

active and aggressive male figures. She treats the work of Barth, Pynchon, Purdy, Kesey, Roth, Updike, Plath and Oates; yet she unaccountably omits consideration of either Mailer or Bellow, who has recently won the Nobel Prize. She does clearly recognize the severely limited or demeaning roles usually assigned to women in the fiction of the decade (which was not, it might be pointed out, fundamentally different from other decades in this respect). But she leaves herself open to considerable criticism by not dealing with two writers of obviously "major" significance during this time—writers whose fiction, moreover, reflects serious attempts to make important statements about the relationships between men and women in contemporary America.

University of Kansas

Charles G. Masinton

SHERWOOD BONNER (Catherine McDowell). By William L. Frank. Boston: G. K. Hall (Twayne Publishers). 1976. \$6.95.

In this excellent study of a minor literary figure we find the expected: a biography of the author, a review of her local color and realistic fiction, and a careful evaluation of her work. But for the feminist critic, male or female, there is more: Bonner's writings are a source of portraits of nineteenth-century American women—by a colorful author who was a protégée of Longfellow's, a well-traveled and an experienced person. She caught details and was, at the same time, sensitive to the role of women.

University of Northern Iowa

Keith McKean

COMEDY AND AMERICA: The Lost World of Washington Irving. By Martin Roth. New York: Kennikat Press. 1976. \$12.50.

Focusing primarily on *Salmagundi* and Knickerbocker's *History of New York*, but concluding with *The Sketch Book*, Roth convincingly develops a terminology for dealing with Irving's particular type of humor: "burlesque comedy," through which Irving found his imaginative relationship to America. Arguing for similarities between Irving's mode and motivation, and key writings by Melville, Whitman, Thoreau, Hawthorne and others, Roth successfully extends the usefulness and applicability of his analysis to the non-specialist as he considers the ways in which Irving, like others who followed, attempted to create a culture untrammelled by the limitations of a moralistic history.

University of Kansas

Haskell Springer

PLOTS AND CHARACTERS IN THE WORKS OF THEODORE DREISER. By Philip L. Gerber. Hamden, Connecticut: The Shoe String Press, Inc. 1977. \$12.50.

A reference work, with plot summaries, an annotated index of characters and a chronology of events in Dreiser's life.

SGL

## arts

SKYSCRAPER PRIMITIVES: Dada and the American Avant-garde, 1910-1925. By Dickran Tashjian. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press. 1975. \$20.00.

In 1924 Gorham Munson first used the term "skyscraper primitives" to describe those American painters and poets who were influenced by the American Dada movement. Founded in New York by Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia, Dada with its preoccupation with the machine, inspired a broad range of writers and artists to celebrate modern technology. Among those were Man Ray, William Carlos Williams, Hart Crane, E. E. Cummings, Charles Demuth, Waldo Frank, Charles Sheeler and Joseph Stella. The cultural changes wrought by technology which the Dadaists witnessed taking place around them motivated their reevaluation of the role of art in society. This searching inquiry appealed to the American avant-garde. In the protean and often anarchic nature of Dada, American artists found the freedom to experiment in their quest for an indigenous expression of contemporary life. Tashjian makes a convincing argument for the importance of the Dada movement during these formative years in American culture.

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