Fall 2016

Book Review: *The Gilded Age and Progressive Era: A Historical Exploration of Literature*

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Notes/Citation Information
Published in Reference & User Services Quarterly, v. 56, issue 1, p. 59.

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Digital Object Identifier (DOI)
https://doi.org/10.5860/rusq.56n1.59b

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One of the latest volumes in ABC-CLIO/Greenwood’s “Historical Explorations of Literature” series, The Gilded Age and Progressive Era is a useful and interesting introduction to framing key literary works of this time period in their historical context. Each volume in the series presents a discussion of four or five representative works of a historical era, such as the Harlem Renaissance, the Chicano Movement, the Jazz Age, and the Civil War Era. Each era is accompanied by a historical overview, synopsis and historical context for each work, primary source document excerpts, and extensive bibliographies for further reading.

This series is similar in intent to the “Literature in Context” series from Cambridge University Press, but while the latter’s volumes focus on placing an individual author within a social, intellectual, and historical framework, “Historical Explorations of Literature” chooses to concentrate on four or five representative works of the time period, demonstrating how each illustrates a key contemporary concern or trend. For example, Mark Twain’s A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court illustrates the era’s rise of industrial technology and social inequality. Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” is explored in the context of women’s health and equality issues.

With its emphasis on the integration of literature and social studies curricular standards, The Gilded Age and Progressive Era is perhaps most useful to high school teachers and early undergraduate literature instructors. The way the material is presented through “historical explorations” of various topics lends itself well to the formation of lesson plans. Although the reader might wish for the inclusion of more visual material, such as contemporary paintings and photographs, the primary source excerpts offer a depth of context missing from other such handbooks. Librarians should also find this well-researched book, along with others in the series, a valuable source of ideas for collection development, displays, and information literacy projects.—Jennifer A. Bartlett, Head of Reference Services, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky