

craft an incisive knowledge of men living in his time and before him. In his brilliant psychological study, "The Hamlet of A. MacLeish," he probes himself as poet and man, and at odds with the materialism of the world, he makes poetic order out of the chaos within him. In "Conquistador," the Pulitzer Prize poem for 1932, he chronicles the conquest of Mexico in an epic of nearly great proportion. In the strong beat of its terza rima stanzas there is a solidity of texture that alternates felicitously with a lyrical assonance few modern poets have been able to master. Lines like "Time done is dark as are sleep's thickets" and "I: poor as I am: I was young in that country" give a quickening sense of immediacy. Mr. MacLeish, an old romantic given to nostalgia, can be spare, clear, lean as any classicist.

If "The Hamlet" is personal and "Conquistador" historical, the sensibilities of a generation's thinking appear in "America Was Promises." This, the "Frescoes," and portions of "Public Speech" make a unity.

It is in his personal idiom as a lyricist that Mr. MacLeish will endure. He has already given stature to many anthologies by such poems as "You, Andrew Marvell," a model of classic design, the "Ars Poetica," an imagist poem with a credo not completely adhered to, "The End of the World," a statement of finalities by a modern, and in "Invocation to the Social Muse," an admirable resolution in poetry of the frenzy of the era. He has written other lyrics not so well known in his "New Poems" and in three of his significant volumes, "Streets of the Moon" (1928), "New Found Land" (1930), and "Active" (1948). These are sufficient to insure

his permanence beyond our time, for they have in common with his New England poems and his lyrics of friendship the right touch of authenticity.

In "Not Marble nor the Gilded Monuments," he invests his love theme with delicate tenderness, but begins with the unexpected

The praisers of women in their  
proud and beautiful poems  
Naming the grave mouth and the  
hair and the eyes  
Boasted those they loved should be  
forever remembered  
These were lies

In "Jesuitical Advice to a Senator," he displays an irony in parallel antithesis as he adjures the gentleman to

Make truth a lie  
and truth will not be by  
for men to find  
with freedom of the mind:  
When freedom of the mind  
is free to find  
no truth but only lie  
Freedom will die

The "Collected Poems" of Archibald MacLeish is a major work, even if it does not include his most exciting radio play, "The Fall of the City." It is a major work despite the appearance of poems that have a biographical literary interest and monologues of no great moment. Certainly it is a strong contender for the major poetry awards this year, and every intelligent reader will heed Mr. MacLeish's sentiments:

I speak to those of my own time  
To none other

O living men Remember me Re-  
ceive me among you.

## Other Men, Other Music

A LITTLE TREASURY OF WORLD POETRY. Edited with an Introduction by Hubert Creekmore. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 904 pp. \$5.

By LOUIS UNTERMEYER

IN 1928 there appeared a book of such size and scope that it seemed unlikely to be matched and impossible to surpass. Entitled "An Anthology of World Poetry," edited by Mark Van Doren on a scale not hitherto attempted, its contents revealed an authority as well as a range which established it as the outstanding and definitive work of its kind. Historians have maintained that cultural taste changes no less than four times a century and, since it is just twenty-five years since Van Doren's collection first impressed enthusiastic readers, it may be time for a reappraisal of the world's poetic riches and a comparison of the older and more recent translators.

Hubert Creekmore's "A Little Treasury of World Poetry" attempts to do both. The proportions of the two books differ drastically; the divisions are sharper; there are many new names among the translating poets. The chief difference is that, for rather specious (or perhaps merely special) reasons, Mr. Creekmore has decided to omit all American and English (but not Irish and Welsh) poetry from his collection, as indicated by his subtitle, "Translations from the Great Poets of Other Languages." This obviously limits a definition of world poetry, and since his volume runs to 872 smallish pages (without the indexes) as against Van Doren's 1,274 large pages, it cannot take the place of its forerunner.

There are, nevertheless, several notable features which distinguish the new compilation. Mr. Creekmore's introduction is one such feature. It is an unusually winning prologue, explanatory without being apologetic, erudite but not academic. Moreover, it summarizes freshly the confusing and often contradictory problems of translation. Every translator is faced with two choices: either to render (or attempt to bring over) the strict meaning, the pure content, of a poem at the expense of the music, or to sacrifice the music for the sake of the meaning. A compromise is sometimes possible, but it is usually the latter process which the translator is compelled to adopt. How, for example, is one to carry over into English the delicate syllables of Heine's "Leise zieht durch mein Gemüt lieb-



"I hope you'll capture the spirit of the book . . . er, has anyone read the book?"

liche Geläute?" Unless the translator can preserve all those sliding, alliterative g's and l's, as well as the swift internal rhyme, he is reduced to a statement of the flat sentimentality that the lovely sound of bells is softly drawing through the poet's heart. To achieve anything like the tonal equivalent of the original, the translator must write a new poem, one which is at best a substitute for the resonant vowels, the contrapuntal consonants, and the intricate nuances of rhyme and repetition—in short, he must (to paraphrase Alice's perversion of the proverb) take care of the sense and let the sounds take care of themselves. Mr. Creekmore uses another analogy when he declares cogently: "They [the translators] could not possibly—nor could anyone—bring over into English all of a foreign poem, as one may import all of a foreign painting. We must be satisfied with black-and-white photographs; at best we can hope only for color reproductions."

