

between book covers. I like best the second section of this poem, probably because it seems to bring me closest to the experience frozen in it. "The formal re-creation of art . . . freezes the experience," as Tate says of the "Ode to the Confederate Dead"—still, for all its half-disclosures, one of the remarkable poems of our century.

## In Erin's Step-Tongue

THE COURSE OF IRISH VERSE IN ENGLISH. By Robert Farren. New York: Sheed & Ward. 1947. 171 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ANN F. WOLFE

THE TRUE Irish poet is not one of John Bull's other rhymers. Even though he write in English, he has a racial tradition to follow in spirit and theme, a Gaelic prosody through which to Irishize the music and gait of his metres. Irish-born Goldsmith and MacNeice, writing in the English tradition, are not Irish poets. Robert Farren is, and he knows every aspect of Irish poetry.

In "The Course of Irish Verse" Mr. Farren surveys the poetry of the English-writing Irishmen who took over after the Gaelic order disintegrated. He traces the growth of their Irishness from eighteenth-century beginnings in English translations from the Gaelic and the English verse of anonymous hedge-schoolmasters. As he carries his subject on up to Colum, Stephens, F. R. Higgins, Clarke, and the other Irish poets of today, he treats not only the poets and translators who contributed to the development of Ireland's literary separatism, but those who should have and failed to. He lays emphasis on the phenomenal originality and metrical virtuosity of Mangan and the "total Irishness" of Higgins and Clarke.

Thomas Moore was the first important Irishman whose English verse sang Irishly. Influenced by traditional music, he wrote a few lyrics that were racial in mood and metrical pattern. In the "general body of his graceful, dainty, but un-Irish poetry" there was maturity and dignity, a break from the sentimentality of mock-Irish rhymes about dear little shamrocks and the convivial charms of whisky.

By the early nineteenth century native themes were setting "the track of the Gael" on the poetry of Ireland's step-language. The countryman's Catholicism as it conflicted with his belief in fairy magic found literary voice in John Keegan's folk-speech verse. In Ferguson and Allingham "country spiritism" integrated its rather other-worldly overtones with

"the sweet, wild twist of Irish song."

Mangan, foremost of the English-writing poets before Yeats, had a racy instinct for lyrical eloquence and sensuous metre. His appreciation of Gaelic poetry was of inestimable value to the translation movement. Some of Mangan's—and Ireland's—best poems are his versions from the Irish.

With Yeats Irish literature crystallized into a movement. In analyzing the poetry of Yeats and his colleague, Mr. Farren does not lose sight of their vital public relations service in bringing Irish letters to the attention of the world.

"The Course of Irish Verse" is a key piece of literary criticism badly in need of an index. The author quotes generously and comments brilliantly, if not always temperately. In his Swiftian approach there is racial psychoanalysis. Some may find this Irishman unreasonable, but few unreadable.

Mr. Farren's poets stand or fall on literary nativeness. He is pretty hard on the "fine fellows" and "grandeers" who left Ireland's pearly half-lights for "the false Italianate sunshine of English poetry." Neither *Zeitgeist* nor circumstance excuses "those vexatious



Robert Farren's dictum: "Dig Irish earth—or else."

Irishmen, cultural emigrés who went versioning the divers dialects of Europe and Asia while an older poetry than most wanted service at home." Famous heads roll at his dictum: dig Irish earth—or else.

## Poetry and Physics

By Gorden Link

THE RE is minuscule pause at the junction of four dimensions when the poem suspends itself in time and space with abstract edges touching no ganglion's end or thing or shadow of thinking.

At this infinitesimal delay in the torrents of time and the cataracts of curving space that mate to spawn infinity, the poem is ignorant of self or form or destiny or pulse or sound.

It might emerge heroic from this fractional log jam of history as sermon or music or design or dream, and only God who owes His being Himself to this intricate phenomenon can know how many poems stipple our past disguised as symphonies or steeples or religious revivals or the staring skulls of dream upon the sands that bury half-remembered races.

And this is well: if a poem survived from every impulse man has had to fossilize himself in song, our heritage from history would be mounds of memorial star-high and eternity-wide; the topheavy world would stagger through the dark uninhabited and cold and doomed to never ending unawareness of man's capacity for constructing nonconformist deities, for translating tribal rhythms into a way of life, for splitting hairs and infinitives and atoms.



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## Vibrant Originality

THE GOOD EUROPEAN. By Richard Blackmur. Cummington, Mass.: The Cummington Press. 1947. 40 pp. \$5.

