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## Book Reviews -- Monographic Musings

Debbie Vaughn

College of Charleston, [vaughnd@cofc.edu](mailto:vaughnd@cofc.edu)

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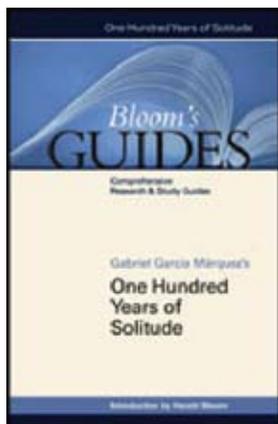
# Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

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

**Column Editor's Note:** No matter what your library affiliation is — publisher, librarian, administrator, or other type of information professional — you cannot help but be concerned with the spectrum of patrons, including those in the “Net Generation.” If you are a publisher targeting this audience, you must be responsive to its preferred reading medium. If your primary role is to serve children, young adults, or traditional-aged college students, then you are already aware of the unique characteristics of this population. If your focus is on adult services, then beware: Net Geners and all of their needs and expectations are coming. Many of these Net Gen patrons might already be familiar with **Harold Bloom**, or at least with his series **Bloom's Guides**. **Bloom's** literary resources are widely distributed among public, school, and undergraduate libraries. Likewise, Net Geners are apt to have been exposed to these and other reference sources in the **Chelsea House** suite, such as the series **The Great Hispanic Heritage**. Veteran **ATG** reviewer **Burton Callicott** examines two such titles in this month's **Monographic Musings**. Happy reading and happy conferencing, everyone! — **DV**

**Bloom, Harold**, ed. **Gabriel Garcia Marquez: One Hundred Years of Solitude**. Bloom's Guides. New York: Chelsea House, 2006. 9780791085783. 80 pages. \$30.00.

and **Darraj, Susan Muaddi**. **Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The Great Hispanic Heritage**. New York: Chelsea House, 2006. 9780791088395. 112 pages. \$30.00.



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

Whenever I hear a mention of **Harold Bloom** I am reminded of a Saturday Night Live skit from a few years back. Someone from the Weekend Update team was interviewing

“**Stephen King**” about the subject of his next book, due to be published soon. To answer the question, **King**, who had been typing furiously since the start of the interview, stopped typing, looked up and started reading the page: “um, lets see, its about a cemetery...” He stumbled as he continued to read the page. Based on the number of books “by” **Harold Bloom**, it would seem that he is as prolific, if not more so, than **Stephen King** ever was. Rather than assume a pseudonym as **King** has with his **Richard Bachman** persona, **Bloom** ensures that his name is prominently displayed on all publications that have only a remote connection to him. An author search for “**Bloom, Harold**” in **WorldCat** brings up 1,678 books (at least that is the tally on the day that this was written). As any librarian who has searched for classic authors and titles can attest, “*Bloom's Guides*” are ubiquitous.

I have to date avoided actually looking closely at a *Bloom Guide*. The cover assures us that **Bloom** wrote the four-page introduction and indeed, the book starts off with his classic observations about influences: “**Faulkner**, crossed with **Kafka**, is the literary origins of **Gabriel Garcia Marquez**. So pervasive is the Faulknerian influence that at times one hears **Joyce**

and **Conrad, Faulkner's** masters, echoed in **Garcia Marquez**.” For many literary critics, **Bloom** has imparted significant, if not life-changing or life-affirming comments on literature and literary theory. Love him or hate him, ever since his landmark “Coleridge: Anxiety of Influence” essay appeared in 1972, subsequent critics have been forced to deal with him on some level. There is no denying that his unpretentious, deceptively simple prose and his lack of fear of actually writing about literature (not “texts”) and his feelings about literature is refreshing and moving — especially in the wake of post-modern, deconstructionist approaches. Many have been moved to hate his comments, but he is moving nonetheless. It is strange to me that someone who is so well established and committed to the world of literature and ideas would be such a cheap date when it comes to publications, especially the “*Bloom's Guides*” that are so obviously geared to the marketplace rather than the advancement of ideas. Certainly there are nuggets in the *Bloom's Guides* that are worthwhile and interesting: “Much that is fantastic in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* would be fantastic anywhere, but what seems unlikely to a North American critic may well be a representation of reality.” The introduction, like most of **Bloom's** more recent work, is fun and incredibly frustrating. What readers get appear to be raw notes that cry out for revision and editing: “My primary impression, in the act of rereading *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, is a kind of aesthetic battle fatigue, since every page is crammed full of life beyond the capac-

