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Book Reviews -- Monographic Musings

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Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

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This month, I present to you a potluck of information. I am pleased and grateful to have the assistance of reviewers Phillip

Powell and Michael Litchfield. Thanks, guys! — DV

Anderson, James M. *Daily Life During the Spanish Inquisition*. Daily Life Through History. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002. 0313316678. \$49.95. 290 pages.

Benn, Charles. *Daily Life in Traditional China: The Tang Dynasty*. Daily Life Through History. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002. 0313309558. \$49.95. 317 pages.

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

Greenwood Press' *Daily Life Through History* series is, simply stated, an invaluable addition to your school, academic, or public library collection. Over one hundred books come to me each year for review, and it is rare that I am as animated and keyed-up by said submissions. With an admitted interest in all things historical, I have an obvious bias towards chronological records of events; yet this is, without a doubt, a first-rate set of epic trivia.

Each volume in the *Daily Life Through History* series covers a relatively brief and at the same time general period of time, combined with a geographic location: the Spanish Inquisition, the Tang Dynasty, colonial New England, ancient Rome, Renaissance Italy, and early modern Japan, to mention a few. These are, indeed, "curriculum-based," as Greenwood's press release claims; the books fit nicely into many high school- and college-level lesson plans. The content also allows students who might not have an immediate interest in history to engage in other people's day-to-day lives, offering reality programming at its best. Social climate, sports and games, food and recipes, music, entertainment, retirement, marriage, and housing are but a few of the issues covered in each book.

Daily Life During the Spanish Inquisition begins with a chronology of events, continues with seventeen brief chapters covering various aspects of daily life, and concludes with appendices, a glossary, a bibliography, and an easy-to-use index. Author and University of Calgary professor emeritus **James Anderson**'s credentials are more than impressive: he was a Fulbright Scholar, a recipient of grants from the Canada Council and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and an often-published authority on Iberian studies. **Anderson** has written archaeological and historical guides to France and Portugal, and has accompanied numbers adult-education tours to European countries. With his tourism experience, it is

no surprise that **Anderson** sells the Spanish Inquisition. His extensive research is readily apparent as he presents readers with details so interesting and often gruesome that the Inquisition seems almost fictional. It is awe-inspiring when an author extracts all of the historical intricacies of a given time and place, so much so that the time and place read like fantasy. **Anderson** doesn't only give accounts of torturous inquisitors and horrendous sentences, though—he discusses different religious affiliations (Jewish and Islamic), rural life versus urban life, fashion, food, medical practices, and more. Images of painting, woodcuts, and pencil drawings illustrate Inquisition parades, street theatre, and bloodletting. A mouth-watering recipe for gazpacho is included.

Charles Benn, author of *Daily Life in Traditional China: The Tang Dynasty*, is an independent scholar affiliated with the University of Hawaii's Center for Chinese Studies. He has published a handful of works about Chinese History and Taoism. Slightly different in format than **Anderson's Spanish Inquisition**, *The Tang Dynasty* outlines the reigns of the Tang emperors and then breaks down major lifestyle issues into separate chapters: history, society, cities and urban life, the home, clothing and hygiene, food, leisure pastimes, travel and transportation, crime and punishment, sickness and health, the life cycle, and death. The first chapter—history—is a mere eighteen pages; yet those few pages present a quality overview of the events of Tang China from 617 to 884. **Benn's** brevity in the area of history allows him to later offer minute details about gold found in geese droppings, drunkenness among the upper class, and the Taoist acrobatic sword ladder, among other things. Well-defined maps and diagrams accompany the text, aiding visual imagery.

The only drawback to Greenwood's new series is the cover design—seeing that these books fit the curricular needs of the young-adult-to-early-undergraduate population, the book jackets could stand to be a bit snappier. But, as the old adage goes, you simply can't judge a book by its cover.

Bordman, Gerald. *American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford UP, 2001. 019513074x. \$75.00. 840 pages.

Reviewed by **Phillip Powell** (Reference Librarian, College of Charleston) <powellp@cofc.edu>

Since this is the third edition of this work by **Bordman**, a great deal has already been said about it. A particularly detailed review is written by **Thomas Riis** [*Notes*, 1994]. **Riis's** article goes into depth to a degree this reviewer, as a rank amateur, is not capable, but a few random comments may be relevant.

This sizable volume, which has been growing with each edition, keeps with the nature of its overall topic by calling its chapters Acts or Intermissions. And like their theatrical counterparts, Acts represent a significant era deemed notable by **Bordman**, while Intermissions characterize transition periods. The book begins and concludes with a Prologue and an Epilogue, plus there are six Acts and five Intermissions. The Prologue discusses musical programs—precursors of the musical theatre genre—that played in the 18th Century and the first half of the 19th Century. Act One begins with the play *The Black Crook* in 1866. Starting from there until the end of the book, each play is discussed season by season through 1999-2000. A new play is introduced in boldface followed by the theatre in which it premiered and the date of the opening. What follows are often-enjoyable synopses and criticisms of the play. These synopses can be very uneven, though—for explainable and, sometimes, unexplainable reasons.

It should be clarified that the term "synopsis" is loosely used. With a lengthy discussion, **Bordman** includes the plot line, of course. But he also mentions the primary characters and the actors who portrayed them.

