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Book Reviews -- Monographic Musings

Debbie Vaughn

College of Charleston, vaughnd@cofc.edu

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From the Reference Desk
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two volumes. There is a chronological list of presidential administrations that includes the names and positions of each cabinet member, as well as a listing of individuals by office held that includes dates and the president served. In addition, there are appendices outlining the federal, state, county and municipal government service of each person listed, as well as their military service, education, place of birth and

marital information. These appendices serve the purpose of reformatting some of most pertinent information into easy to read lists.

The United States Executive Branch: A Biographical Directory of Heads of State and Cabinet Officials should prove a useful compendium to readers interested in American political history. It condenses into one source easily accessible information about the leadership of the federal government since the founding of the country. Academic libraries, in particular, will find it of value.

Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

Column Editor: **Debbie Vaughn** (Reference Librarian,
College of Charleston) <vaughnd@cofc.edu>

Column Editor's Note: William Shakespeare often uses animal imagery in his plays, including the romantic comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. However, in it, the character Bottom is magically transformed into an ass, not a dog. In fact, most of Shakespeare's references to dogs are insulting or unkind in nature. Often, the master dramatist used the phrase "he is a dog!" (or some variation thereof) to describe a scoundrel or rogue. This issue's *Monographic Musings* combines Shakespeare and dogs in a happy light, though. Two critical surveys of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are reviewed, and Ellen Finne Duranceau offers a mass of Dog Lit commentary in her semi-regular column *Books That Matter*. Happy reading, everyone! — DV

Halio, Jay L. *Midsummer Night's Dream: A Guide to the Play*. Greenwood Guides to Shakespeare. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2003. 0313321906. 184 page. \$55.00.

and
Nostbakken, Faith. *Nostbakken's Understanding A Midsummer Night's Dream: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents*. "Literature in Context." Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2003. 0313322139. 216 pages. \$45.00.

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

Greenwood Press has introduced two series that provide in-depth information about different works of literature. While they both investigate many of the same titles, *Greenwood Guides to Shakespeare* and "Literature in Context" are quite different in scope.

For example, *A Midsummer Night's Dream: A Guide to the Play*, written by Jay L. Halio, truly is just that: an in-depth guide to Shakespeare's romantic comedy. The book begins with a textual history that examines early editions, eighteenth-century editions, and modern editions of the text. In the second chapter, Halio considers various contexts of the script and reflects on a number of historical sources that influenced Shakespeare's story. This critical assessment is followed by a scene-by-scene explication of the text in which the dramatic structure of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is outlined. The fourth chapter presents a handful of themes that are present in the comedy: different strain of love, the play-within-the-play, reality versus illusion, friendship, and harmony from discord. Halio continues his analytic breakdown of the play in the fourth chapter by

expounding upon critical approaches to the text that might, as Halio suggest, help the reader more fully understand the "bountiful riches" of *Dream* (73). The author surveys and comments on scholarly literature pertaining to psychoanalytical criticism; feminist/gender criticism; New Historicism and Cultural Materialism; and myth, ritual, and folklore, all in light of the comedy's many themes. In the last two chapters, Halio discusses the play in performance or on film. Sketches and photographs from stage productions and stills from different versions of the film are included. A selected bibliography and sparse index complete the book.

In contrast, Faith Nostbakken's *Understanding A Midsummer Night's Dream: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents* addresses many of the same themes, but does so through a different pair of glasses. Whereas Halio responds to secondary literature, Nostbakken explores the historical, social, and political contexts of *Dream* by analyzing primary documents and historical data. Her first chapter, "Dramatic Analysis," not only

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Books That Matter — Dogs: Fantasies That Don't Disappoint

by **Ellen Finnie Duranceau** (Digital Resources Acquisitions Librarian, MIT Libraries) <efinnie@mit.edu>

Column Editor's Note: This column reviews recent books about dogs—not those dime-a-dozen books that tell you how to get a dog to sit and give you pointers on housetraining—but rather books about how and why people and dogs love each other. It's about the particularly enriching qualities of the human/canine bond, and what it means to those who share their lives with dogs.

I can't say for certain that these books will be as interesting to the average reader as they were to me, since by almost anyone's definition I'm a dog fanatic. But I feel confident that these are books that matter: If you believe that creatures other than humans matter, then the one species that lives closer to humans than any other seems to me important enough to read about. People and dogs have lived deeply intertwined for more than 10,000 years: Dogs bear witness to our daily lives and deepest secrets, share our beds, meals, smiles, and tears. So perhaps it should be no surprise that if you pick up any one of these books, by the time you are done, you will know more about love, and more about people, as well as more about dogs. And that's a good thing. — EFD

Two recent books focus not so much on how to train your dog, but on how to build a relationship with your dog, and I recommend both highly: **Suzanne Clothier's** *Bones Would Rain From the Sky: Deepening Our Relationships with Dogs* (Warner Books, 2002. 0446525936. 320 pages. \$24.95) and **Patricia McConnell's** *The Other End of the Leash: Why We Do What We Do Around Dogs* (NY: Ballantine Books, 2002. 0345446798. 246 pages. \$25.95) Both take an approach that

is different than that offered by popular dog training books. Both are sensible, insightful, intelligent, empathetic, and grounded in years of experience with dogs.