Reviewed by DUDLEY FITTS

IF IT WERE only for the third section of "Three Poems from a Text: Isaiah LXI: 1-3," an elegy called "A Garment of Praise for the Spirit of Heaviness," Mr. Blackmur's new book would be a contribution of signal importance to American poetry. As it happens, the elegy need not stand alone: there is nothing here that is not ponderable, and much that is as moving, philosophically (not, perhaps, so bitterly compelling), as that poem. The writing, not least in the two sets of epigrams, "Scarabs for the Living," is nervous, extraordinarily complex in texture, and urgent with a kind of religious New England cantankerousness that one has scarcely heard in contemporary verse since the too-early death of John Wheelwright—not that I mean to imply that Mr. Blackmur derives from Wheelwright (the debt, if it exists, must surely be reckoned the other way around), but that the vibrant originality of the one stirs memories of the other, *discordes concordantes*. A comparison of Mr. Blackmur's "Three Poems from a Text" with Wheelwright's elegy on Hart Crane, "Fish Food," will illustrate what I am getting at: no poems could be less alike, yet they both, with clean violence, exacerbate the memory of the dead and take the reader's imagination by surprise. I am saying, in



—From "Tim Murphy, Morgan Rifleman."

short, that Mr. Blackmur, extraordinarily difficult though he can be, is a poet *sui generis*; and the *genus* is rare and important.

For the first time in my experience, I feel that I must comment on the typography of a book of verse. Mr. Victor Hammer's American Uncial is a strikingly beautiful font—it seems to be based largely on the Irish alphabet—but it is extraordinarily hard to decipher. It is a question whether it is well suited to poems like Mr. Blackmur's, which demand undistracted attention. It is difficult enough to have to work one's way through the lines, weighing every word, without having the extra task of worrying over each letter as in reading a medieval manuscript. For once, typographical beauty clogs understanding.

## A New Hero

TIM MURPHY, MORGAN RIFLEMAN AND OTHER BALLADS. By A. M. Sullivan. New York: The Declan X. McMullen Co., Inc. Illustrated by Howard S. Zoll. 1947. 219 pp. \$3.75.

Reviewed by MARTHA KELLER

NOT LONG ago my sister, returning to her Greenwich Village apartment with her arms full of books and bundles, found the doorway to her apartment house barricaded by a couple of orange crates and two small boys with cap pistols. The bundles were heavy, so she said, "Sorry, boys, but I just have to get through." The older boy, about eight, said, "That's all right, we have to scout for redskins anyway." The four-year-old added, "And the thmoke from the redthkinths' camp."

That incident should not only be proof enough that Daniel Boone and Davie Crockett, Kit Carson, and Sam Brady still survive—but should warm the heart of A. M. Sullivan who has just added a new hero to the great company of American scouts. And all of us who love Americana are much in debt to Mr. Sullivan for the addition. For his new book, "Tim Murphy, Morgan Rifleman and Other Ballads" tells the story of a most fascinating and energetic rifleman whose deeds were fully as memorable and remarkable as those of Boone himself, though less generally known. Mr. Sullivan is a highly competent verse writer rather than a greatly gifted one, but he has magnificent material to work with and wonderful adventures to relate. And though some of his rhymes seem forced, and his verse sometimes has about it a certain pedestrian monotony—he manages to sustain on a pretty high level a narrative of considerable complexity and length. This is no mean achievement.

Moreover the book contains another ballad, a minor gem of the first water. I refer to "Ballad of a Man Named Smith," which states the case for and against the minor writer both with brilliance and penetration and with irony and wit. Technically its derivation from "The Ancient Mariner" is obvious. Spiritually and intellectually it is original with Mr. Sullivan. And because its point of view is fresh and honest and unique, and because its execution is expert in the extreme—it deserves to be as durable as the durable name it celebrates. I recommend it without qualification to any writer whose dream exceeds his grasp, i.e., to any honest man.

Martha Keller has been acclaimed for her ballads of American history.

## To a Poet Who Feels Neglected

By William Justema

AS YOU say, what is the good the use  
of breaking your heart daily,  
of managing to endure, but hardly  
by practising every ruse  
so that poetry may obtain.

There is something stubborn in nature  
and poetry is the crux of it,  
yet how should beauty be revealed  
if everyone seizes upon  
and confuses it?

In neglect lies our substance and power  
which may vanish as insensibly  
as they were given to us  
as to others who loudly abuse  
that which makes poets of poets.

I imagine that blind Homer also,  
not seeing the upturned faces,  
often fretted with loneliness  
singing out into a night  
which was day somewhere and forever.