
This five-volume encyclopedia of more than nine hundred alphabetically arranged signed entries stretches from the earliest English-language American poetry to the present day, with both biographical and topical entries. The entries range from about a page for biographical entries of less-influential poets to more than six pages for broad topical essays such as Canadian poetry and for biographical entries of well-known and influential poets. The entries are well written and the contributors, who are profiled in the back of volume five, comprise university faculty members, writers, and some graduate students. The entries contain cross references to other entries, indicated in bold type.

Each volume begins with lists of entries, arranged in four ways. The first is a comprehensive alphabetical list; second is a list of the poets (divided into two eras: “Pre-Twentieth-Century Poets” and “Twentieth- and Twenty-first-Century Poets”), a list of topics, and finally a list of “Topical Entries Grouped by Subtopics.” Although the topical lists do not reference the poets related to each topic, the comprehensive index in the back of Volume 5 does. One looking up the Harlem Renaissance poets in the index, for example, will also see the biographical entries of related poets. The index also includes titles of well-known poems and collections of poetry.

There is no comparable encyclopedia covering American poetry. However, the larger series, Dictionary of Literary Biography (DLB; Gale, 1978–) will cover the topics that this smaller work does. Also, DLB often includes portraits of writers and samples of their manuscripts, while the Greenwood encyclopedia is lacking illustrations.

Although The Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Poets and Poetry attempts to be as inclusive as possible in scope, the entries are limited to poetry and poets written and writing in print (as opposed to performing or writing on the Internet) and in the English language. The biographical entries focus on writers who primarily write poetry, thus excluding authors like Annie Dillard and James Agee, who are well known for work in other genres, but have written at least a little poetry. Children’s poetry is underrepresented. For example, the encyclopedia includes a biographical entry for Dr. Seuss, but notable children’s poets Shel Silverstein and Jack Prelutsky are only mentioned by name in the topical essay for Children’s Poetry.

Despite the shortcomings mentioned above, The Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Poets and Poetry provides an excellent overview for students learning about American poetry, and is recommended for libraries wishing to provide basic reference information on American poetry for high school and undergraduate students. Libraries with Dictionary of Literary Biography, however, may not find enough unique coverage in this set.—Sigrid Kelsey, Associate Librarian, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge


Within each volume, the narrative chapters are supplemented by a timeline, discography, bibliography, and a glossary of encyclopedia entries. Each volume includes an index and a generous number of black-and-white photographs and is bound in an attractive full-color hardback binding.

I found the articles to be engagingly written, and the overall design of each volume to be well thought out and easy to use. The photographs of the various performers and performing groups add a great touch. The timeline that opens each volume is very helpful in placing a specific group or movement in its...