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Book Reviews -- Monographic Musings

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Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

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



Column Editor's Note: Readers' Advisory is an integral part of patrons' library experience, especially in the public and high school library sectors. The books reviewed in this month's *Monographic Musings* illustrate the broad spectrum of sources available and skills required to offer quality RA service. **Joyce Saricks** has written another addition of her RA classic, *Readers' Advisory*

in the Public Library, that encompasses all aspects of RA. **Robert Bleiler's Guide to Mystery and Detective Fiction** is a weighty reference guide that does not specifically address Readers' Advisory issues, but would be an excellent resource for advisors. Both of these authors' current works are first-rate additions to the discipline's literature. Happy reading, everyone! — DV

to *Adventure/Suspense Fiction*, reviewed above). **Saricks** does not merely list and describe sources; she discusses their strengths and weaknesses and even provides a checklist of what to look for in RA reference sources.

The third and fourth chapters of *Readers' Advisory in the Public Library* focus on RA service itself. Chapter three examines how to grasp a book's appeal in order to relate it to other books (and eventually categorize it into a genre). As **Saricks** explains, appeal deals with more than just subjects or topics; it also relates to "pacing, characterization, story line, and atmosphere as well as style" (41). The author delves into these aspects and guides RAs on how to determine a book's elements. Included is a useful thesaurus of sorts that presents a variety of vocabulary words for each element. Unfortunately, while **Saricks** initially discusses the inclusion of nonfiction into advisors' scope, she does not relate any aspect of "book appeal" to nonfiction works. The fourth chapter highlights the RA interview, notes the similarities between it and the reference interview, and gives examples of what an advisor might do in a special situation. For example, if an advisor is asked whether or not a book is "safe," **Saricks** recommends that s/he never guarantee that a book is appropriate for children or sensitive readers. Rather, the advisor should suggest that the requestor simply try out the book but return it if it proves offensive at any point.

The final three chapters address issues that advisors and advisor trainers face. Chapter five focuses on helping advisors gain a general knowledge of popular fiction and nonfiction. Helpful tips for creating a reading plan are offered, as well as hints for noting similarities among different authors and genres. The sixth chapter delves into the challenge of promoting and marketing and assessing your library's Readers' Advisory service; examples abound. Finally, in the last chapter, **Saricks** explores training for advisors. Including this information for department heads, team leaders, and/or administrators gives this book wide-ranging appeal to all library personnel, especially those in public service.

Saricks' appendices are valuable "quick references" that provide concrete examples for RA services. The popular fiction and nonfiction lists are broken down by genre; each genre is briefly described before authors' names are given. **Sarick** then offers an essay on "Sure Bets:" "titles that appeal consistently to a wide range of readers, from fans of the particular genre to others beyond" (188), both fiction and nonfiction. Finally, librarian **David Wright's** *NovelList Author Readalike* on the author **Donal Goines** provides a concrete example of a fine RA promotion tool. A bibliography, an author index, and a subject index conclude the book.

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Bleiler, Richard J. *Reference and Research Guide to Mystery and Detective Fiction*, 2nd ed. Reference Sources in the Humanities Series. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2004. 001563089246. 848 pages. \$78.00.

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

Though **Richard Bleiler's Reference and Research Guide to Mystery and Detective Fiction** is not a Readers' Advisory guide *per se*, it is an unparalleled resource of information on this genre of literature. The book's catchy cover art is an immediate draw; of course, a book must not be judged by its cover but rather by its content. **Bleiler's** content is, in short, amazing. Who knew so much information about mystery and detective fiction could be tracked down and compacted into one handy volume? *Mystery and Detective Fiction* is a comprehensive source for anything and everything in connection with the genre: encyclopedias and dictionaries, guides and lists, maps and atlases, publishers, periodicals, quotations, Web resources, and more.

In this second edition, **Bleiler** has made the organization of his work more efficient than that of his first edition. He has left out the minutiae such as mystery and detective fiction Website descriptions. In his introduction, the author admits that his literary genre boundaries are not as rigid as they were in his original publication; if an author is even only infrequently recognized as a mystery or detective author, s/he is included in **Bleiler's** reference guide. Most impressively, in his sophomore work, **Bleiler** has increased

the number of monographic citations by one-third.

Mystery and Detective Fiction is broken down into twenty chapters, an appendix, and an index. **Bleiler** compartmentalizes various types of reference sources in each chapter; relevant sub-categories are arranged alphabetically within each chapter. Citation entries are assigned accession numbers and extensive bibliographic data is provided. **Bleiler** then provides annotations for each source; his annotative remarks are one of the strong points of *Mystery and Detective Fiction*. Even in the introduction, **Bleiler** makes no apologies for adding possibly-subjective comments regarding a source's ease of use, limitations, and other problematic issues. The appendix provides readers with an extensive author index and refers readers to entries by accession number. **Bleiler** includes everyone from **Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky** to **Janet Evanovich** (my personal favorite) to **Donald E. Westlake**. Finally, the index references authors, resource titles, characters, and topics.

Mystery and Detective Fiction will complement public, academic, and high school library collections and will be a handy resource for readers' advisors.

Saricks, Joyce G. *Readers' Advisory in the Public Library*, 3rd ed. Chicago: American Library Association, 2005. 0838908977. 224 pages. \$38.00.

