September 2003

Book Reviews -- Monographic Musings

Debbie Vaughn

College of Charleston, vaughnd@cofc.edu

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

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

Recommended Citation

Vaughn, Debbie (2003) "Book Reviews -- Monographic Musings," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 15: Iss. 4, Article 21.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4488>

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.

Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

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

Column Editor's Note: As a reference librarian, I have a certain penchant for the Reference Issue of *Against the Grain*. The monographs reviewed herein are just waiting for reference consumption. Many thanks to **Burton Callicott**, **Michael Litchfield**, and **Jared Alexander Seay** for contributing to this month's column. Happy reading, everyone! — DV

Anderson, Charles R. *Puzzles and Essays from "The Exchange:" Tricky Reference Questions*. New York: Haworth Information Press, 2003. 0789017628. 215 pages. \$14.95.

Reviewed by **Jared Alexander Seay**
(Reference Librarian, College of Charleston) <seayj@cofc.edu>

Charles Anderson, reference librarian for thirty-five years, was the editor for "The Exchange," a column in *RQ* (later *RUSQ*), the official journal of the Reference and User Services Division of the **American Library Association**. As described in the preface of this book, "the purpose of the column...was to 'serve as a reference librarian's exchange for Tricky questions, notes on unusual information sources, and general comments concerning reference problems.'"

"The Exchange" eventually became a place of last resort for numerous unresolved reference questions sent in by librarians from many countries. *Puzzles and Essays from "The Exchange:" Tricky Reference Questions* is a collection of some of the more interesting questions and answers sent in over the thirty-five years that **Anderson** edited the column. The book's

seventeen chapters are divided into general subject areas such as "Strange and Common Customs," "Popular Sayings," "People and Places," "Quotations: Spurious and Real," and "Words and Phrases." Other interspersed chapters give helpful insights and advice on answering reference questions, reference desk anxiety, question negotiation, and even technological change and libraries. The final chapter lists questions that "The Exchange" has yet to find answers for. Each chapter ends with a cumulative list of references.

This is the one small complaint I have about the book: most of the answers do not necessarily give direct answers inasmuch as they give

sources to consult. For example, the matter of "how is black humor defined" is answered thusly: "The concept of black humor is discussed in an article entitled 'Those Clowns of Conscience.' (Friedman 1965)."

Anderson goes on to offer three additional sources. Many of the "answers" to questions are not actually answers, but rather "see" references. Another case in point is "why yawns are contagious" (something that has fascinated me for years). **Anderson** states merely that the question was "part of a large study on the ethological basis of yawning by a University of Maryland psychologist, Robert Provine." Again, sources are given, but the actual answer is not divulged. As a librarian, I can greatly appreciate being directed to the source of an answer. However, being an average "want it now" human, I would have been much more satisfied with a basic, direct albeit simplistic answer. On the rare occasion that **Anderson** provides direct answers, some of them are given without sources at all. A question about the origin of the term "on the Brooklyn side" is answered directly with no sources cited. My librarian self was horrified (and unsatisfied).

Anderson notes at the end of his book that a little more than half of the questions submitted to "The Exchange" over the last thirty-five years have yet to be satisfactorily answered. He includes these questions "that stumped reference librarians on four continents" in the last chapter of his book. Just reading over these made the librarian sleuth in me want to dive into the stacks. For a few of these questions I'm just "certain" that I know where to find the answer—I think.

Puzzles and Essays is a great collection of resources on hard-to-find answers and would be a fun addition to a ready reference shelf. It is well organized, comprehensively indexed, and fascinating to read. As **Anderson** says, we should not consider that a question has no answer just because it has not been answered after many years of research. The answer may just not be found—yet.

García Osuna, Alfonso J. *The Cuban Filmography, 1897 Through 2001*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003. 0786412755. 216 pages. \$55.00.