Clothier is a dog trainer by trade, but she is not your standard dog trainer. She is a humble observer of dogs who has learned how to communicate with them; she approaches dogs not as objects to control, but as beings to be understood and appreciated. Typical of **Clothier** is her willingness (after many years of working with dogs—she did not come to these insights instantly) to challenge and reject the advice of the mainstream dog trainers, who emphasize that people must show dogs they are the “alpha” member of the pack. She rejects those who say dogs should not sleep on your bed, get on the furniture, or have free access to toys...or they will become “alpha” dogs. (Now here's a woman I can trust to understand me and my dogs!) “If there's a single word I could remove from the language of dog lovers and particularly dog trainers,” she says, “it's this: alpha.” **Clothier** concludes that this notion “has served as justification for a fair amount of unfairness and downright cruelty to dogs,” and explains that “advice found in the popular dog literature is purely nonsensical, some is based on poorly understood truth, and some is nothing short of strangely twisted interpretations of what dogs really do with dogs.” She prefers the concept of “status” and offers a cogent discussion of this idea and its implications for working with dogs.

We need, in **Clothier's** view, not to dominate dogs, but to provide dogs with leadership, attention, and understanding. She debunks many myths about dog aggression and offers instead a gentle way of being with dogs.

with the remaining chapters: “Social Distinctions: Royalty, Gentry, and the Common People;” “Popular Culture: Holidays, Court Entertainments, and Play-Acting;” “Imagination and Beliefs: Dreams, Fairies, and Transformation;” “Performance and Interpretation;” and “Contemporary Applications.” An extensive bibliography wraps up the book.

Both **Halio** and **Nostbakken** require active critical thinking of their readers; they do so, though, by offering divergent examples and evidence pertaining to the themes in Shakespeare's ageless romantic comedy. *A Midsummer Night's Dream: A Guide to the Play and Understanding A Midsummer Night's Dream* complement each other well, yet they also stand firmly alone. Both books—and both series—would befit undergraduate and high school library collections. 🐾

Her emphasis is on seeing dogs as spiritual beings. She says:

“We hold ourselves above [our dogs] as if something dreadful might happen if we allow ourselves to embrace the notion that perhaps the dog lying at our feet chewing on a tennis ball is also a sentient being with feelings and emotions and thoughts and humor and language and loves and fears and creativity, and we may choke hard on the idea of the dog as a spiritual being. Of course...if our dogs do feel and think and reason (though not as incomplete versions of us but as fully splendid versions of themselves) then we'd best think long and hard about how we've been treating man's best friend.”

Through case studies and real-life examples, **Clothier** emphasizes getting a dog to do what you want the dog to do by understanding the dog: “The trick is to discover in what way (or ways) your dog is motivated to act as you'd like him to.” She likes to ask “how do we accomplish this together?” and “what can I learn from you?” believing that the questions stimulate thinking in terms of relationships and seeing and hearing in new ways. (Not bad questions to take into other domains of life, come to think of it.) She believes we can learn about forgiveness and nonjudgmental love from dogs and looks for ways to “become the kind of person my dog believes I am.”

I was deeply affected by **Clothier's** book—the only thing I did not like was the title, which discloses little of the book's value or approach. So, focus on the subtitle, not the title, and if you read only one of these books, I recommend that it be this one.

McConnell's book fills a similar niche as **Clothier's**, in that **McConnell**, who is an animal behaviorist, doesn't want to teach us how to get a dog to “sit” when we say “sit,” but rather how to understand a dog's world view, so we can more effectively interact with the dog. This makes for fascinating reading.

The chapter title “Translating Primate to Canine” captures both her purpose and her success in this book; its best quality is its ability to remind us that we are primates, and as such relate to the world around us differently than canines do. To offer one characteristic example, she includes pictures of dogs being hugged by people, looking a bit uncomfortable, as if they are just tolerating the hugs, while their humans smile blissfully, because this kind of full-frontal squeeze is a very primate behavior. Dogs never press their chests against one another and in fact tend to approach each other from the side; a frontal approach like this, especially if it includes eye contact, is very threatening to a dog.

Like **Clothier**, **McConnell** advocates understanding dogs and building a relationship with

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comments on structure, language, imagery, allusion, and irony, it also gauges the spectrum of the comedy genre and points to *Dream's* place on it. The second chapter inspects gender relations — “Love, Marriage and the Battle of the Sexes” — and offers actual examples of either historical or literary works that influenced *Dream* (including Shakespeare's later works). At the close of the chapter are twenty (give or take a few) “Topics for Written and Oral Discussion,” open-ended questions that are appropriate for in-class or take-home essays, group discussions, journaling, and other critical reflection. A bibliography of suggested reading closes the section. **Nastbakken** continues this format