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From the Reference Desk-Reviews of Reference Titles

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From the Reference Desk

by **Tom Gilson** (College of Charleston) <gilson@cofc.edu>

Ancient Egypt holds a continuing fascination for students and scholars, as well as the general public. A recent reference set will give them all a reason to smile. **Oxford University Press** has published a top-notch subject encyclopedia that is exhaustive and accessible. With over 600 articles in 3 volumes, the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* (2001, 0195102347, \$450) is an example of what a quality encyclopedia should be. Editor **Donald B. Redford** and his contributors illuminate the study of ancient Egypt from the early treasure hunting days of the late 1800's through today's application of 21st century techniques and methods. In the process they point to the evidence provided by architecture, language and linguistics, literary theory, archaeology, religion, art, economics, life sciences and other fields of study. The articles cover every aspect of ancient Egyptian life from foreign affairs to burial rites. Individual biographies, discussions of historical periods, analysis of individual sites, geography and resources, household goods and jewelry, death and the afterlife, sports and festivals; there are entries treating them all. The bibliographies are impressive. Many of the major articles are in sections with each having its list of resources. For example, the article on Egyptian scripts contains an overview, as well as sections on hieroglyphs, cryptography, Hieratic, Demotic, and Coptic scripts. Bibliographies follow each. Production features are good with black and white photos, drawings, maps and charts complementing the text. The binding is sturdy by today's standards and the print is clear and easy on the eyes. The set includes both a synoptic outline of contents and a thorough index lending a sense of scope and access to specifics. There is also a list of Egyptian Kings on the back covers of each volume.

More focused than Scribners' *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* and broader in coverage than **Routledge's** *Encyclopedia of Archaeology of Ancient Egypt*, the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* should find a prominent place on academic library

reference shelves. Given the popularity of the subject, larger public libraries will also want to give it thoughtful consideration.

Another subject encyclopedia that merits attention is **Routledge's** *International Encyclopedia of Women* (2000, 0415920884, \$495). This 4 volume set concentrates on ideas and issues of concern to women worldwide. It is not focused on people or places. Biographies are not included and there are no individual country studies. Important figures and specific countries are treated within articles on individual issues. For example, the article on feminism is more like a series of articles and contains an overview as well as sections on places as diverse as China, the Middle East and the sub-Sahara. It also highlights the people most associated with the topics discussed. *International Encyclopedia of Women* shares with another recent **Routledge** publication an unabashed grounding in feminist practice and theory. (See my review of the *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theory* in the Feb. 2001 *ATG*, p 49-50.) For example, in the article on cosmetic surgery the author openly says that she comes to the topic "from a mainly feminist, critical standpoint." In general, that can be said for the entire encyclopedia. Regarding content, the coverage is comprehensive and informed by the latest scholarship. Close to 1000 articles discuss women's issues in a number of broad areas like the arts, education, health, reproduction and sexuality, the environment, family, politics, science, religion and women's studies. The perspective is international with contributors from 70 different countries. As you would expect there are useful bibliographies with each entry and they contain references to books, journal articles and Websites. There are "see also" references linking related articles and a thorough index. Unfortunately, the index uses the annoying practice of referring only to page numbers, and not the volume. That works fine when the key is on each page of the index or when the page range is printed on each volume. But in this set the key is only on the first page of the index and there are no page numbers printed on the spine of the each volume. Another downside is the binding. It is of the paper variety and does not inspire confidence that it will hold up under heavy use.

Of course, the content is the main concern, and in that, the *International Encyclopedia of Women* deserves praise. It provides a thoughtful introduction to relevant issues, as well as being challenging and thought provoking. The in-

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tent of this set is scholarly but editors **Cheris Kramarae** and **Dale Spender** have successfully geared this work so it will have appeal to upper level high school students and the general reader. This encyclopedia is a strong buy for academic libraries supporting women's studies programs and a worthy purchase for larger public libraries where there is sufficient demand. If your library is interested, order it now. After June 30, 2001 the price tag goes up to a rather expensive \$695.