Reviewed by **Michael Litchfield**
<dcblue_room@hotmail.com>

The Cuban Filmography, 1897 Through 2001, by **Alfonso J. García Osuna**, is more than just a filmography. It includes a forty-page essay on the history of film in Cuba. Although

continued on page 81

From the Reference Desk from page 78

While *South Asian Folklore* is an impressive effort, there is no way a single volume could be comprehensive. The editors are correct in saying that this book "presents a suggestive sample of the huge range of South Asian cultural practices and productions." However, *South Asian Folklore* offers a very useful starting point, and is one of those encyclopedias that help define an area of study by initiating the collection of related and relevant information. Hopefully, there will be a second edition in a few years that will trace the continued growth of this field. Academic libraries supporting South Asian studies should put it on their list of future purchases.

Greenwood has added another title to its reference catalog that should attract some attention. The *Greenwood Guide to American Popular Culture* (2002, 0313308780, \$400) is a four-volume set that plays to our fascination with what **Gilbert Seldes** called the "lively arts." This set is an update of an earlier **Greenwood** title, the *Handbook of American Popular Culture* (1989, out of print but available used, via Amazon.) A few entries from the 1989 edition have been dropped because they have received substantial coverage elsewhere, but a few new

topics are including like, "amusement parks, home improvements, housing, living history, reenactments, museums and collecting, and the New Age movements." Overall, this new version consists of close to sixty chapters covering cornerstones of America popular culture ranging from automobiles and animation to Westerns and young adult fiction. Each entry offers historical outlines of the topic, as well as a series of bibliographic essays discussing reference works, research collections and history and criticism. In addition, each chapter ends with a listing of full citations for the books and articles referred to in the bibliographic essays. Editors **M. Thomas Inge** and **Dennis Hall** also include two helpful introductory chapters. The first attempts a definition of popular culture and is reprinted from the 1989 edition. The second chapter discusses the study of popular culture as an evolving discipline.

Greenwood Guide to American Popular Culture does not replace the five-volume *St. James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture* (2000, 1558624015, \$820.50) and it 2,700 alphabetically arranged entries, but it serves as a highly useful companion. It is intended for the student and the serious researcher in need of guidance to quality sources for numerous topics related to popular culture. Reference librarians in academic as well as larger public libraries will turn to this set when guiding patrons to further sources and basic background information.

the essay focuses on a nearly year-by-year summary of the evolution of film in Cuba, it also provides a cultural context within which to view Cuban film. Important theatrical works, musical compositions, novels, and poems are cited. The political backdrop is also explored, from Cuba's independence from Spain, through the corruption and racial tensions of the 1920's and 1930's, the rise of **Fulgencio Batista**, the Revolution, and the subtle but significant changes of the past forty years. The historical essay deals with the founding of ICAIC—the Instituto Cubano del Arte y Industria Cinematográficos—the government agency that has produced all of Cuba's films since 1965. The importance of ICAIC in the evolution of Cuban cinema cannot be overstated: since Cuban filmmakers all work for the same agency and are not in competition for profits, films made under the aegis of ICAIC tend towards the purely artistic. These films also form a body of work that defines Cuban culture. In post-Revolutionary Cuba, film is the most significant voice for social change; filmmakers often use their products to criticize the government and encourage social development.

The films covered in the book are not necessarily all Cuban. There are of course the ICAIC films: the brilliantly funny *Death of a Bureaucrat*; the painfully existential *Memories of Underdevelopment*; the social epic *Lucía*; *Fresa y chocolate*, a study of homosexual life in Cuba; and *For Trade*, a criticism of the government's housing policies, to name a few. But there are also films about Cuba made by non-Cubans outside of the country. There's *Cuba*, a United Artists movie starring **Sean Connery** filmed in Spain, and *Havana*, **Sidney Pollack's** film starring **Robert Redford** "conceived as a retelling of *Casablanca*." Also in the filmography are pre-Revolution films by the major American studios starring the likes of **Desi Arnaz**, and more modern films by Cuban-Americans such as **Andy García**.

