

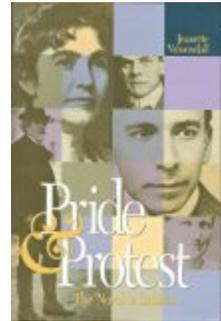
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Jeanette Vanausdall. *Pride and Protest: The Novel in Indiana*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press, 1999. xviii + 169 pp. \$27.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87195-134-2.

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Hoosier Novels and Novelists

Indiana's contribution to enduring American fiction comes down to a major place for Theodore Dreiser and a footnote for Booth Tarkington. Jeanette Vanausdall doesn't shrink from this reckoning, which gives her book high marks among historical accounts devoted to the literature of a single state. She doesn't wish to be an uncritical booster of Indiana writing, but neither does she wish to be a grim debunker. Her chosen place is somewhere in between, meaning that she wants to show – as she puts it – how Indiana writers “fit within the broader context of American literature, which should be a source of pride.”

After Dreiser and Tarkington the pride stems largely from the dominance of Indiana writers in popular American writing in the period roughly from the 1870s to the 1920s – among them, Edward Eggleston, James Whitcomb Riley, Maurice Thompson, Lew Wallace, Meredith Nicholson, George Barr McCutcheon, and Gene Stratton-Porter. This was likewise the period of the fresh winds of realism in American fiction and poetry coming out of the Middle West – the age of Hamlin Garland, Edgar Lee Masters, Carl Sandburg, Willa Cather, O. E. Rolvaag, Sherwood Anderson, and Sinclair Lewis. With the large exception of Dreiser and some wiggle-room for Tarkington, Indiana writers shunned realism and its cousin, naturalism, in favor of two particularly syrupy strains of

romanticism – historical costume drama and nostalgic treatments of a lost Eden of rural innocence. For a time around the turn of the century the Indiana romancers seemed to rule the day, but with the reissue of Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* in 1907, the game was essentially over. The romances would slide into obscurity and Dreiser, who for fictional material turned his attention to the brawling new urban worlds of Chicago and New York, would remain as Indiana's undisputed claim to literary fame.

All this Jeanette Vanausdall knows, giving Dreiser his literary due and treating the parade of Indiana romancers as deserving of historical interest only. The final two chapters of her book attempt to bring Indiana writing more or less up to date with a discussion of Ross Lockridge, Jr.'s, one-time blockbuster *Raintree County* and the enduring work of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. Such contemporary Indiana writers as Scott Russell Sanders and Michael Martone come in for cursory attention. But the primary focus of the book is on Indiana's past in literature, not its present, and here *Pride and Protest* offers a clear, sensible, economical account.

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