

**Roberts, Walter Adolphe**

1886 -- 1962

Poet and novelist

Born in Kingston, Roberts was privately educated, largely by his father who had been a silk merchant in China before coming to Jamaica. In 1902 he became a reporter on the staff of the *Daily Gleaner*. Later he was war correspondent for the *Brooklyn Daily Herald* from 1914 to 1917, and after that edited several American periodicals, including *Ainslee's Magazine*. He founded a branch of the Jamaica Progressive League in New York in 1936, and another of the League of Jamaica, of which he was president from 1937 to 1940. Although he visited the island often, Roberts did not return permanently to Jamaica until 1949, when he soon became prominent in cultural activities. He quickly became editor of the **Pioneer Press** and President of the Jamaica Historical Society. The range of his publications was wide, from poetry and novels to history and biography. Roberts' poetry, for the most part unrelated to the West Indies, is indebted to classical influences and relies for many of its effects upon references to figures and settings from Greek mythology. Typically his work celebrates an aspect of human beauty, or an emotional

attachment, and the verse-structure, feelings and intentions of his poetry are highly aesthetic. Sometimes he returns to local observations, elevating a single central figure as a symbol of strength or pride, qualities he clearly sought to identify with national feeling in Jamaica. Strangely at variance with the urbane and often European flavour of his verse, Roberts' prose works, which included six novels, often reveal an assertion against white cultural values, and are connected with political awakenings and the emergence of a rebellious literature in the region. His prose style is direct and realistic, again in contrast to the elegant and highly mannered patterns of his verse.

Roberts' association with **Claude McKay** and others produced a movement which was representative for many West Indian intellectuals, of a new and independent Caribbean literature. He also wrote biographical works and a number of romantic adventure stories in historical settings; his total output was considerable.

### **Bibliography**

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### **Criticism**

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