The filmography itself is over 150 pages in length, and there is a bibliography and an index. Each entry includes the film's title in Spanish and English, the director and production company, the year of production, length, appropriate animation and music credits, cast, and a plot synopsis. What is unfortunately lacking is an index of titles. If you are looking for, say, *Memories of Underdevelopment*, and you know the Spanish title is *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, the film is easy to find. If you want to find a film starring **Sergio Corrieri**, you can quickly find him in the index. But if you can't remember a film's Spanish title, you'll have to thumb through the filmography to find it. Still, the book is useful for anyone with at least a basic knowledge of Cuban film. **García Osuna's** work is suitable for public and academic libraries.

Knowles, Elizabeth. *The Oxford Dictionary of Modern Quotations*, 2nd ed. New York: Oxford UP, 2003.
0198662750. 512 pages. \$35.00.

and

Ratcliffe, Susan. *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase, Saying, and Quotation*, 2nd ed. New York: Oxford UP, 2003.
720 pages. \$45.00.

Reviewed by **Debbie Vaughn**

The second editions of *The Oxford Dictionary of Modern Quotations* and *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase, Saying, and Quotation* are two of the latest additions to the long list of Oxford quotations dictionaries. **Elizabeth Knowles**, managing editor of the quotations dictionaries, and **Susan Ratcliffe**, an associate editor at Oxford, present two distinctive volumes for quotation reference consumption.

The classic print reference is now on the Web!

EUROPA WORLD

The Europa World Year Book Online

Experience the dynamic new online version of the *Europa World Year Book*, the indispensable source for information on world affairs.

EUROPA WORLD delivers:

- Up-to-date information on world events
- Sophisticated search and browse functions
- Comparative multinational statistics in graph and tabular form (premiering in September)
- And more ...

Price quotes, order details, and free trial subscriptions available from

Taylor & Francis E-Reference Services

Email: e-reference@taylorandfrancis.com

Call toll-free (800) 797-3803 Ext. 7845

www.europaworld.com

Europa Publications
Taylor & Francis Group

The Oxford Dictionary of Modern Quotations, covering only the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, is a straightforward collection of quotations arranged alphabetically by author. The source and year are attributed to each quote. The volume concludes with a 125-page keyword index and a selective thematic index. Over 100 pages longer than the first edition, which was published in 1991, the second edition incorporates broad categories into the main author sequence such as Advertisements, Cartoons, Catchphrases, Film Lines, Newspaper Headlines, and even Misquotations. If you own the first edition of *Modern Quotations*, it is worth the investment to purchase the second. With twelve years between publications, there has been ample time for the editors at Oxford to collect the latest quotation fodder. Even the typeface and the font size of the new publication make it more reader-friendly, and the extra categories in the main sequence are priceless. **Knowles** has done a first-rate job adding improvements to the second edition of this useful tome.

Likewise, **Ratcliffe** has enhanced the second edition of *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase, Saying, and Quotation*, which boasts a 20% increase of information. This interesting volume goes beyond simple quote resuscitation and, in a between-the-lines fashion, illustrates the impact that society, language, and communication have on each other by "emphasizing the links between individual remarks and fixed phrases and sayings." It is not as comprehensive as a traditional volume of quotations, such as **Bartlett's** or the general *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*. Nevertheless, **Ratcliffe's** edition presents a unique alternative to such reference standards. The book is primarily arranged by extremely broad topics with "see" and "see also" references included when necessary. A list of these topics serves as a vague table of contents at the beginning of the book. An extensive keyword index makes for easy accession. Quotations included under each topic are further categorized into proverbs and sayings, phrases, and quotations. (Note that not every topic includes phrases, most likely because established expressions seem to be difficult to nail down.) I was initially foggy on the distinction between the three, but luckily the reprinted introduction to the first edition clarified any confusion. A proverb refers to "a short pithy saying...held to embody a general truth," whereas a phrase is a non-sentence "with a particular

continued on page 82

Book Reviews
from page 81

meaning," and a quotation is defined as a remark "said by a particular person at a particular time." Whether looking for a quote on a particular topic or studying the evolution of verbal communication, *Phrase, Saying, and Quotation* offers a choice variety of references. What is absent is an author index, which would allow even easier access to individual quotations.

