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From the Reference Desk

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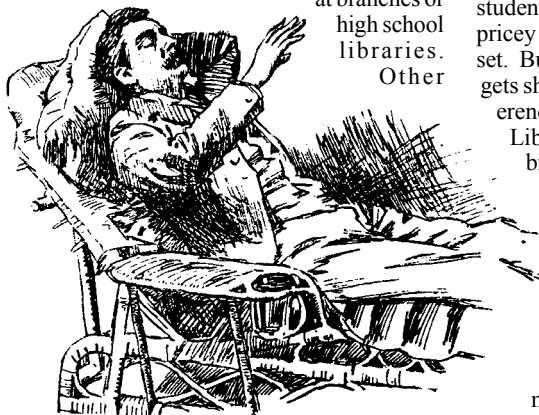
by **Tom Gilson** (Head, Reference Services, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, 66 George Street, Charleston, SC 29401; Phone: 843-953-8014; Fax: 843-953-8019) <gilson@cofc.edu>

A new entry joins the **Facts on File's** well regarded set of companions to British poetry. Edited by **James Persoon** and **Robert R. Watson**, the **Facts on File Companion to British Poetry 1900 to the Present** (2009, 978-0-8160-6406-9, \$85) keeps up the tradition of quality set by its predecessors. Consisting of 450 entries, this **Companion** is a compact and well conceived volume that aims to meet the needs of both high school students and undergraduates.

However, the title is a somewhat misleading. Coverage is not restricted to poets of the British Isles. The editors purposely expanded their range by including "the world community of poets writing in English, minus Americans." As a consequence, readers will find entries on the poets and poetry of countries like Canada, India, Australia, New Zealand and English speaking nations in Africa. While many of the articles deal with individual poets, there are also numerous entries on specific poems as well as others covering the impacts of movements like cubism, feminism, postimpressionism, new criticism, surrealism and performance poetry. The essays range in length from 500 to 2,500 words and contain "see also" references to related entries as well as helpful bibliographies. There is also a brief glossary of poetic terms and a selected bibliography consisting of poetry anthologies and general works on more than one writer. A list of contributors and a general index rounds out the volume. Admittedly, a thematic index where readers could see a list of all the articles on a specific category like Irish Poetry would have been helpful. However, given the overall quality here, this is not a deal breaker.

The **Facts on File Companion to British Poetry 1900 to the Present** manages to compress a great deal of valuable information and useful analysis into a handy and easy to use volume. The articles are written in a style that is informed by scholarly criticism but clear and understandable to the general reader. Like the other volumes in the set, this **Companion** is one of those versatile reference works that could be placed in the circulating collections of larger public or academic libraries and in reference

at branches or high school libraries. Other



titles include *The Facts on File Companion to British Poetry before 1600* (2008, 978-0-8160-6360-4, \$85) and *The Facts on File Companion to British Poetry, 17th and 18th Centuries* (2008, 978-0-8160-6328-4, \$75).

Although focusing on a somewhat more "spicy" topic, *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Love, Courtship, and Sexuality through History* (2008, 978-0-313-33359-0, \$599.95) is another reference intended for both undergraduates and high school students.

The set is divided into six volumes by broad time periods including The Ancient World, The Medieval Era, the Early Modern Period, the Colonial and Revolutionary Age, the Nineteenth Century, and the Modern World. Each volume is individually edited and can stand alone as a single volume although they are obviously more impressive as a set.

Major topics like marriage, prostitution, sexually transmitted disease, love and courtship, religious views, contraception, rape, and homosexuality are covered in all volumes. However, era sensitive subjects like psychotherapy, media and sex, Sappho, the Kama Sutra, music halls, and the Atlantic Slave Trade are featured in one or two volumes. Unfortunately, there is no overall index which detracts from the **Encyclopedia's** usefulness as a set. Admittedly, the argument can be made that given the chronological arrangement by volume that an index is unnecessary, but from a reference stand point a good general index is always a plus. If a second edition of this work is planned, an overall index should be seriously considered. On the positive side, each volume has its own guide to related topics, a chronology of events and a selected bibliography. The articles are fact filled and objective reflecting a variety of perspectives, especially when dealing with more controversial issues.

Taken as a whole, *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Love, Courtship, and Sexuality through History* offers a fascinating historical survey of a topic that nearly everyone is curious about. While it is a serious and scholarly work, it is also accessible to advanced high school students and general readers. Admittedly, it is pricey and this will cut into the interest in the set. But those libraries with the requisite budgets should give it consideration, if not for reference, then for their circulating collections.

Libraries interested in a work that offers a broad multidisciplinary approach to more current issues related to sex and gender might also consider **Macmillan's Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender** (2007, 978-0-02-866115-5, \$425).

Sage has recently published a two-volume set covering one of the most serious and growing public health

concerns facing the nation. *The Encyclopedia of Obesity* (2008, 978-1-4129-5238-5, \$250) is edited by **Kathleen Keller** of the **New York Obesity Research Center** and contains almost 500 entries on a diversity of topics that will be of interest to both students and lay readers.

