

Library Lin's Biographies, Autobiographies, and Memoirs

Linda Maxie

Spoon Creek Press

(298pp)

979-898592342-1

Librarian Linda Maxie's intriguing, original reference text does an impressive job of collecting notable books about interesting people.

Librarian Linda Maxie's *Library Lin's Biographies, Autobiographies, and Memoirs* is a reference text that collects and recommends biographical and autobiographical books.

Maxie is used to matching library patrons with great books. Drawing on that experience—as well as on sixty-five reputable recommended reading lists produced over the last century and crowdsourced popular titles from friends and social media platforms—this text delivers a curated list of hundreds of biographies, autobiographies, and memoirs ranging widely across the spectrum of human experiences. Each title is accompanied by a concise synopsis.

The book is organized into forty narrow, easy-to-navigate chapters based on subject and theme. From “Animals and People Who Love Them” to “African Chronicles,” the chapters are engaging and include fresh perspectives on the books they highlight. An index of names of the individuals covered in the collected books makes it possible to find any person one may want to read about with ease.

With a limit of one title per individual, there are quirks in the arrangement and selection. Zora Neale Hurston appears twice but is only the subject of one book—her second appearance is as the author of Cudjo Lewis's biography. The decision to only include one book per individual leads to some notable omissions, as with the absence of Malcolm X's autobiography in favor of a recent biography, as well as to the inability to compare various texts on a single individual.

Still, on the whole, the book represents a remarkable number of important figures. Exceptional but lesser-known titles are included, as with the harrowing, anonymously published *A Woman in Berlin* and Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya's collection of essays *Is Journalism Worth Dying For?: Final Dispatches*. But there's noticeable emphasis on contemporary writing that could end up dating the text should it not be refreshed.

Both useful as study resource and rewarding as a browsing experience, the book is akin to a small, portable library itself, complete with summaries and recommendations. It stands as a powerful argument for the value of going to the library and talking to librarians, who are treasure troves of information about finding literary pleasure, and who can provide countless book recommendations for eager readers.

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WILLEM MARX (June 15, 2023)

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