

ence and beginning practitioners. This purpose seems to be adequately fulfilled. The author is to be congratulated on adopting a case study approach, which is best suited to bring out the many salient features of in-house systems. The book is therefore recommended as an excellent companion volume to the many general textbooks available in this area, including the author's recent contribution entitled *The Dissemination of Information* (Westview, 1978).—*Sarojini Balachandran, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.*

American Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide from Colonial Times to the Present. In Four Volumes. Ed. by Lina Mainiero. New York: Ungar, 1979. V.1 (601p.) \$45. LC 78-20945. ISBN 0-8044-3151-5 (V.1).

"Three hundred years of women writers. Thousands of women who took pen in hand. . . . Voices coming from every town and village. From every region of America. From every social class. From every variety of religious and political belief. Women who

cared passionately about civil and human rights, about their fellow human beings and their God. Women who wrote eloquently about motherhood, marriage, and home. Women who wrote to other women—to caution, to instruct, to inspire."

In these words from her brief preface to *American Women Writers* (V.1: *A to E*, on which this review is based), Lina Mainiero celebrates the subject of the four-volume dictionary. Characterizing the publication as a "pioneering reference work that would inform and illuminate," she praises contributors, consultants, publishers, and librarians, who receive special thanks for their commitment to the project. Editor Mainiero also wisely recognizes the guide's indebtedness to earlier biographical dictionaries, especially *Notable American Women, 1607-1950* (incorrectly dated 1951 instead of 1971).

According to the publisher's foreword to the first volume, which provides a more detailed description of the work, *American Women Writers* is a critical reference guide from colonial times to the present and dif-

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fers from earlier studies in its emphasis upon the critical rather than the biographical. Only *American Women Writers*, the publisher asserts, combines critical consideration with essential biographical information; only *American Women Writers* provides, for almost every author, primary bibliographies and selected secondary sources.

Who are included? The foreword enumerates five categories, beginning with "writers of reputation," like Louisa May Alcott, Willa Cather, and Joan Didion, for whom space is commensurate with fame. Popular authors appear in a representative selection, determined by such criteria as contemporary response, sales, extent of translation, scholarly interest. Nontraditional writers (authors of diaries, letters, autobiographies) also emerge as a representative group, while children's writers enjoy "substantial coverage." In the fifth category, through a very selective sampling, are those whose extraliterary achievements have won wide general readership: Anita Bryant, Rachel Carson, Adelle Davis, and others.

The remaining introductory pages of the first volume produce the expected: names and academic affiliations of the committee of consultants, names of contributors and their contributions to the volume, a list of writers to be included in all four volumes, and, finally, abbreviations of newspaper and journal references not occurring in the master list of journals and series familiar to all users of the *MLA International Bibliography*.

Each dictionary entry in this first volume—from Edith Abbott to Sarah Ann Evans—presents the writer's name in natural order set in striking twenty-four-point Goudy Bold. Vital statistics follow in small italic type. After the essays, varying in length from 400 to 5,000 words, the author bibliographies appear with works listed in chronological order. Secondary-source references complete most entries. With but few exceptions, essays and attendant data are the work of women members of the American academic community.

Despite the assertions of the publisher, a review of the essays themselves does reveal, in many, a predominant biographical element, often combined with a largely descriptive, rather than a truly evaluative,

view of the author's works. Except for the studies of major writers, most essays do not exceed 500 words; consequently the space for extended critical consideration is limited. As for the bibliographies, secondary sources are indeed selective, and reliance upon predecessor dictionaries is evident in the oft-repeated "for articles in reference works, see *Notable American Women, 1607-1950*."

Yet, for some little-known writers, the guide makes an important first attempt at bibliographical compilation. The practice of identifying each writer by her surname initial throughout the critical essay results in a series of studies about A., followed by another series concerning B., and so on, through the E. entries. Probably adopted to conserve precious space, the use of the initial alone seems to depersonalize the subject and subtly weakens each presentation.

Few reference tools are without flaw, and *American Women Writers*, as represented by volume 1 in attractive, sturdy octavo, is a significant undertaking. Used with other complementary resources, it will serve well, not only students of literature, but also those interested in women's studies and in American studies as well. Through the inclusion of writers in many fields, the guide may reach general readers, even casual browsers, in the reference room. Since the concluding paragraph of the publisher's foreword acknowledges the need for a supplement to compensate for the inevitable omissions resulting from lack of space, a supplementary volume and, later, a revised edition seem probable. Though not inexpensive, *American Women Writers* is an important purchase for academic and large public libraries.—*Martha Chambers, State University of New York, College at Oneonta.*

Brenni, Vito Joseph. *The Bibliographic Control of American Literature, 1920-1975*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1979. 210p. \$10. LC 79-12542. ISBN 0-8108-1221-5.

If author Brenni had any inclinations toward heavily expounding on the theories of, and problems inherent in, bibliographic control, as the title may mislead one into expecting, he has mercifully spared his