As an aside, both *Modern Quotations* and *Phrase, Saying, and Quotation* contain an advertisement for **AskOxford.com**, Oxford's free

Web site devoted to "language exploration." This, too, is a fun source for not only quotation research but also writing tips and foreign language help. Of course, a link is provided to shop for Oxford publications, but **AskOxford.com** is not merely one giant ad. The free content nicely augments the vast assortment of Oxford reference books, and the site provides catchy words of the day and quotes to expose younger learners to the study of language and communication.

The Oxford Dictionary of Modern Quotations and *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase, Saying, and Quotation* are worthy candidates for high school, public, and academic libraries.

Martínez-Fernández, Luis, et al., eds. *Encyclopedia of Cuba: People, History, Culture*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003. 157356334X. 2 volumes, 760 pages. \$174.95.

Reviewed by **Michael Litchfield** <dcblue_room@hotmail.com>

The Encyclopedia of Cuba attempts to offer an extensive, if somewhat introductory, study of Cuba's history and culture without delving into politics. The editors have brought together more than 700 entries by eighty-one authors. The encyclopedia is divided into twelve chapters, with the entries arranged first by theme, then alphabetically by subject. The first chapter of volume one is a brief introduction to Cuba's national symbols: the national anthem, bird, coat of arms, flag, flower, and tree. Cuba's geography is dealt with in the second chapter, with entries on each of the country's fifteen provinces and major cities. The next three chapters consist of the history of Cuba, which is broken down into the Colonial Period, the Republican Period, and the Revolutionary Period. Cuba's modern economy is addressed in the sixth chapter; literature and social sciences in the seventh. Volume two covers the performing arts, the plastic arts, popular culture, religion, sports, and the Cuban Diaspora. There are also fifteen appendices consisting mostly of important documents in Cuban history, from **Columbus's** log to the Helms-Burton Act. Chronologies of Cuba's colonial, republican, and revolutionary eras are also included.

There is thorough cross-referencing within and between the books, and both volumes

commence with an alphabetical list of entries for easy navigation. A selected bibliography broken down by subject and entry-specific shortlists of further readings allow researchers to examine more detailed resources. A cumulative index rounds out the set. While most of the entries are fairly short—roughly half a page—there are several that go into more depth. For instance, there are five pages devoted to **Fulgencio Batista**; **Fidel Castro's** narrative is three pages, as is **Che Guevara's**. On the flipside, some fairly significant people seem a little short-changed: **Nicolás Guillén's** entry is less than a page—not much for the "national poet." The entry on Cuban cinema is, not surprisingly, fairly encompassing, as is the entry on Cubans in the U.S. music industry.

The Encyclopedia of Cuba is thorough but hardly exhaustive; however, it is not meant to be so. It is intended to introduce Cuba's history and its culture, and it points the interested reader to more in-depth works: **Tad Szulc's** definitive biography of **Fidel Castro** is referenced more than once, as is **Jon Lee Anderson's** similarly definitive biography of **Che Guevara**. As an introduction to Cuba, the encyclopedia is certainly a success, and is suitable for high school, public, and academic libraries.

McKean, Erin, ed. *Weird and Wonderful Words*. Ill. by Roz Chast. New York: Oxford UP, 2002. 0195159055. 144 pages. \$16.95.

and
Hargraves, Orin. *Mighty Fine Words and Smashing Expressions*. New York: Oxford UP, 2002. 0195157044. 320 pages. \$27.50.

Reviewed by **Burton Callicott** (Reference Librarian, College of Charleston)
<callicottb@cofc.edu>

The **Oxford University Press** has recently come out with a couple of fun books with very promising titles for logophiles or anyone with a mild interest in the English language and English words. *Weird and Wonderful Words* was compiled by **Erin McKean**, one of six staff editors of the *New Oxford American Dictionary*. After reading just a few pages of her book

it is clear that **McKean** loves her job and loves words. It is easy to imagine her filling many notebooks with words of particular interest much the same way beachcombers gather seashells. With this book, **McKean** shares one of her word notebooks she has devoted to the truly weird and wonderful.