Spirituality is uniquely woven throughout Irish history and now there is a single volume encyclopedia that centers on that fact. Written by **Phyllis G. Jestice** and published by **ABC-CLIO**, the *Encyclopedia of Irish Spirituality* (2000, 1576071464, \$75) is one of those reference titles that is just as likely to find its way into circulating collections. One of the main themes in this book is the continuity of the Irish religious experience. Whether pagan or Christian, religions have adapted to Irish tradition in a way that "reveals a remarkable tolerance and affection for the faith of earlier ages." The only exception to this is the Protestantism brought by the English rule in the 16th and 17th centuries. (The ramifications of which are still grist for the morning headlines.) The 600 articles in this book tell the story of these fascinating developments in concise, but scholarly fashion. The entries in this book trace Irish spirituality from the Druids of the pre-Christian Celts to the creation of the Book of Kells to flirtations with 20th century New Age ideas. There are articles on topics as diverse as immortality, the Protestant Reformation, angels and shape shifting. The *Encyclopedia* also debunks some myths. St. Patrick is often given credit for the conversion of Ireland to Christianity. But as the author points out in her article on the topic, there is some evidence of Christian communities before Patrick, and in fact, Ireland "remained largely polytheistic 2 centuries after his death." Each entry has a brief bibliography with all of the citations contained in a cumulative listing at the end of the book. There is a helpful general index and black and white photos provide a visual break from the text, as well as illustrating specific entries. However, there is one recommendation for any future edition. There are a few summary articles like the ones on education, literature and poetry, but there are none dealing with art, politics, nor economics. Articles summarizing impacts on those areas would be of interest.

Overall, the *Encyclopedia of Irish Spirituality* offers a serious look at an engrossing, and in some places, popular topic. It is straightforward and factual without being dry.

Ms. Jestice is obviously very knowledgeable and fully engaged by her subject. Readers will be too. Whether for reference or circulating collections, her book is recommended for both academic and public libraries.

Bibliography is still a serious pursuit in some circles. Witness **Robert Balay's** *Early Periodical Indexes: Bibliographies and Indexes of Literature Published in Periodicals before 1900* (2001, 0810838680, \$55). Mr. Balay brings the same meticulous care to this work that he lent to *Choice* and *ALA's Guide to Reference Works*. True to its subtitle, this reference lists more than periodical indexes. It includes bibliographies that include periodical references along with references to books, government publications, dissertations, etc. The sources cited are not restricted to any particular subject or discipline. As the author notes in his introduction, "I have included any bibliography or index, whenever published, if it in some way gives access to pre-1900 periodical articles by date." Some 400 titles fit the criteria and range from Johann Beutler's index to nine German periodicals published in 1790 to the *Index to nineteenth century American art periodicals* authored in 1999 by **Mary Schmidt**.

Nor is the scope limited to English language titles. The author has a working knowledge of a number of European languages and has examined each of the sources cited, writing annotations for each that are critical as well as descriptive. The annotations are a real strength and allow this bibliography to serve as a selection tool as well as one for identifying sources. Anyone familiar with the *Guide to Reference Books* will recognize the organizational scheme. Entries are arranged in a similar alphanumeric sequence. A few of the sources listed are electronic, but as you might expect, the vast majority are in print. The book is indexed by author, title, subject and dates of coverage.

Early Periodical Indexes will be warmly welcomed by serious scholars and librarians alike. It unlocks the door to an important area of bibliography not easily opened elsewhere. While the author admits, "it would be foolish to pretend that I have found everything," he provides an admirable foundation on which other librarians and bibliographers can build. Undergraduate as well as research libraries will want it in their collections.

