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| **Agee, James (1909-1955)** |
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| James Agee was an American film critic, journalist, and novelist, who, like his modernist contemporaries, pushed against the constraints of his genres. Born in Knoxville in 1909, Agee attended Harvard University before working as a journalist for *Fortune,* *TIME*, and *The Nation.* In 1936 he and photographer Walker Evans spent weeks among Alabama sharecroppers with the intention of writing a journalistic story of their plight under the Depression. The essay and photographs they produced were rejected by their editors but were later incorporated into their book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941). Although the book sold poorly, it would become a modern classic and a groundbreaking work of literary journalism. During the 1940s, Agee served as a film critic, whose intellectual film reviews elevated the medium from marketing device to literature. He lauded the work of Alfred Hitchcock, revived interest in silent film comedians, and hailed cinema as the preeminent art form of the twentieth century. Eventually, he worked in film production himself, co-writing scripts for *The African Queen* (1951) and *The Night of the Hunter* (1955), before dying of a heart attack at the age of 45. Two years later, his semi-autographical novel *A Death in the Family* found publication and then won the Pulitzer Prize, securing his place in the canon of American writing. |
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| Further reading:  (Heitman)  (Moreau)  (Neuman)  (Seib)  (Webb) |