BOOK REVIEWS


Reviewed by James P. Leary

More than a dozen collections of Australian songs and ballads, as well as two indices and a handful of booklength studies, have been published. Unfortunately, none have measured up to scholarly standards; this volume is no exception. Ostensibly printed for the group-sings of enthusiastic folkies, it disregards any mention of historical, contextual, or comparative data. Likewise, there are no musical transcriptions; instead we are presented with directives useful only to those who already know a song. For example:

"The Stockmen of Australia"
Key: G   Mood: Lively
Tune: The Irishmen

Despite such irritations, the texts are quite interesting.

While not all of the songs derive from oral tradition, many do. The adept reader will immediately note the absence of Child Ballads and the preponderance of songs related to English and Irish Broadside verse ("The Billy-Goat Overland" is from "The Lincolnshire Poacher"; "The Bullockies Ball" is "Finnigan's Wake" transformed), late 19th-century Kiplingesque balladry ("Flash Jack From Gundagai"), and songs of the American West ("The Dying Bagman" and "The Dying Stockman" strongly resemble "The Dying Cowboy"; "The Cockies of Bungaree" is one with "The State of Arkansas"). Additionally, the influence of rebellious, male outback workers on Australian tradition is accurately set forth in the following song categories: Convicts, Miners, Bullock Drivers, Swagmen, Drovers, Shearers and Bushrangers.

However, those seeking an introduction to Australia's folksong tradition would be better off consulting either Russel Ward's Penguin Book of Australian Ballads or Ron Edwards' The Overlander Songbook.


Reviewed by Camilla A. Collins

This volume in Prentice-Hall's Twentieth Century Views series is an unexciting and weak report on the emergence of modern Black poetry. The introduction by Donald B. Gibson attempts to survey the historical periods in the development
of Black poetry but is actually a fast-moving exercise in listing the names of the poets associated with each of the historical periods. Gibson begins his survey with the 17th-century poets, moves rapidly through those of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and then slows down briefly to consider the Harlem Renaissance poets. A paragraph statement about contributors to the 30s through the 50s follows.

Having reached the 60s in approximately eight pages, Gibson takes another eight to define modern Black poetry. He discusses its ideological, didactic, and explicit nature, its language and content, and its relationship to an urban mass audience. Much of what he says keeps strictly within the general nature of his introduction, and one is left with the impression, and the hope, that the collected essays will more fully develop these topics.

The twelve essays in this volume basically conform to the editor's pattern of presenting Black poetry according to its development by decades. There are two essays about the Harlem Renaissance poets--one is a general consideration of the works of Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and James Weldon Johnson; the other is a rather detailed examination of the themes of the 20s as reflected in specific poems by Countee Cullen, Sterling A. Brown, and Claude McKay. Writers of the 30s, 40s, and 50s are represented in several essays which primarily focus on Robert Hayden, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Melvin B. Tolson. Gibson includes his own essay about the many similarities and few differences in the poetry of Langston Hughes and Walt Whitman. Also included is the essay of another writer concerning religious references--both obvious and slight--in Hughes' work.

Gibson's choice of essays for the 60s and early 70s contains two which are devoted entirely to Imamu Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones); Baraka also receives major emphasis in another essay concerned with the degree of hate evident in Black poetry and in its criticism. The two remaining essays consider the revolutionary and humanistic style and content of poetry by Don L. Lee, Sonia Sanchez, and Nikki Giovanni.

Of the twelve essays in this volume, seven are reprinted from earlier works and five are published here for the first time. They survey the development of Black poetry, emphasizing the past rather than the modern. The book best belongs on a supplementary reading list for an undergraduate class in literature.