

November 1996

From the Reference Desk

Tom Gilson
College of Charleston

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gilson, Tom (1996) "From the Reference Desk," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 8: Iss. 5, Article 15.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.1953>

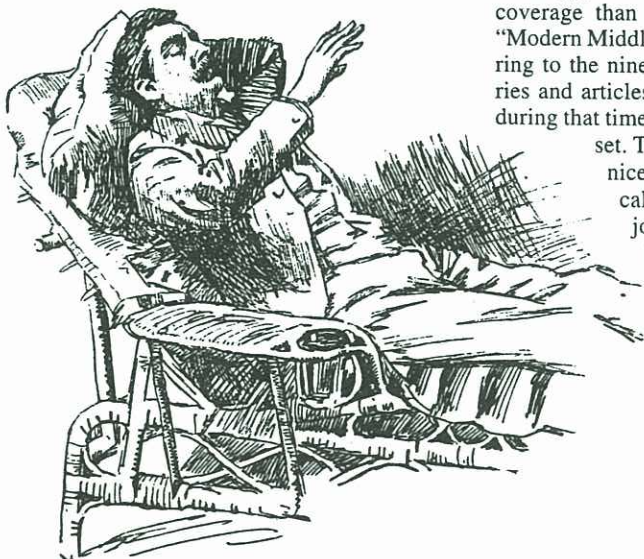
This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

From the Reference Desk

Column Editor: **Tom Gilson** (College of Charleston) <gilson@cofc.edu>

Luckily for all of us, there seems no shortage of new reference titles this fall. A few new items have been sent our way by publishers, while others are arriving because we have ordered them for our own collection. Although I had hoped to address the intense interest in Web search engines and directories this month, there are a number of worthy reference books that I feel deserve attention first.

In the field of political references there are few publishers that rival Congressional Quarterly. The recently published second edition of *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to the Presidency* (1996, 1-56802-018-x, \$239) helps support this claim. Editor, Michael Nelson's updated version of his 1989 edition, covers much of the same ground as the first edition. But his second edition is an improved and enhanced model. It not only adds information about the Bush and Clinton administrations and updates developments on issues like campaign finance, this edition of the *Guide to the Presidency*, has a new look. It is now in two volumes, and visually the layout is more attractive than the sometimes boring look of the first edition. Some 400 photos and illustrations are included, and while many of the photos are similar to those used in the first edition, their reproduction is sharper and placement improved. But the main appeal of this, and other CQ publications, is the quality and objectivity of the information contained within its covers. This set provides a strong overview of issues relating to the American presidency as well as answering specific questions many researchers might have. Notes and bibliographies are provided throughout the set and the writing is authoritative but clear, being accessible to layman, as well as scholar.



Another two-volume set that deserves mention is Ken Bloom's *American Song: the Complete Musical Theatre Companion* (Schirmer, 1996, 0-02-870484-3, \$150). In this new edition, Bloom updates his 1984 Facts on File publication by adding ten more years of songs from the American musicals and revues. In total, song lists from over 4,800 musical shows presented from 1877 through 1995 are included. The main entries are listed under show title and are arranged alphabetically. The entries consist of opening date, theatre, number of performances, personnel involved (composer, lyricist, director, producer, set designer, choreographer, etc.) song list, cast and notes of interest. The second volume consists mostly of two indexes. The first is a name index of the more than 27,000 people involved in these shows and the second lists the over 70,000 songs performed. Working from sources as close to the original as possible, Ken Bloom has performed a service for both the serious scholar and the lover of American musical theatre.

This column would be incomplete without mention of a quality subject encyclopedia and our pick for this month is Macmillan Reference's *Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East* (1996, 0-02-897061-6, \$290). There are few regions in the world which are more important, politically and economically, than the Middle East. The editors of this four-volume set include information on each of the twenty-four countries from "Morocco to Afghanistan," which they identify as being part of the Middle East. But, they wisely categorize countries according to the impacts they have had on major areas of concern like culture, economics and government, and then allot coverage according to these categories. Thus countries like Israel, Egypt and Turkey get more significant coverage than Cyprus or Mauritania. By "Modern Middle East," the editors are referring to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and articles on major events occurring during that time are included throughout the set. This encyclopedia also does a nice job in providing biographical sketches of the region's major personalities which highlight their influence. In general, the bibliographies at the end of each article are limited, and this is a feature which should be enhanced in any future edition. The index, while basically good, is awkward to use. The set is continuously paged and index references are to page num-

bers, but no key is provided at the bottom of the index pages. (I could not tell, if the pages were listed on the spine of the individual volumes. Any such indication was covered by our classification labels. This is a common library processing practice which publishers should take into consideration when designing encyclopedia sets).

Surgery Electives: What to Know before the Doctor Operates (Carmania Bks., 1996, 1-884702-22-8) is a handbook which might be equally at home in a library's circulating collection. While reading author John McCabe's introduction, his feelings about what he considers to be unnecessary surgery become obvious. This book is meant as a consumer guide to elective surgery with a definite "consumer beware" slant. McCabe is highly critical of the medical establishment and after reading a few of the horror stories he relates, it is hard to blame him. Besides this criticism, McCabe also offers chapters on alternative health care, diet, deciding on surgery, how to proceed with it, recovering and a list of questions to ask the doctor. The reference value of the book comes in the second half when McCabe lists a variety of research resources arranged by major subject categories. For each of these categories, he includes a bibliography, list of associations and occasional Web sites. (However, one of the categories is "Online Health Information," the majority of which are Web sites.) Overall, this book contains valuable information enabling one to become an educated consumer of medical services.

Some other reference books that you might consider adding to your collection include:

Greenwood Press's *D.H. Lawrence: A Reference Compendium* by Paul Poplawski (1996, 0-313-28637-X, \$99.50).

Bartlett's Roget's Thesaurus published by Little, Brown (1996, 0-316-10138-9, \$18.95).

The Atlas of American Society by Alice C. Andrews and James W. Fonesca published by New York University Press (1995, 0-8147-2626-7, \$40).

Vital Statistics on Congress 1995-1996 by Norman J. Orstein, Thomas E. Mann and Michael J. Malbin published by Congressional Quarterly (1996, 0-87187-865-3, \$46.95).

Omnigraphics Inc.'s *The Business Library and How to Use It* by Ernest Maier, et al. (1996, 0-7808-0026-5, \$45).