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Sometimes, the reader is treated to excerpts of musical lyrics or dialogue. What makes a lengthy discussion such interesting reading is **Mr. Bordman's** style. It is evident he has an encyclopedic knowledge of the musical theatre and uses this knowledge advantageously. The following is an example that amused the reviewer greatly. Early in the work, **Bordman** speaks about a revival of *The Black Crook* and the ballerina, **Maria Bonfanti**, who was in the original production. **Bordman** suggests **Bonfanti** must have looked upon *The Black Crook* as her private annuity, appearing again years after its premiere. I am rather put in mind of **Carol Channing** and *Hello Dolly*. This reviewer saw her perform in it in the late 1970s thinking that would probably be the last chance to see **Ms. Channing**. Yet, nearly twenty years later, she was touring again as **Dolly Levi**. **Bordman** also speaks of the critical reception of *Carousel* back in 1945. Critics were certainly not of one mind at the time. Some called it the "season's triumph" while others spoke of it being the "beginning of an era of pretentious solemnity"...an attempt "to replace the marquee with a steeple."

The completeness of this work allows the reader to see the evolution of the musical theatre in America. With **Bordman's** comments, it is easy to determine what were trends in the genre within a given period and what was becoming passé. It is also interesting to see how "musical theatre" is defined when one sees the names **Gilbert and Sullivan**, **Ziegfeld**, and **Rodgers and Hammerstein**.

As complete as **Bordman** attempts for this book to be, the librarian within questions some fairly significant omissions. For a work of such scope, there is virtually no recognition of the sources that **Bordman** used to compile such an epic work. Any sort of recognition took place at the end of the preface to the first edition. Only there does **Bordman** state he consulted twenty-two libraries and theatre collections. And, of those, he only names three of them specifically. Although considered the seminal work of its genre, bibliographies of sources used and lists of these collections are sorely needed.

This reviewer found it odd that notable shows from the 1920s through perhaps the 1950s often receive significant coverage while he discusses later shows to a considerably lesser degree. It is not unusual for a play such as *Anything Goes* or *Porgy and Bess* to have an entire page devoted to it. *Oklahoma*, understandably, covers two entire pages and begins a third. Following *Sweeney Todd* (1979), later musicals, even the notable ones, seldom are given more than a lengthy paragraph. The unevenness in coverage is quite evident and the reviewer is curious why the change. Did musicals change so significantly

following the 1950s and 1960s? Are the more recent shows no longer worthy of the coverage given earlier productions? Finally, the

chummy tone of the earlier years is not there. Despite these quibbles, this book remains at the top of the pack.

Kobrak, Peter. *Cozy Politics: Political Parties, Campaign Finance, and Compromised Governance*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002. 1588260674. \$22.50. 273 pages.

Reviewed by **Michael Litchfield** (Charleston Conference Coordinator)
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Voter apathy recently gave the French a choice between the ultra-right **Le Pen** and the comparatively moderate **Jacques Chirac** (who looked pretty conservative himself a few years back when he was running for his first term). *Cozy Politics* is a book about voter apathy and how it has changed the way government works. **Peter Kobrak** argues that voter apathy is partly a reason for and partly a result of the gradual merging of politics and economics. He argues that government is becoming an increasingly corporate-sponsored spectator sport. Then he sets about proposing a solution: "*Cozy Politics* . . . takes the radical position that the dangers of the current course can be overcome only through an extensive redesign of our political parties and a more modest reworking of our government. This would encourage broader citizen involvement, which in and of itself would do much to counter the current political excesses and promote the broader interests over the special interests."

As our expenses (such as health care and education) have dramatically increased in price, our savings dropped, and our incomes lagged behind, **Kobrak** believes that we have come to lose faith in our elected officials, and as a result we have stopped participating in the political process. He writes, "fully three-

fifths of U.S. citizens are absent without leave from their political system." His solution is to reorganize political parties to make them a larger part of the political landscape and lessen the impact of campaign contributors, theorizing that more powerful parties will lead to greater citizen participation. This might seem a bit counter to empirical evidence, but he supports his claim by arguing that parties currently cater to large contributors rather than the citizenry they are supposed to represent. **Kobrak** first examines the reasons for growing voter apathy, then charts the effects it has on how elected politicians run government. Finally, he proposes some reforms to revitalize our political system to make it more responsive and responsible to the people.

Cozy Politics is a good source for a political science course, and I recommend it for an upper-level undergraduate collection. It serves to make its reader think about the issue it addresses more than it informs, so it wouldn't necessarily suit a lower-level undergraduate. It certainly makes the reader reflect a bit, since the common belief is that there's too much party politics and **Kobrak's** claim is that there isn't enough. At least not the right kind.

Hemingway, Ernest. *Hemingway on Fishing*. Nick Lyons, Ed. New York: Lyons Press, 2000. 1585741442. 242 pages. \$29.95.

Reviewed by **Michael Litchfield** (Charleston Conference Coordinator)

I have an extensive collection of **Hemingway** on my bookshelf, so selecting an anthology to add to that collection is a painstaking process. *Hemingway on Fishing* is a good collection of his work, with "Big Two-Hearted River," excerpts from *A Moveable Feast*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *Green Hills of Africa*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, and two of his posthumous works, *The Garden of Eden* and *Islands in the Stream*. However, the writing in *Hemingway on Fishing* is available already. The book is divided into three sections: the first is short stories and excerpts from his novels; the second consists of several articles **Hemingway** wrote for newspapers and magazines; the third section includes longer excerpts from *The Garden of Eden*, *Islands in the Stream*, and *The Old Man and the Sea*. The selling point of this book is

the second section. This too is available elsewhere, but it is hard to find, and it is nice to have a collection of journalism that spans forty years.

I love **Hemingway**, but I am not much of a fisherman. I am also too much of a student. While all of the works in *Hemingway on Fishing* are available elsewhere, what is not available, at least in a cursory search, is a collection of essays on the importance of fishing in **Hemingway's** fiction. I am ambivalent about the book; in the end, it is a smart collection and a solid introduction to **Hemingway's** work that spans his entire career with both fiction and non-fiction. But *Hemingway on Fishing* is nothing that offers new insight into his work and little that I have not read before. 🐟