The scope of these two volumes is diverse and sweeping with coverage of the medical, biological, societal and personal implications of this condition. There are numerous articles that touch on obesity as it relates to children, women and people of different races and ethnicities. There are also entries that discuss physical and genetic factors as well as psychological, environmental, and societal contributors. In addition, there are articles that cover medical treatment and dietary interventions as well as those that treat various eating disorders and other health implications. Pointing to the fact that obesity is not purely an American phenomena, there are articles that discuss its prevalence in other parts of the world.

As is true with most encyclopedias, this set is intended as a starting point for further research as well as source of background explanations and definitions. As such, each entry has its own bibliography listing journal articles, books and websites. There is also an overall Resource Guide at the end of volume two as well as a glossary and a ranking of obesity prevalence by gender and country. An additional feature is a Body Mass Index table in volume one.

The Encyclopedia of Obesity offers readers a snapshot in time of the current research relating to obesity. While the entries are scholarly and peer reviewed, they appear written with the lay reader in mind. Larger public libraries as well as academic and special libraries should give it full consideration. And for those of you who prefer the online version, check out www.sage-ereference.com.

(Other libraries looking for a more economical one-volume treatment may want to consider **Facts on File's Encyclopedia of Obesity and Eating Disorders** (2006, 0-8160-6197-1, \$75).)

American Countercultures: An Encyclopedia of Nonconformists, Alternative Lifestyles, and Radical Ideas in U.S. History (2009, 978-0-7656-8060-0, \$299) is another title that should have broad appeal. Edited by **Gina Misiroglu** and published by **M.E. Sharpe**, this three-volume set leaves no doubt that nonconformity is a major theme running throughout the American Experience. From the Puritan dissenters like **Roger Williams** to today's gay rights proponents, counterculture personalities and movements and have been essential ingredients in shaping our history.

However, this encyclopedia's focus is not

continued on page 57



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From the Reference Desk from page 56

merely on people and movements. Articles are also devoted to places and events, ideas and ideologies, the arts, film and music, as well as books and other publications. Even consumer products and illegal substances are covered. As such, readers will find entries on topics as diverse as Greenwich Village, the Woodstock Music and Art Fair, Abolitionism, Pseudoscience, Feminism, Freemasonry, *Easy Rider*, the Beat Generation, Gangsta Rap, Gonzo Journalism, *The Liberator*, Marijuana, Absinthe, and the Volkswagen Beetle. The length of the entries reflect the importance of the topic and the writing is straight forward, factual and accessible. There are short bibliographies for each entry and "see also" references are employed throughout. Each volume has an individual table of contents as well as a thematic index or topic finder for the whole set. The third volume also has a collection of 24 relevant documents, a cumulative bibliography, a filmography and a useful general index.

American Countercultures: an Encyclopedia of Nonconformists, Alternative Lifestyles, and Radical Ideas in U.S. History offers readers a unique reference that pulls together disparate elements of our historic nonconformity. By doing so it helps provide clarity and definition to just how deeply

countercultures are woven into the American fabric. In addition, it is one of those references that, while being useful and fact filled, is also fascinating to read and fun to browse. While most of the contributors are academics, this reference is well suited to general audiences and public libraries will want to

consider it along with undergraduate libraries. This encyclopedia is a strong compliment to another **M.E. Sharpe** reference entitled the *Encyclopedia of American Social Movements* (2003, 978-0765680457, new copies available from **Amazon** starting at \$412). 🐼

Booklover from page 55

theater screen. Even **Saramago** acknowledged when interviewed about the cinematic potential of "*Blindness*" that he had resisted "because it's a violent book about social degradation, rape, and I didn't want it to fall into the wrong hands."

At this point, the reader might well ask what exactly does all this have to do with **Joy's** recommendation? **Saramago's** lead character is a woman and ultimately the only individual unaffected by the white blindness. Thus the reader is afforded voyeur status in the atrocity as seen by a woman. In "*Infidel*" **Ayaan Hirsi Ali** tells her story of exile. In her youth, the exile was necessary because her father opposed the Somali dictatorship and actively worked to overthrow it. As a young woman her exile was self-imposed to escape an arranged marriage. She had begun to question the Muslim oppression of woman asking such questions

as "Must our husbands obey us too?" It is yet another story of the monster as seen through the eyes of a woman.

So why mention "*Hypocrite in a pouffy white dress: Tales of growing up groovy and clueless*"? There is always more than one way to present the subject matter. **Saramago** used his beautiful prose in the fictional account of humanity's inability to help itself. **Ali** told her life struggle simply and candidly. **Gilman** uses humor to reflect on her formative years. Sometimes it is the schoolyard encounter that is our cruelest. In the disparate worlds of literary fiction, self imposed religious exile and an Upper West Side Manhattan schoolyard; humanity continues to present its darkest side to us. In these three cases the encounter is served up to us from a uniquely feminine perspective; but it is no less real and horrible. 🐼

As a final note of gratitude to my long-term friend, Jim, who found the words that I needed to round out this presentation. — DJ