

Book Reviews

A *History of Indiana Literature*. By Arthur W. Shumaker. *Indiana Historical Collections*, Volume XLII. ([Indianapolis]: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1962. Pp. xi, 611. Frontispiece, index. \$7.50.) [Also available from the Indiana Historical Society in a paperbound edition for \$3.50.]

The purpose of this book, as stated in the Introduction, is to substantiate the assertion that "the production of Indiana writers is one of the more significant contributions to American literature made by any state or region." Admittedly, this is not an easy task, not through any lack of Indiana literature, but rather because of the difficulties inherent in both judgment and definition of regional literature. The author, Professor Arthur Shumaker, of DePauw University, has accomplished this aim, certainly, as well as it is likely to be done, and the Indiana Historical Bureau, which published the book, has a volume which may well serve as a guide and model for other alert historical societies to follow. In considering some of the problems which arise from a study of this nature, Professor Shumaker has made some important contributions, it seems to the reviewer, in approach and methodology useful to those who may wish to make similar attempts at writing regional literary history. While he may not have completely solved all problems, he has indicated how such solutions may be approached.

Indiana seems to have produced more than its share of writers in comparison to other midwestern states. As early as 1827 it was recognized that the Hoosiers were "a scribbling and forthputting people," and literary histories have often tentatively recognized the existence, especially in the early decades of the twentieth century, of a "Hoosier school" of authorship. In analyzing possible causes of this long record of activity, Shumaker suggests, among other reasons, the diversity of Indiana's settlement, its lack of formal educational facilities (leading to folklore and oral traditions of storytelling), its propensity to frontier oratory, and its rural character. It seems certain that there was a recognizable "Hoosier" personality fairly early in the state's history available to writers and sufficiently developed for literary exploitation in a fashion perhaps not true of other states in the traditional Northwest group.

Next, the author addresses himself to the difficult question: What is an Indiana author? Is he anyone merely born in the state, regardless of other facts about him? Is he anyone who has written about the state, and if so, how much and how well? In nailing down his definition, admittedly a difficult job at best, Professor Shumaker includes in his study those writers who spent most of their lives or their most productive years in Indiana, regardless of their birthplace, and whose

works show conclusive evidence of influence of the Indiana environment. At the same time he excludes those whose works, in quantity or quality, do not meet normal standards of literary attainment. No one, certainly, could quarrel with these decisions and definitions, which reflect historical honesty and common sense. Thus, from a possible total list of 1,563 writers, Professor Shumaker chooses 142 who, from the beginnings of the state to 1939, may reasonably be called Indiana writers.

Though under this definition Indiana loses claim to authors of such stature as Theodore Dreiser, David Graham Phillips, E. W. Howe, Joaquin Miller, and Jessamyn West, there are an impressive number of authentic Hoosier writers remaining. Of these Professor Shumaker identifies as "major," Edward Eggleston, Booth Tarkington, Meredith Nicholson, and William Vaughn Moody, reserving George Ade, James Whitcomb Riley, and Kin Hubbard for a separate category of major humorists. In the second flight he places Lew Wallace, Maurice Thompson, Charles Major, George Barr McCutcheon, and Gene Stratton Porter. Few will argue with his choices, though among the minor authors there are some fascinating figures whose lives and works deserve not to be neglected.

But do these authors, Professor Shumaker asks, constitute a singular "Indiana school" of writers, with enough in common in style, method, and theme to warrant the name? They were not a school, he concludes, in any accepted sense, for they wrote for national rather than regional audiences, quite independently of each other, displaying no identifiable set of beliefs that could be called uniquely regional. Yet at the same time, in their use of Indiana materials and attitudes, and through the common influence on them of the Indiana background, they did share in a broader sense something of an Indiana flavor. A list of typical "Hoosier traits," similar to the one drawn up by Carl Van Doren (pp. 459-460), who wrestled with the problem of the "Indiana point of view" in one of his studies of the novel, may indicate the key to the answer. The characteristics listed as "Hoosier" are in fact indistinguishable from any other traits usually associated with midwestern small-town and rural nineteenth-century life. It may well be, then, that the indefinable "Indiana quality" one finds in these authors is a sort of concentrated essence of the midwestern personality and temperament as it appeared in small-town and rural life and that the great contribution of the Indiana "school," if such exists, lies in observing and exemplifying these things.

There is, of course, much more in Professor Shumaker's study than can be discussed in a brief review. The volume is a veritable compendium of information about Indiana literary and cultural history, carefully researched and incisively written. In the field of regional history, it seems to be a major achievement, one from which others interested in similar literary and historical problems may learn much about arrangement and interpretation.

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