

Not much fault can be found with Parks' appraisal of Kirby Smith. He perhaps gets caught up in the intricacies of Smith's handling of the cotton business in Texas and his attempt to use it as a source of monetary supply. Perhaps the greatest disappointment to the reader will come from the short space given to the quarter of a century of Kirby Smith's life after the surrender of his Trans-Mississippi Army. Like many of his fellow officers of the Confederacy, General Kirby Smith rendered one of his greatest services to the Southland on the college campus. There, like General Robert E. Lee, he taught the young manhood of the South loyalty to a reunited country and an enthusiasm for serving that country. The stature of Kirby Smith grew on the mountain top at the University of the South, better known as Sewanee. It is of further interest to note that in his native Florida the chief monuments to Kirby Smith are the Kirby Smith School in Jacksonville and the Kirby Smith School in Gainesville, the University City.

One may well wish that Parks had made somewhat greater use of official records to which he had access. He leaned somewhat too heavily on family papers but these undoubtedly added spice to his narrative. Errors seem to be few and largely excusable, such as a footnote on the bottom of page 115 when the date should be 1861 instead of 1860. The author leaves us somewhat up in the air as to what became of 26,000 stand of small arms which were badly needed by General Kirby Smith's Trans-Mississippi Army. We lose these arms on page 352 and they do not show up again.

On the whole, Parks has made a notable contribution to the Southern Biography Series, started and developed by Fred C. Cole and Wendell H. Stevenson in the best tradition of excellent scholarship.

*University of Florida*

Freeman H. Hart

*The Chicago Renaissance in American Letters: A Critical History.* By Bernard Duffey. (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State College Press, 1954, pp. viii, 285. Bibliography and index. \$6.50.)

"Find me a writer who is indubitably an American and who has something new and interesting to say, and who says

it with an air, and nine times out of ten I will show you that he has some sort of connection with the abbatoir by the lake," H. L. Mencken wrote in 1917. Astonishing as it may seem today, when New York is unquestionably our literary capital, the title once belonged to Chicago. The city may have been, as Sherwood Anderson said, the scene of only a "robin's egg renaissance," but it was fertile and genuine, however short-lived, and there was nothing else like it in the nation. From 1890 to 1926 Chicago was the creative nexus for scores of writers, from such well known figures as Anderson, Edgar Lee Masters, Vachel Lindsay, and Carl Sandburg, to such forgotten but once noted authors as Robert Herrick and Henry Fuller. The flowering of the Renaissance in the second decade of the twentieth century saw the founding of *Poetry* magazine, the *Little Review*, and the lively Chicago Little Theatre, while the *Friday Literary Review* and the *Chicago Daily News* became outlets for vigorous critical writing. The Renaissance had cosmopolitan breadth; it was "the first characteristic modern instance in which American literary romanticism met Europe." Finally, Professor Duffey asserts, the Renaissance first defined the anti-materialist, anti-business rationale that is the vital heritage of modern American writers. The waters of the Chicago River formed a somewhat muddy Pierian spring that is still flowing.

Duffey observes, however, that the Chicago phenomenon was not a "rebirth" but the "working out within the city of creative forces common to the nation at that time." In the first phase, Chicago writers, like other American writers, were attempting to free themselves from the rose-petal shackles of a diffuse romanticism and outworn idealism—the "genteel tradition." Chicago's upper class strivings for culture, the casting of pearls before swine, were reflected in the novels of Henry Fuller and Hamlin Garland's later work. Yet despite genuine achievements, the precursors of the Renaissance failed of fulfillment. Because the city's upward movement lacked the solid social foundation it needed, the genteel tradition there as elsewhere faded off in a delicate sunset of "taste."

It was superseded by the more vital forces of realism. Although realism had had earlier Midwestern representatives in Edward Eggleston and E. W. Howe, William Dean Duffey sees it in the Renaissance as stemming primarily from Wil-

liam Dean Howells and from its European practitioners, and attracting undisciplined writers like Theodore Dreiser because it enabled them to capitalize on mere experience without the pain of developing imagination and style. And despite the reportorial accuracy of "critical realists" like Will Payne and I. K. Friedman, who used their novels as ethical lances to attack the brutality of Chicago, their writings remained superficial. Herrick in a few of his novels achieved a more enduring form of muckraking which still fell short of tragic perception.

The climactic phase Duffey calls the "Liberation." The new "assertively liberated bohemians" had in common with the genteel writers and the critical realists the protest against the industrial world's crushing materialism, but the earlier writers were motivated by the spirit of uplift, the liberators by the spirit of rebellion. It was the liberators who produced the bulk of what Duffey suggests is the best literature of the Renaissance: *Spoon River Anthology*, Sandburg's *Lincoln*, Anderson's finest prose. He mentions, too, Lindsay's mystical poetry and a couple of Floyd Dell's novels. Yet even the major figures of the Renaissance had careers which were in some essential way unfulfilled. The basic cause, Duffey indicates, was their failure to discipline the Midwestern romanticism to which they fell heir.

Duffey has succeeded in a difficult project: anatomizing a whole sprawling corpus of literature and laying bare its complex relationships. His ability as a social historian is demonstrated, for example, in his skill at perceiving the function of the city and its class structure in shaping the Chicago writer and his literary product. Here he strikes a nice balance between assessing the strength of environment and the writer's own character. His biographical sketches, though rather colorless, center unerringly on the critical influences upon a writer, and always with a sharp eye to his writing.

Duffey is likewise distinguished as a critic, when he permits himself to be one. His insights are subtle, his judgments sound. His book lacks the high surface interest of, say, Van Wyck Brooks's studies in cultural history, but it is critical history in a sense that Brooks's are not. Duffey comes close to Vernon Parrington in acute analyses of social and political forces, but he is, quite properly, far more concerned with

literature than Parrington was. Far from imposing a single political idea as his literary canon, Duffey never makes it quite clear just what his whole canon is, though one gathers that for him ideas and good intentions are no substitute for literature: depth, sensitivity, imagination, a cultivated style, a sense of tragedy are needed. But he is silent on the question of the rightness of the whole course of the Renaissance in aligning itself against the dominant ethos of the business community, and at the end he is only tentative about the ultimate value of the best work of the Renaissance, rather curiously rejecting the final act of criticism. It is, of course, true, as Duffey says, that "Great room is needed for individual perceptions," but it is precisely the lack of these which is the major shortcoming of his book. It is not only that he usually gives a clearer picture of the limitations of his writers than he does of their merits, and that he allots seventeen pages to Henry Fuller and thirteen to Sandburg, but that one may read the essay on Lindsay, for instance, without getting much understanding of any other aspect of his poetry than his mysticism. Yet Duffey's more extended analysis of *Spoon River Anthology* is so penetrating that one wishes that the same courtesies had been extended to other significant works. The thinness of the literary criticism is not altogether compensated for by its strength and its stylistic sensitivity.

*The Chicago Renaissance in American Letters*, is not, then, the definitive study of the period. Duffey's bibliography notes time and again the need for research in certain areas. But until the secondary materials are available for the literary historian, or until some scholar has the patience and the means to produce them himself, Duffey's study will offer values rare for initial investigations of this scope. And in some ways it will be very difficult to equal it.

*University of Michigan*

Parry E. Stroud