

# Studies in English, New Series

---

Volume 6

Article 47

---

1988

## John Pilkington, Stark Young.

Linda McDaniel

*The University of Southern Mississippi*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies\\_eng\\_new](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies_eng_new)



Part of the [American Literature Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

McDaniel, Linda (1988) "John Pilkington, Stark Young." *Studies in English, New Series*: Vol. 6 , Article 47.  
Available at: [https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies\\_eng\\_new/vol6/iss1/47](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies_eng_new/vol6/iss1/47)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Studies in English at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Studies in English, New Series by an authorized editor of eGrove. For more information, please contact [egrove@olemiss.edu](mailto:egrove@olemiss.edu).

## REVIEWS

315

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 "geniune 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."

Thomas Daniel Young

Gertrude Conway Vanderbilt  
Professor of English, *Emeritus*,  
Vanderbilt University

John Pilkington, *Stark Young*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985.  
165 pp. \$19.95

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 Gielguld 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

one by Eugene O'Neill) and saw his own work on stage. Pilkington includes brief, informative discussion of the contents and productions of Young's one-acters and of *The Queen of Sheba*, *The Saint*, and *The Colonnade*. Young's drama criticism ultimately proved more influential. Pilkington's clarifying approach to such collections of reviews and essays as *The Flower of Drama* and *Glamour* shows how Young developed his theory of the central or "essential idea" of a play on which he said actors, directors, costumers should base each detail of a production.

The treatments of the novels—*Heaven Trees*, *The Torches Flare*, *River House*, and *So Red the Rose*—provide biographical background and identify prototypes and sources, particularly from among the Stark and McGeehee clans. Pilkington also highlights passages dealing with Young's general recurring themes, such as the importance of the "continuity" of the family and the "life of the affections," contrasts between Southern provincial and New York cosmopolitan life, conflicts between academic and artistic options, and uses and shortcomings of the Southern agrarian past. The chapter on the Agrarians' invitation to contribute to *I'll Take My Stand* explains Young's role in that collection and examines the content of Young's essay, "Not in Memoriam, but in Defense."

Pilkington selects and condenses from his extensive research for his award-winning editions of Young's letters (*Stark Young: A Life in the Arts*, 1974) to make this Twayne volume the place to begin for a basic introduction to Young and his work. Pilkington's forthcoming biography of Young presumably will elaborate on incidents and people only briefly mentioned in this survey—such as Young's relationships with his family and with such famous figures as Robert Frost, Maxwell Perkins, and William Faulkner.

Linda McDaniel

The University of Southern Mississippi

Steven H. Gale, ed. *Encyclopedia of American Humorists*. New York: Garland, 1988. 557 pp. \$49.95

Steven H. Gale's encyclopedia supplements, but does not replace, Stanley Trachtenberg's *American Humorists, 1800-1950* (volumes 11 and 12 in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 1982). Gale not only includes colonial and contemporary humorists outside Trachtenberg's scope but also discusses twice as many writers. His 135 entries are briefer but cover the same kinds of information: biographical material, literary analysis, and a bibliography of primary and selected secondary