Studies in English, New Series

Volume 6  
1988

William Brevda, Harry Kemp: The Last Bohemian.

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also reveal his intellectual shortcomings—his mental aberrations and his emotional obsessions: his impractical political naïveté; his admiration for fascist economic reforms; his anti-Hebraism and belief in conspiracies perpetrated by capitalist governments in collusion with Jews and bankers; his misunderstanding of the causes of war; his obsession with monetary and banking practices, causing him to see usury, international loans, and the profits of armament makers as the roots of all evil. But if any of his Japanese correspondents understood him on these matters, they never let on.

But Pound was a great poet and is a major literary figure. He exerted an influence in ways never achieved by Eliot or Yeats. Kodama’s collection is not only highly interesting but also an important contribution to Pound studies.

Richard P. Benton, Emeritus Trinity College


Before reading this illuminating biography, I had known vaguely of Harry Kemp as someone who was somehow related to Upton Sinclair. I did not know that he and Sinclair’s wife, Meta, were the “Godwin and Wollstonecraft” of their time and that their love affair became widely regarded, in Scott Fitzgerald’s words, as “the most expensive orgy in history.”

The author of nineteen books—including drama, poetry, and fiction—Kemp was better known in his own day as “The Tramp Poet,” than he was for what he wrote, although Upton Sinclair once referred to him as a “modern Walt Whitman.” Brevda demonstrates, however, that although Kemp’s belief that his “tramp poetry” was somehow “unique and significant” was not completely without foundation, he was not another Walt Whitman. Whitman’s man of the open road poetry is generally a metaphor “for a spiritual state of mind” and intended “to evoke the virtues of the national spirit.” If Whitman, as John Jay Chapman wrote, gives “utterance to the soul of the tramp,” he has little love for his body: “No diseas’d person, no rum drinker, or venereal taint is permitted here,” he wrote, suggesting, as Brevda points out, that “Whitman was not interested in particularizing the actual tramp.” His persona “has more in common with Bunyan’s Christian than he does with the hordes of actual tramps” who were more and more commonplace in the first two decades of this century. Unlike many
other writers of “tramp poetry,” Kemp does not reduce “Whitman’s ideals to a glib, careless, carpe diem, sentimental wine, women and song . . . afoot with pose and posture, not with vision.” He tries to make Whitman’s symbolic persona real; he attempts to create a poetry of “genuine vagabond mood—without dilettantism.”

Today, if Kemp’s writing is known at all, only the authority in the field remembers more than one or two poems or perhaps Tramping on Life: An Autobiographical Narrative (1922), a best seller in its day. He is remembered not for what he wrote but for how he lived. He has been called the “King of Bohemia,” and as Brevda rightly proclaims, he “was in many respects the quintessential bohemian and one member of the group who, for better or worse, most fully personified the bohemian temperament.” Long after writers like Max Eastman and Floyd Dell had ended their identification with the Village, Kemp was still adhering to its lifestyle. “For Eastman, Dell and the others,” Brevda concludes, “bohemia was a way of youth. For Kemp it was a way of life . . . For both longevity and robustness of the rebel spirit, Harry Kemp . . . seems to be the noblest Bohemian of all.”

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His achievements overshadowed since 1950 by a younger townsman from Oxford, Stark Young finally becomes the subject of a book-length study in this “survey” of a “life in the arts.” From Young’s birth in Como, Mississippi, in 1880, to the memorial service for him in New York, attended by such notables as John Gielgud and Franchot Tone in 1963, Pilkington admirably organizes a readable overview of the career, providing useful background, interpretative groundwork, and selected annotated bibliography.

As he presents each phase of a full multifaceted career, Pilkington places Young’s contributions in contexts of American literary history to show this artist’s influence on the development of the American theater of the 1920s, on the Southern historical novel of the thirties, and ultimately on the Southern Renaissance. Turning from the early poetry to translations, drama, and criticism, Stark Young led the amateur theater movement in America with successful productions at The University of Texas; later in New York he directed plays (including