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Review of Afro-American Writers, 1940-1955

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Biographies


This "sixth and final volume in [the DLB] series devoted exclusively to Afro-American writers" (p. xi) covers twenty-six novelists, poets, playwrights, biographers, screenwriters, and essayists who published significant works between 1940 and 1955. Other volumes in the subseries cover fiction writers after 1955 (see ARBA 85, entry 1056), dramatists and prose writers after 1955 (see ARBA 86, entry 1112), poets after 1955 (see ARBA 86, entry 1155), writers before the Harlem Renaissance (see ARBA 87, entry 1069), and writers from the Harlem Renaissance to 1940 (see ARBA 88, entry 1158). The essays in this volume begin with a list of works by each writer followed by discussions (punctuated with photographs) of each writer's life and works, and conclude with selected references to critical works (not linked to the text) and locations of papers. Essay length varies for each author based on his or her renown (e.g., three pages for William Blackwel Branch, twenty-three for Richard Wright). References are often insufficient (e.g., two references for J. Saunders Redding, three for Melvin Tolson, four for Margaret Walker), although the entry for Ralph Ellison has eighty-one references. The essays are well written, some critical, some simply descriptive, by little-known scholars (although Robert Farnsworth composed the Tolson entry), and all significant authors of the period are covered (e.g., Gwendolyn Brooks, Robert Hayden, Chester Himes, Ann Petry). Three additional essays describe the Hatch-Billops Collection, the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, and the Schomburg Center. A superfluous reprint of the readily available December 1950 issue of Phylon expands the text by sixty-two pages, space that could have been better used for an analytical index. The work concludes with a forty-six-item general bibliography and the usual DLB cumulative index.

Handbooks

1053. Colonization, 1640-1865. illus. index. (Concise Literary Biography (CLB)) 0-8103-1819-9.

This work is a volume in the Concise Literary Biography (CLB) series. It is of use to researchers who do not need the more comprehensive volumes in American Literature, vol. 6. The entries are concise, and the bibliography emphasizes American authors. The period covered is the Romantic and Transcendentalist periods. The entries are arranged alphabetically by author's last name.

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In a style that reflects the early American spirit, this book presents itself as a new almanac. Its contributors present an encyclopedic alphabetization of academic and anecdote. An introduction includes almanacs (by "Bolton" and others). Other entries are American literary almanacs (by various authors). Entries are arranged alphabetically by author's last name, and must be used with care. The work concludes with a selected references to critical works (not linked to the text) and locations of papers. Essay length varies for each author based on his or her renown (e.g., three pages for William Blackwel Branch, twenty-three for Richard Wright). References are often insufficient (e.g., two references for J. Saunders Redding, three for Melvin Tolson, four for Margaret Walker), although the entry for Ralph Ellison has eighty-one references. The essays are well written, some critical, some simply descriptive, by little-known scholars (although Robert Farnsworth composed the Tolson entry), and all significant authors of the period are covered (e.g., Gwendolyn Brooks, Robert Hayden, Chester Himes, Ann Petry). Three additional essays describe the Hatch-Billops Collection, the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, and the Schomburg Center. A superfluous reprint of the readily available December 1950 issue of Phylon expands the text by sixty-two pages, space that could have been better used for an analytical index. The work concludes with a forty-six-item general bibliography and the usual DLB cumulative index.

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