoch. New York: The Fine Edition Press. 1947. 108 pp. \$2.50.

RIP VAN WINKLE'S DREAM. By Jeannette Michael Haien. New York: Doubleday & Co. 1947. 95 pp. \$2.50.

A LITTLE TREASURY OF GREAT POETRY. Edited by Oscar Williams. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1947. 766 pp. \$3.75.

DARK OF THE MOON. Edited by August Derleth. New York: Arkham House. 1947. 418 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by ALFRED KREYMBORG

ROYAL MURDOCH, born in California about fifty years ago, and a fur-cutter by trade, has borrowed the title of his first book of poems from Celia in "As You Like It": "You must borrow me Gargantua's Mouth first: 'tis a word too great for any mouth of this age's size." While the poet does not meet this injunction throughout and his work is uneven, he makes his public bow with disarming exuberance. His virtues are pagan rather than Christian and reveal an absolute fondness for nudity, physical or mental. There is a poem on our latest craze existentialism, a surrealist sequence, a war group, lyrics and sonnets, ballads and translations, and a vein of hearty satire for which he might be suppressed by respectable citizens—vide "The Disrobing," "A Poem About Democracy," "Atomic Bomb." And academic sonneteers will question the subject and style of "Sick-Night Sonnet":

I have, you have, and we and they
and it:
There is the verb that you must conjugate
If you would be a credit to the state
And not be known as useless and unfit:
So gather in the talons of your wit
And strike for dollars, let them be
your fate:
Beauty then will bed with you for
mate,
And at your dinner kings and queens
will sit.
But if you choose to dwell among the
poor
And pass your days with those who
have no bread
And little raiment to keep the cold
away,
Your lips will never kiss the Kohi-
noor,
Nor when you die will very much be
said
Nor priests make pause to genuflect
and pray.

Jeannette Michael Haien's "Rip Van Winkle's Dream," which received the annual Avery Hopwood Award, will

prove disappointing to lovers of narrative poetry. First of all it suffers by comparison with Irving's poetic fable in prose and by its failure to surmount Poe's judgment against any long poem. Whenever it touches on nature, or the background of Rip's long dream, the style is more certain and the versification as well. Yet even here there is much too much nature and not enough human nature. There is also the type of philosophy which, as Goethe observed, obscured and ruined many good poets in the past, German or otherwise. And since the old Olympian was aware of this tendency in himself, his word is an excellent warning to other philosophic poets.

There is no end to the craze for further anthologies, or for books designed for larger public consumption. And as long as Palgrave's "Golden Treasury" heads the popular list there will always be attempts to surpass it in taste, if not in sales. The industrious Oscar Williams has now followed up "A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry" with the companion "A Little Treasury of Great Poetry," containing more than 500 "great" English and American poems of seven centuries, designed for the reader "whose purpose in buying a book of this sort is to have a convenient volume that allows for constant reading wherever he may be." The volume is arranged under various headings so the reader may "find interest in different treatments of different themes" by poets from different ages, and closes with "A Little Treasury of Jaberwocky," a generous selection of nonsense verse in the shadow of Lewis Carroll. Oscar Williams has solved the dilemma of all anthologists "by putting in his own favorites," a choice to which he is entitled. But the choice of the title "great" is far too pretentious and sweeping and breaks down under detailed examination. There are poems here which are great indeed, and others which are good or not so good, and things which aren't poetry at all.

August Derleth, another industrious poet, has edited an anthology, "Dark of the Moon," which is confined to



poems of fantasy and the macabre, a fascinating theme in any age. In his modest introduction, he reveals that the largest market for poets today may be found in magazines entirely devoted to these and kindred themes. The book is composed of border ballads and of poems by cultivated poets whose work in extending balladry into art rarely equals or surpasses the primitive minstrels. A good deal of space is given to some half dozen contributors to the magazine *Weird Tales*, and to some eight pages by the editor, a specialist in this field. The best of our youthful balladists, Byron Herbert Reece, is likewise included. There are, however, a number of notable absentees who might well have enhanced the volume by replacing a number of "weak sisters." Yet the book is attractive enough to be worthy of private or market-place readers.

A Valid Talent

THE SILVER FAWN. By David Russell. Dallas, Texas: The Kaleidograph Press. 1946. 92 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by I. L. SALOMON

POET-LAUREATES are always endangering poetry; their commemorative verses have great heart and little else to commend them. David Russell, the representative of Texas by legislative enactment, is no exception. "The Silver Fawn," the latest of three books in four years, is overwritten; the devotional and anniversary pieces are decidedly old hat. And that is a pity, for David Russell is a poet who can achieve a splendid image; he is at his best in the brief lyric.

The title-poem has several fine stanzas; a little sharper self-criticism would eliminate a trite phrase or two; and the poem would then come into its own as an example of what David Russell can do, for he can create a mood. He does so in "Twilight on Matagorda Bay," concluding with "silver is the wonder/That over me comes rolling."

In the regional poems he is not averse to using a line from "America the Beautiful": "from sea to shining sea"; and he has no objection to substituting plural pronouns in Emerson's fine line in "The Problem": "he builded better than he knew."

Despite his enthusiasm for the Lone Star State, David Russell should not permit his heart to overwhelm his mind. George Santayana and Robert P. Tristram Coffin have attested to the validity of his talent; he should keep to the short lyric and not disappoint them.

Chinese Orphan

MR. ON LOONG. By Robert Standish. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1947. 326 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by ANN F. WOLFE

ROBERT STANDISH is a prose stylist and a story-teller extraordinary. He has a deft hand for local color and an original touch in blending humor, charm, and excitement. He knows how to balance low life and high adventure.

The hero of Mr. Standish's new book is John On Loong, son of a Chinese laundryman in the West Indies. Orphaned at twelve, John is cast adrift on the tides of class distinction and race prejudice. He is the only member of his race on a small island ruled by the English and served by Negroes. To the former he is an inferior, to the latter an intruder.

In flight from a schoolmaster who orders him to believe in the catechism without comprehending it, the boy meets Captain Pierre Lorillard. In port Pierre is the traditional carousing sailor; aboard his schooner he is a philosopher and a scholar. He becomes a second father to the orphan, guiding him into commercial life and helping him in the slow climb to business leadership and a position of dignity and honor in the Caribbean community.

The story opens in 1913 and closes soon after the death of John's aviator son in the Second World War. The hero's life is closely involved with the career of Pierre's Martinique mistress and that of her daughter Laurette. Both ladies are warm-blooded, aphrodisiac, and skilled in the arts of vengence. Laurette, no believer in art for art's sake, makes an international success of her social talents. Her Hollywood-ending reformation is the major flaw in the book.

"Mr. On Loong" was written primarily—and successfully—for entertainment. Yet for all the frangipani, the palms and the trade winds, the reader must face class and racial conflict in the West Indies, peasant starvation in China, decadence and corruption in Europe's high places. The author's quiet satire overlooks neither the immemorial ways of American cruise tourists nor the tragi-comic Colonel Blimps.

To one reader, the most memorable character in the book is John's father, the laundryman. "He loved the long free strokes of the iron, the sense of well-being which came as the dull matt surface surrendered to gleaming ribbons of splendor. . . ." If that is not occupational poetry, it is at least notable writing.

**"Gabrielle Roy's story
of love in Montreal
will be read
in many a hammock
this summer,"
says *Newsweek***



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