Reference librarians also appreciate a good, comprehensive bibliography that is centered on a heavily studied literary figure. So it will come as no surprise that **Scarecrow Press's** recent *Arthur Miller's Life and Literature: An Annotated and Comprehen-*

sive Guide (2000, 0810838699, \$95) will find a ready audience. This bibliography includes listings for primary and secondary sources as well as for media resources like films, television productions, and sound recordings of Miller's work. The primary sources include Miller's own diverse and substantial catalog ranging from major plays to minor essays as well as interviews, manuscripts and correspondence. Secondary sources are drawn from books, dissertations, manuscript collections and articles from newspapers, magazines and literary journals. Among the secondary sources a great deal of attention is paid to the specific stage plays and there are individual sections for each. For example there is a 100-page section devoted to *Death of a Salesman* and another 50 pages to *The Crucible*. Each citation has been thoroughly researched and verified. All are annotated with helpful descriptions of the content making it easy for the reader to decide if the work meets their research needs.

Author **Stefani Koorey** deserves great credit for a revealing work of scholarship that covers one of America's foremost writers. Students, scholars, librarians and all admirers of **Arthur Miller** owe her a debt of gratitude. *Arthur Miller's Life and Literature* is a necessary choice for academic libraries where Miller is taught. Larger public libraries may also find it of value.

Greenwood Press has also published a reference devoted to an icon of American letters. The single volume *John Updike Encyclopedia* (2000, 0313299048, \$89.50) by **Jack De Bellis** is a handy but authoritative guide to the author's life and work. Alphabetically arranged articles cover Updike's novels and other works of fiction as well as the individual characters that inhabit his world. There are also discussions of themes ranging from religion to sex as well as elements of Updike's style like imagery and symbolism. In addition, there are entries that deal with literary figures that Updike admires or disparages in his criticism as well as people he alludes to in his own work. Added features include a chronology of Updike's life and accomplishments as well as one of his works. There is also a list of films and film personalities mentioned in his fiction and non-fiction. While some of the entries contain bibliographic references and there is a general bibliography, this is not major feature. However, the author, **Jack De Bellis**, has also written a bibliographic monograph entitled *John Updike, a bibliography, 1967-1993* also published by **Greenwood** (1994, 0313288615, OP). Taken together, these two works are a powerful combination. Tying things up is a useful index ending the book.

The *John Updike Encyclopedia* offers a scholarly but accessible reflection of

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Updike's diversity and growth as a writer. It is a candidate for reference and circulating collections in most academic libraries. Individual scholars with a specific interest in Updike's work may want a copy of their own.

Another bibliography/research guide that may be of interest is the *Undergraduates Companion to American Writers and Their Websites* (2001, 1563088592, \$25.50). With this book *Libraries Unlimited* has published a compilation of resources which students and librarians will find useful. However, the title is a bit misleading. When I first pick it up, I thought that this was a webliography, and while there are Websites listed among the recommended references, many more are from other print sources. But the Websites listed are selective and have been examined by the authors to assure quality. They have also include annotations for many of them. The more extensive entries contain listings for biographies and criticism, dictionaries, encyclopedias and handbooks, journals, indexes and concordances, and bibliographies. Authors **James K. Bracken** and **Larry Hinman** have wisely based their selection of writers on standard literary anthologies. They only cover authors featured in the *Concise Anthology of American Literature*, *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, the *Harper Collins Literature* and the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*. The entries are arranged chronologically to facilitate those students studying specific periods of American writing. There is also an alphabetical list of authors with related page numbers. However, this is not a comprehensive guide. Bracken and Hinman admit that authors ranging from "Andy Adams to Maya Angelou to Rosanna Warren and Louis Zukofsky" are not included. But my main reservation about this book has to do with their "Strategy for Literary Research in the 21st Century," outlined in the introduction. They recommend students start with the Internet. This may be what students want to hear and what the media hype would lead them to believe, but I question the soundness of the advice. Admittedly, there are quality literary Websites. The authors list a number of them in their book as well as offering advice on identifying others. However, placing the Web above proprietary literary databases and print reference titles strikes me, at best, as premature, and at worse, a surrender to fad and convenience. Until there is more reliable quality in cyberspace, I prefer promoting the "library brand" of resources first, and then recommending the Web. Nonetheless, the *Undergraduates Companion to American Writers and Their Websites* is of definite value, especially for its intended audience.

Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

Column Editor: **Deborah Vaughn** (Reference Librarian,
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Spring symbolizes rebirth and growth. Grass gets greener, trees get taller, flowers bloom, and nature deliciously and gracefully stretches after a long winter's nap. For as many new things as there are to celebrate in this peaceful season, there are also old things to honor. In March we celebrated the 1995 unveiling of Netscape Navigator 1.1. Women's history was also celebrated throughout the month of March. April 18, 1775, marks Paul Revere's famous ride, the popular precursor to the American Revolution. And what brings them all together? I'd like to think that **National Library Week**, April 1-7, is the tie that binds. How could we appreciate growth and history without reading about it? How could we learn about female pioneers without books? And how could we have access to many intellectual and technological treasures without the library?

So the next time you're wondering what **Internet users**, **women's history**, and the **American Revolution** have in common, you'll know: you can check them out at the library. Happy reading! — **DV**

Ater, Mark and Betty Ater. *Internet User's Handbook 2001*.
Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001. 0786411317. \$22.50.

Reviewed by **Debbie Vaughn**
(College of Charleston) <vaughnd@cofc.edu>

"This book is dedicated to brand new computer users who want simple explanations." Thus begins Mar and Betty Ater's *Internet User's Handbook 2001*, a concise introduction to anything and everything relating to the Internet. For those of you who do not work behind a reference desk, you would be surprised at the number of folks who claim to be computer illiterate and web un-savvy. Of course, most of these patrons ask for help from a reference librarian only after they have spent a considerable chunk of time—sometimes even hours—at a computer, unsuccessfully searching and surfing for some bite (and byte) of information. It is a phenomenon that I affectionately call "e-embarrassment." With computers and the Internet being givens in most of American society, people are often uncomfortable (and, yes, even embarrassed) when they cannot find something that they feel they should be able to quickly discover by the input of a few words and the click of a mouse. E-embarrassment is not unique to any particular age group, nor is it specific to any gender or level of income. It can strike anyone at anytime. And it can strike in your library.

One solution is to add the *Internet User's Handbook* to your collection and to promote it to those patrons who often feel uncomfortable with the "whole web thing." In the spirit of **Gordon P. Foreman's PC Buyers Handbook 2000** (see ATG 12.4), Ater and Ater have created a guide to the Internet that is both all-encompassing and to the point. From the

first page of the introduction to the last page of the glossary, *Internet User's Handbook* is packed full of useful facts, hints, and advice. From operating systems to viruses, from wallpaper to ISPs, from Netscape Navigator to Microsoft Internet Explorer, the Aters cover it.

Readers be warned: this is not a reference guide. It is not a source that can be easily and quickly referred to in times of trouble without having previous knowledge the content. Rather, *Internet User's Handbook* is best read cover to cover before computer/Internet use. Though it has an acceptable index, this book does not lend itself to ready-reference as triumphantly as, for example, books in the **Peachpit Press' Visual QuickStart series** (point your browser to www.peachpit.com).

It does, however, help to make e-embarrassment a thing of the past. Chapters include "Internet Service Providers," "Do's and Don'ts," "Freebies," "Almost Free," and "Using a Credit Card Online," to name a few. Screen captures, step-by-step instructions, and "tricks" accompany information on issues such as cookies, message boards, and screen savers. Subject-specific chapters such as "Money," "Games," "Travel," "Hobbies," "Government," and "Finance," suggest websites for readers to visit. An appendix of the authors' "Favorite Websites" is included. *Internet User's Handbook* is, without question, a wealth of information.

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