McKean's fuzzy theme provides plenty of

room to range and to be idiosyncratically selective. Appropriately for a dictionary editor, she has arranged the book in alphabetical order. A simple list of words with their definitions are broken up with short essays on word families with titles such as: "Aberrant and Amazing Anatomy," "Freakish and Fantastic Fornications," "Irregular and Incredible Illnesses," *et cetera*. I found these essays to be quite interesting, fun, random, and titillating. They are short and hence whetted my appetite for more.

What really ties the book together are the illustrations by **Roz Chast**. Anyone who has read *The New Yorker* will instantly recognize the work of **Chast**. Her illustrations are very funny and well spaced throughout the book. Many readers will be tempted to leaf through the book in order to indulge themselves in the cartoons/illustrations before getting to the more meaty essays and definitions.

My only criticism is that the definitions are not "Oxford English" enough; that is, there are no etymological notes or historic usages. Also, I think the book would have benefitted from having more essays to break up the lists of words and definitions. On the whole, this is an amusing book and probably best enjoyed in short concentrated bursts. It is revealing of the author in a unique way that is perhaps more honest than an autobiography. Librarians and scholars will be happy to note that there is an annotated bibliography of reference works as well as a "Webliography of Weird and Wonderful Word Sites" tacked on to the end of the book. An added bonus is **McKean's** clever do-it-yourself section entitled "How to Create Your Own Weird and Wonderful Words." Furthermore, **Simon Winchester's** brilliant forward is almost worth the cost of the book.

Despite its jaunty title, **Hargraves's** volume, *Mighty Fine Words and Smashing Expressions*, is a much more serious and systematic endeavor than **McKean's**. As stated in the introduction, "this book is mainly concerned with fleshing out the contexts in which situations arise between the two major dialects of English in the world today: American English and British English." Indeed, **Hargraves** fleshes out, or rather maps out, these contexts in chapters that cover the gamut of life: "Money, Business, and Work," "The Government and the Law," "Education," *et cetera*. All the chapters and appendices are chockfull of charts that draw the distinctions between American English and British English in stark, clear lines.

Hargraves's style is precise. Those expecting to have a little coffee book chuckle reading about the idiosyncratic terms germane to the British or the Yanks may be somewhat disappointed. The monograph is probably better suited as a guidebook or a reference book. It may prove to be indispensable to an American traveling to the United Kingdom and vice versa. It could also prove to be an excellent and unique addition to a reference collection, though its title may throw off reference librarians doing a quick scan of catalog results. The straightforward, unambiguous chapter titles coupled with its fairly thorough subject and word indices are what really motivate this book and determine its worth. **Oxford's** attempts to market this book as a "fun

continued on page 84

Book Reviews from page 82

and witty guide" are somewhat misguided. My feeling is that for this book they would have done better to stick to a more classic, staid and stodgy reference book approach for its packaging and promotion. This is not to say that the book is totally dry. It will be very interesting, if not

exactly amusing to Anglophiles, Americanists, and semioticians.

Although these books exhibit a similar *joie de vivre* with their cute titles and attractive covers, they really are suited to different audiences and purposes. **McKean's** book would make a great coffee table or gift book while **Hargraves'** book would make an excellent addition to a public or academic reference collection.

Sarkodie-Mensah, Kwasi, ed. *Helping the Difficult Library Patron: New Approaches to Examining and Resolving a Long-Standing and Ongoing Problem*. New York: Haworth Information Press, 2002. 0789017318. 303 pages. \$49.95.

Reviewed by **Debbie Vaughn**

Though the title is more than a mouthful, *Helping the Difficult Library Patron: New Approaches to Examining and Resolving a Long-Standing and Ongoing Problem* is a dense yet graspable collection of essays sure to engage any public service librarian. Edited by **Kwasi Sarkodie-Mensah** and co-published simultaneously as *The Reference Librarian*, numbers 75/76, this volume brings together twenty-five articles concerning descriptions of and a variety of methods for dealing with less-than-ideal patrons and patrons' problems.