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

Joyce Saricks is no stranger to Readers' Advisory—she worked in the field for over twenty years, she has given countless RA workshops and lectures, and she tops professional development in her field. **Saricks** is the author of *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction*, and she contributed to *Now Read This: A Guide to Mainstream Fiction, 1978-1998* and *Nonfiction Readers' Advisory*. In her third edition of *Readers' Advisory in the Public Library*, **Saricks** has added (to name a few things) over fifty pages of content, information that specifically addresses RA for nonfiction readers, ex-

panded popular reading lists, and an increased number of illustrative examples and figures.

Readers' Advisory in the Public Library is broken down into seven chapters, four appendices, a bibliography, an author index, and a subject index. Chapter one presents a history of the practice and offers a basic introduction into its scope. In this first chapter, **Saricks** makes a special note of the expansion of RA coverage into the nonfiction realm and into the audiobook format. The second chapter covers RA reference sources (including *Blood, Bedlam, Bullets, and Badguys: A Reader's Guide*

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Using **Saricks'** vocabulary of appeal outlined in the third chapter of *Readers' Advisory in the Public Library*, allow me to describe this most-excellent resource:

In terms of pacing, it is densely written yet easy to follow.

The "storyline" is issue-oriented and thought-provoking.

Saricks' style is concise and direct.

In other words, this book is a keeper, no doubt about it. I recommend this title for library school students, public libraries, high school libraries, and even academic librarians whose patrons regularly request RA assistance. 🌱

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and from sexual orientation to the political process. There are also entries on issues like blacklisting, censorship, violence, racism and ethics, as well as the impacts of technologies like cable and the computer. In addition, there are numerous articles that discuss popular shows listing their casts, producers, and programming history. And, of course there are articles on the careers and influence of leading actors and actresses, producers, media executives and television journalists.

The emphasis is on U.S. television but British and Canadian T.V. are given ample coverage and there are articles on a wide range of other countries including Turkey, Norway, Belgium, Finland, France, Egypt, Japan, Hungary,

India and Russia among many others. As far as features go, each entry has a list of further readings and "see also" references. The general index is good, but given that volume numbers are not listed, it suffers from a lack of a page key. Unfortunately there is no topical index that would have been helpful in grouping related articles and while each contributor is listed, their institutional associations and other evidence of their qualifications, is not. These are features that the editors might consider for any future version of the *Encyclopedia*.

This edition of the *Encyclopedia of Television* will prove even more useful than its predecessor. Academic libraries supporting popular culture, as well as media and communication programs should find a place on their shelves for this set. Larger public libraries that have found the first edition useful should also give it serious thought. 🌱

America Life in the 19th Century: Unabridged Travel Accounts by Audubon, Olmsted, and Twain

by **Gene Waddell** (College Archivist, College of Charleston) <waddelle@cofc.edu>

John James Audubon is best known as an artist, but he was also a major writer, and his accounts of American life in the Middle West from c. 1810-1835 are astonishingly vivid. **Frederick Law Olmsted** is best known as a landscape architect, but no one travelled more widely and wrote more incisively about the American South in the 1850s. **Mark Twain** is best known as a humorist, but his records of life along the Mississippi River and in the West are classic accounts of two eras of American history and two major areas of the United States.

Audubon, Olmsted, and Twain provided comparable accounts in that all three were similarly brilliant, well-informed, and excellent writers. **Audubon** and **Olmsted** wrote like novelists, and **Twain** was as good at non-fiction as fiction. Taken together, their travel accounts provide what is probably the best possible panorama of American Life in the 19th Century. At least four volumes of their best works deserve to be read in chronological order by everyone interested in how Americans became a distinctive people.

Audubon

In search of birds, **Audubon** travelled throughout the eastern half of the United States during the early decades of the 19th Century. From 1827-1838 he published 435 plates in his *Birds of America*, and to accompany his depictions of birds, from 1831-1839 he wrote and published five volumes entitled *Ornithological Biographies of American Birds*. To add interest to his scientific descriptions, he included occasional "delineations of American scenery," and these episodes portray what the life of early settlers was like on the Ohio and

other branches of the Mississippi River.

Audubon's accounts are all the more extraordinary considering that English was not his native language. He came to the United States from France to avoid conscription during the Napoleonic Wars, to make his way in life, and to learn English. While living on the Ohio, he became an American frontiersman and taught himself how to depict birds better than anyone ever had, and he learned to write extremely well. He kept detailed journals of his extensive travels, and they served as the basis for his accounts of birds and other types of animals and of his experiences travelling in the area of the Louisiana Purchase.



Audubon's Delineations were published together for the first time in 1897 along with selections from his surviving journals. A two-volume set edited by his granddaughter **Maria Rebecca Audubon** contains valuable notes by the naturalist **Elliot Coues**. In 1926 the episodes were first published by themselves in a volume entitled *Delineations of American Scenery* that was edited by his biographer **Francis Hobart Herrick**. Recently published collections of **Audubon's** writings have enhanced his reputation as a writer, but he also deserves to be considered a historian for his important record of a way of life that disappeared during his lifetime. Altogether, **Audubon** published 59 essays (including "My Style of Drawing Birds," which was only in his granddaughter's reprint, and "Merchant of Savannah," which was only in **Herrick's** reprint, but excluding the "Moose Hunt," which as **Audubon** noted later was contributed by another writer). His essays were published in random order, but most are dated, and the ones which are not can, in many cases,



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be assigned approximate dates. In chronological order, they provide an excellent overview of how the Midwest developed and changed.

Olmsted

Before becoming America's first landscape architect, **Olmsted** was a writer, and before be-

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