

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.

Weighing Worksheets

POETS AT WORK. By Rudolf Arnheim, W. H. Auden, Karl Shapiro, Donald A. Stauffer. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1948. 186 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by ROBERT HILLYER

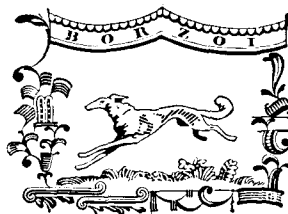
IT WOULD be impossible to review this book adequately without duplicating it in length. The best one can do is to give a brief summary of its contents which consist of essays based on the modern poetry collection of the Lockwood Memorial Library of the University of Buffalo.

Charles D. Abbott, the onlie begetter of the collection of poets' worksheets at the University of Buffalo, leads off with an account of his adventures in gathering them. He found the poets more responsive and generous than anyone would expect, which is a tribute to his personality as well as his acumen. His essay reflects the learned enthusiasm of his aim, and includes, among other things, interesting tales of the poets and their habitats.

Donald A. Stauffer examines the manuscripts with a view to determining the differing impulses and methods of the poets in making their revisions, a subject well adapted to his alert critical understanding. Karl Shapiro continues the examination with especial reference to Spender, Williams, and Crane. His criticism works in the opposite direction from Mr. Stauffer's; that is, from the poet's mind outward to the manuscript. Rudolf Arnheim, with less citation from the collection, analyzes the psychology of the poetical process with an exactness that invites civilized dissent and discussion. W. H. Auden's observations are wholly enchanting. They are a series of notes on poetry in general. Heartily agreeing with everything he says, I find him wise and humorous, profound and witty. His ideas are just right; his prose is delightful. Furthermore, in these days of lugubrious length, what could be more refreshing than a series of crisp paragraphs, each complete in itself? In conclusion, I should add that Samuel P. Chapin, the chancellor of the University of Buffalo (Continued on page 43)

LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

1. Robert Browning. 2. Lord Byron. 3. Thomas Campbell. 4. Coleridge. 5. Antoine D'Arcy. 6. Edward Fitzgerald. 7. Bret Harte. 8. John Hay. 9. Felicia Hemans. 10. John Keats. 11. Rudyard Kipling. 12. Henry W. Longfellow. 13. John Masfield. 14. Joaquin Miller. 15. John Milton. 16. Edgar Allan Poe. 17. Alan Seeger. 18. William Shakespeare. 19. Alfred Tennyson. 20. Oscar Wilde.



The Collected Tales of A. E. Coppard

WITH A PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR

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—CLIFTON FADIMAN, *Book of the Month Club News*

☞ "Mr. Coppard is almost the first English writer to get into English prose the peculiar quality of English lyric poetry. I do not mean that he is metrical; I mean that hitherto no English prose writer has had the fancy, the turn of imagination, the wisdom, the as it were piety, and the beauty of the great seventeenth-century lyricists like Donne or Herbert—or even Herrick." —FORD MADDOX FORD

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