The book is divided into three sections: "The Nature of the Problem," "The Problem Patron in the Electronic Age," and "Providing Solutions to the Problem." **Sarkodie-Mensah's** introduction, albeit brief, aptly ties together the compositions. Each article begins with an article summary and relevant keywords, and ends with references. Disappointingly, **Sarkodie-Mensah** does not ex-

pound upon or even overview each section. Furthermore, it might be beneficial to have summaries of individual contributions as other editors have done with **Haworth Monographic** "separates."

Admittedly, twenty-five articles is a hefty collection. But as long as there are libraries and difficulties, there will be difficult library patrons. Scanning the table of contents made me momentarily question the inclusion of some of the pieces. At first glance, **Gary Kenneth Peatling's** "Historical Perspectives on Problem Patrons from the British Public Library Sector, 1850-1919" seems more like a thesis or dissertation than an approach to resolving ongoing patron problems. Immediately, though, **Peatling** re-

veals the importance of looking at the historical perspective. Likewise, some titles at the outset seem redundant: "Help Yourself: Front-Line Defense in an Academic Library," "The Difficult Patron Situation: Competency-Based Training to Empower Frontline Staff," and "Core Competencies of Front-Line Employees: The German Contribution to a New Service Culture." Yet each of these essays speaks in a unique voice and provides distinct information for frontline library personnel. It also might seem somehow inefficient or outmoded to devote an entire section to "The Problem Patron in the Electronic Age." It is, indeed, challenging to publish relevant and current information about technology in book form, for as soon as it hits the printed page it is often defunct. Even articles that specifically address patrons' interactions with the Internet and other ever-evolving resources offer timeless approaches to such issues. For example, **Sara Baron's** "Problem or Challenge? Serving Library Customers That Technology Left Behind" blankets computer anxieties with more enduring information about learning theories and information literacy.

Praise on the back cover of *Helping the Difficult Library Patron* exclaims "Finally! A book that fills in the information cracks not covered in library school about the ubiquitous problem patron." I couldn't agree more. This book is invaluable for initiation into library public service and an excellent tool for professional development. 🐘

Adventures in Librarianship — Fear Factor

by **Ned Kraft** (Ralph J. Bunche Library, U.S. Department of State) <kraftno@state.gov>

As a service to our readers, *ATG* offers this list of phobias and anxiety disorders peculiar to our profession. We believe that recognizing our problems is the first step toward overcoming them. If you find yourself described below, don't be ashamed. Help is available.

Nomatophobia: Fear of name authority files.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder: Occurs primarily among special librarians who fear their collections are becoming too generalized. Sufferers exhibit a strong aversion to printed materials outside a specific subject area, or, concurrently, an aversion to printed materials within the preferred subject area but written for a lay audience.

Anuptaphobia: Fear of staying single. Experts disagree as to whether this

meets the classic definition of phobia as an "unreasonable" fear.

Fiscal Panic Disorder: Most common among library directors who depend on lapsed salary for their book purchasing budgets. Symptoms include sweating, pacing, and self-mutilation.

Discardaphobia: Fear of weeding collections.

Marcophilia: An inordinate love of MARC format. Sufferers often must be escorted from meetings where MARC is disparaged, and will sometimes sneak volumes of US MARC Format home for bedtime reading.

Plutophobia: Fear of wealth. Experts are uncertain why this phobia appears so often among librarians.

Virtual Anxiety Disorder: Severe anxiety in-

duced by Web browsing. Sufferers feel lost, directionless, impatient, and tend to doubt their own validity. Some are compelled to tap their fingers and stare without blinking.

Postalphobia: Fear of incoming mail. Most commonly observed among serials librarians who develop the delusion that every piece of mail contains the announcement of a serial title change. Reductions of dietary sugar and caffeine have proven effective in the short term.

Acidic Personality Fixation: Among rare-book librarians, a sympathetic response to aging books where sufferers feel acidic and brittle, and develop phantom spine problems.

Stasibasiphobia or Stasiphobia: Fear of standing or walking. Most common in libraries with extensive "desk-top" resources.

Loophobia: Fear of pointing the way to the restroom, common among reference staff in public libraries. 🐘