Within these limitations, Mr. Creekmore has made admirable choices. As might have been expected, he is most successful with the narratives, descriptions, meditations, ironies—those with the greatest amount of "prose content"—and least felicitous when he comes to the pure lyric in which the original words are

charged with musical overtones, verbal ambiguities, and implications beyond the mere meaning. Although his book is sharply limited in size, the editor has given more space to certain key poems than his pioneering precursor. For instance, Babette



Deutsch's vivid version of Alexander Blok's compact and epic "The Twelve" is reprinted in its entirety rather than (as in Van Doren) a few disjointed segments. On the other hand, where Van Doren gives the complete "Song of Songs," "The Rubaiyat," and other important long poems, Creekmore offers only snippets. The smaller format also forces Creekmore to omit representative poets of various literatures, such as the Russian Bunin, Nikitin, Sologub; the French Vidal, Musset, Spire (the first memorably translated by Ezra Pound, the last by Stanley Burnshaw); the German Uhland, Liliencron, Möricke (inspirer of Hugo Wolf's most sensitive songs), Ernst Toller, whose "Schwalbenbuch" is a poignant experience, Otto Julius Bierbaum, Walter Hasenclever, etc. And, although it may seem an ungracious quibble, lovers of Horace may well ask why there is not even one of the brilliant Horatian versions by Austin Dobson, Eugene and Roswell Martin Field, Franklin P. Adams, and George F. Whicher.

On the other hand, Whicher appears in two lively medieval Latin lyrics, and the best of the recent crop of translators is represented by some of Dudley Fitts's multiple renderings from the Greek, as well as his paraphrases of the modern Jorge Andrade and Efrain Huerta; Robert Fitzgerald's translations from Villon and Virgil; Stephen Spender's fine approximations of Eluard and Lorca; J. B. Leishman's sensitive evocations of Rilke; Kenneth Rexroth's silhouettes from the Japanese; Horace Gregory's and Jack Lindsay's versions of Catullus; Witter Bynner's transliterations from the Chinese; Vladimir Nabokov's rhymed counterparts of poems by Tyutchev and Lermontov. These, and other modern efforts to express one culture in terms of another, make this book a kind of condensed sequel, supplementing though not supplanting its eminent predecessor.

## Poetry Notes

**MORE IMAGINATION THAN WHIMSY:** It is difficult to pin down the quality of David McCord's latest book of "rhymes," "Far and Few" (Little, Brown, \$2.50). It is probably better not to try since, if the effort would not exactly be to "break a butterfly upon a wheel," it would involve handling such other natural creatures as "Five Little Bats," "The Newt," "The Grasshopper," "The Starfish," and "Our Mr. Toad" in an equally inappropriate way.

From the format, which appears to be that of a children's book, decorated with effective pictorial line drawings by an artist with a taste for the whimsical in nature, it might be supposed that "Far and Few" is a collection of verses for children. But these "Rhymes of the Never Was and Always Is" are more on the side of imagination than whimsy ("the Never Was and Always Is" could be a good definition of the imagination), and Mr. McCord himself, in a dust-wrapper note, points out that his work is primarily of children: "If they are of, then they will certainly be for."

He goes on to say that "the verses in this book reflect a child's self-reliance, his instinctive interest in nature, and the heritage of the young respecting rhythm and secondary color of familiar words." The reflections appear to be accurate, and the mirror of Mr. McCord's mind glitters with wit as well as charm. Not seldom, this is not merely child's play, as for example, in "Cocoon," a short "rhyme" which I quote in its extensive entirety:

The little caterpillar creeps  
Awhile before in silk it sleeps.  
It sleeps awhile before it flies,  
And flies awhile before it dies,  
And that's the end of three good  
tries.

—GERARD PREVIN MEYER.

**MADCAP SATIRIST:** No reader, new to the madcap proclivities of that tender yet ironic modern, Peter Viereck, should be dissuaded from reading "The First Morning" (Scribner, \$3), a truly admirable book of poetry. What gets in the way of his freshly-minted lyrics is not his art, compulsive and genuine as it is, but his intolerable egoism, which permits him to intrude subordinate irrelevancies that might well have appeared in an appendix. The adjunctive accouterments of epigraphs, parenthetical subscriptions and superscriptions to titles, asterisks, and footnotes do not let several poems breathe as they should on the page. The reader is occasionally spared these personal divagations, but he should be forewarned that he had better have a multilingual lexicon at

### FRASER YOUNG LITERARY CRYPT No. 497

*A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 497 will be found in the next issue.*

ALTER TO ORDESH

ERDTMPGR: TG BTDD

ADRPOR TGORDC BTGK XRLF

HRPW PEXPWGPNRO.

OPHQRD VSKWOSW

*Answer to Literary Crypt No. 496*

Opinion has caused more trouble  
on this earth than plagues or  
earthquakes. —VOLTAIRE.