

ciation for State and Local History. This concluding volume offers widely interdisciplinary coverage, with sections devoted to history, archaeology, architecture, and technology and crafts.

Like its predecessors, *Research* does not aim for comprehensive coverage but provides "paths to comprehensive research" to lead the searcher systematically into the literature. Each section includes basic reference books, lists of organizations and periodicals, general works, guides to methodology and bibliographies, both under the general heading and under topical subheadings. The entries are briefly annotated where the title is not self-explanatory. Notes for each section provide subscription information and addresses for periodicals and organizations.

Practical arrangement of the material for maximum usefulness to its targeted audience has been the guiding principle. Entries are repeated under several headings where appropriate. A particularly useful feature is the inclusion of many pamphlets, technical bulletins, and government publications. These elusive items are basic to many of the topics covered and are seldom included in general bibliographies.

This is a well-designed working tool that will be extremely useful to museum and preservation workers embarking on any related research.

Indiana University Libraries, Bloomington Nancy C. Cridland

American Literature and Social Change: William Dean Howells to Arthur Miller. By Michael Spindler. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983. Pp. viii, 236. Notes, selected bibliography, index. \$18.50.)

Michael Spindler's book is offered as an interdisciplinary study, an exercise in what he calls "the sociology of American literature" (p. 7). His concern, broadly speaking, is with the interrelationships between American economic, social, and literary life in the period roughly from Reconstruction to the 1950s, and he has selected seven writers for detailed study: William Dean Howells, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis, John Dos Passos, and Arthur Miller. His method is to describe American social development (and thus, for him, literary development) in terms of the Marxist formulation of base and superstructure. This procedure conveniently yields two phases of American social and economic history, the first which Spindler calls "The Production-Oriented Phase" and the second which he labels "The Consumption-Oriented Phase." The former includes the works of Howells, Norris, and Dreiser, the latter those of Dreiser (again), Fitzgerald, Lewis, Dos Passos, and Miller.

Spindler is determined to show how the "ideological confusions and contradictions" (p. 47) endemic to American social history have molded its literature, and his account of the genesis of a literary work, therefore, is deterministic and reductive. For example, he says of Norris and Dreiser that they "played down the significance of form and fashioned a coarse-grained prose that corresponded well with the rough, coarse-grained texture of their subjects . . . the bitter strikes and harsh conditions did not require the delicate nuances of Jamesian prose but a new rhetoric suitable to the thrusting crudity and angularity of industrial society" (p. 47). Now, the cynical reader might see all this as special pleading on behalf of writers who are simply far less talented than Henry James. Where, indeed, given the fact that "played down" suggests conscious choice, is the evidence that Norris and Dreiser were capable of writing any other kind of prose? Of John Dos Passos, Spindler says: "he realised that the conventional realist novel was inadequate to the portrayal of the texture of modern social experience and to the rendering of a definite historical interpretation" (p. 200). But where, again, in the early part of his career, is there any evidence that Dos Passos *could* have written conventional realistic novels if he had wanted to? To say that Dos Passos fashioned a new form of discontinuous narrative in the face of the complexity of modern industrial experience might simply be to say that he had no gift for narrative. In fact, in the later stages of his literary career Dos Passos did evince a talent, albeit a very limited one, for the conventional novel, but these are works that Spindler probably finds "ideologically" offensive.

Spindler's is not a critical book, but it does not claim to be one. His readings, however, are not as innovative as he thinks them to be (see p. 6). Far too often the sociological and historical aspects of his book seem detachable components merely used to bolster conventional observations; nowhere is this more apparent than in the introductory chapters to his two "phases," entitled "Hardware" and "Software." He is not, moreover, the most accurate of historians, especially of intellectual matters. He says, for example, that, for the Puritans, "the decision Chosen or Damned was based on performance in the never-ending struggle between good and evil" (p. 31), thus imputing to them a doctrine of good works which is not evident in their writings.

Despite these weaknesses, Spindler's book is not wholly without merit. On the whole, it is clearly written, and the chapters on Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* and Miller's *Death of a Salesman* can be especially recommended. But it is not the groundbreaking contribution to the sociology of American literature that Spindler claims it to be, and, in fact, on the evidence of the methodology used here, one wonders if there ever will be one.

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