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Steven H. Gale, ed. Encyclopedia of American Humorists.

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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.

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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

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sources. Trachtenberg's book has numerous photographs and illustrations as well as several essays on the history of American humor. However, Gale's limits itself strictly to single-author entries, a sensible decision which prevents duplication of general material easily available elsewhere. Yet the *Encyclopedia of American Humorists* is seriously flawed because it overlooks both popular and influential humorists from the colonial period to the present. Gale's omissions do not seem to be tied to a battle he might be waging about reinterpreting the canon, but rather suggest insufficient editorial control over his project. As the preface explains, with a few exceptions Gale chose "to include only those writers who are known primarily as humorists." It goes on to propose a second volume "that will involve 'serious' literary artists who use humor effectively." Thus, Bret Harte and Oliver Wendell Holmes appear because of long-standing scholarly interest in their humor. However, the justification for including such figures as Donald Barthelme, Fred Chappell, and Grace King is obscure, given the prefatory remarks. Their presence is even more puzzling when one notices the absence of significant humorists who will not be appropriate for the projected second volume. Essays on Charles Farrar Browne (Artemus Ward) and George Washington Harris, each of whom is mentioned in entries on more than a dozen other writers, should have been included. Likewise, there is no essay devoted to Benjamin Franklin, whose influence is mentioned in entries throughout the book. If the contributors assigned these men did not meet the deadline, one wonders why the editor did not feel it necessary to fill the void himself. If recent anthologies can be used as a measure of what scholars expect this encyclopedia to contain, the colonial writers Ebenezer Cooke and Joseph Green should be here in addition to the useful entries on Sarah Kemble Knight, Thomas Morton, and Nathaniel Ward. Henry William Herbert appears as a representative of antebellum humorous sporting writers from the Northeast. Yet Gale overlooks William P. Hawes, a member of that same group more widely acknowledged in his own day for humor. In our own day the burlesque sermons of William Penn Brannan have received repeated, although brief, critical attention. Brannan should have been included not only because of his reputation but also because scholars could benefit from an extended entry on his life and work. Anthologies, including college freshman composition readers, are also useful guides in selecting contemporary humorists. Certainly, Gale would have made his reference book more complete had he listed the frequently anthologized Ellen Goodman, Lewis Grizzard, Florence King, and Calvin Trillin—none of whom would seem to belong in the second volume devoted to "'serious' literary artists." A final comment on the bibliographies which conclude each entry is appropriate. The annotations on secondary sources vary as widely in

quality as do the entries themselves, and in some cases they suggest that writers were insufficiently informed on their topic. For example, the bibliography for C. F. M. Noland neglects both editions of his *Pete Whetstone letters* (1957 and 1979) and also overlooks an important *American Literature* article (1981). This information is, however, available in Trachtenberg. None of those writing on Russell Baker, Erma Bombeck, Art Buchwald, or Mike Royko lists Neil A. Grauer's *Wits & Sages* (1984) which has long chapters on each of these columnists and essayists about whom little has yet been published. Although many of the entries in *Encyclopedia of American Humorists* are clear, fluent, and original pieces that humor scholars will want to consult, the problems of selection and thoroughness prevent it from being an adequate reference work.

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William E. Lenz. *Fast Talk & Flush Times: The Confidence Man as a Literary Convention*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985. 237 pp. \$21.00

Few critics of American fiction would argue with the contention that the confidence man is a major, if not *the* major, character type in our literature. It also appears that few of these critics can agree on just what the precise nature of that enigmatic figure really is. William Lenz's *Fast Talk & Flush Times* is the latest attempt to define that nature and, as with other studies, such as Susan Kuhlman's *Knave, Fool and Genius: The Confidence Man as He Appears in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction* and Gary Lindberg's *The Confidence Man in American Literature*, its many strengths are finally compromised by its own terms.

Lenz's basic contention is that the confidence man is a product of the "boom and bust 'flush times'" of the 1840s as found in "the new country" of the Old Southwest. He would distinguish the confidence man from "tricksters, promisers, shapeshifters, and rogues" who "appear in many genres and periods" (p. 23), insisting that the confidence man is a distinct type that uses fast talk, clever manipulation, and exploitation of ambiguity for personal (preferably profitable) advantage. Lenz further argues that the confidence man needs to be seen as a response to and an expression of the particular culture that gave him birth—the flush times of the Southwest. The book then traces the convention's rise, its first full appearance in Hooper's Simon Suggs, four "variations" of the type (Ovid Bolus, Sut Lovingood, Melville's