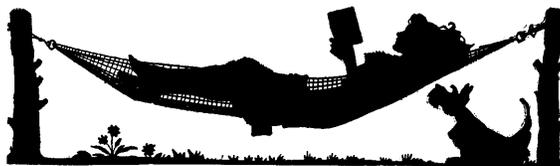
ity of any single reader to absorb.” One gets the impression that someone has **Bloom** held captive in a dank basement and is forcing him to crank out these rich introductions (and full length books as well, see his *Jesus and Yaweh, the Name Divine*, for a prime example). Given the intended audience for the *Bloom's Guides* series, high school students and first and second year college students, this makes little or no sense aside from an economic/marketing angle. Reference librarians know that few students looking to bolster a paper or brush up for an examination will find much of practical use in the introduction.

What follows the introduction is a librarian's nightmare (but possibly an undergraduate's dream). Standard chapters such as “Biographical Sketch,” “The Story Behind the Story,” etc. have no named author, are void of footnotes, and are followed by a brief bibliography. The rest of the book contains snips from critical reviews in which the author is named but any other citation information is omitted. The summary and analysis information is decent and quite functional as far as that goes: “Now a widower, **Aureliano Buendia** throws himself into politics. The conflict between the Conservatives (of whom **Aureliano's** father-in-law, **Don Moscote**, is one representative) and the Liberals has intensified” (46). This is the real meat of the book. The “Cliff's Notes”-type information is written in a chummy, cool smart guy kind of way that is pleasant and can help inexperienced readers make sense of a complicated story.

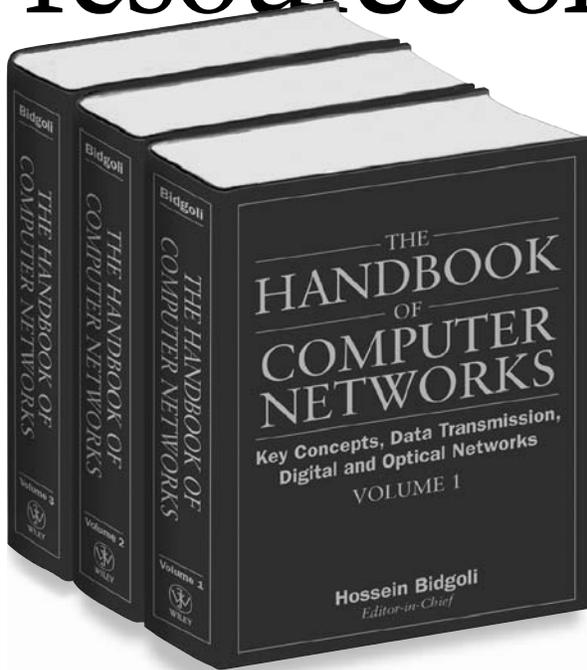
Some of the criticism included in the book is very functional in terms of undergraduates, in that it is straight forward and straight to the point: “The allegory is clear: Macondo, America, is a mirage, a dream. Everything repeats itself in a constant circle” (113). It is unclear, however, whether or not the criticism included has been published prior to the publication of this guide to *One Hundred Years of Solitude* — little reference information is provided — and many of the “scholars” included seem random. The list of featured critics includes **Peter H. Stone**, “[who] has been staff correspondent for *National Journal* in Washington since 1992 where he has covered a wide array of lobbying and campaign finance issues” and is “writing a book on **Jack Abramoff** and the Indian casino lobbying scandal that is scheduled to be published in the fall of 2006 by **Farrar, Straus and Giroux**” (122). The collection of criticism is a shame because though books like this can be seen as “cheating” and short circuiting the research process, they can be excellent bridges to “real research.” Guides that contain excerpts of well-cited criticism by the major players in the field can lead novice researchers to quality sources and a conception of the way the game is played. This *Guide* falls short.

Another grab at the library market published by **Chelsea House** is *The*

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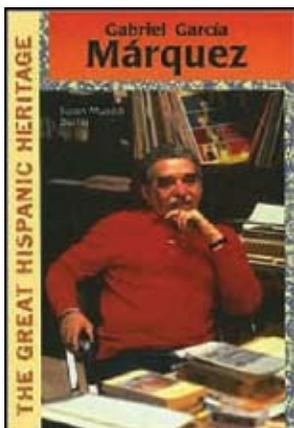


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## Book Reviews from page 66

**Muaddi Darraj** at the outset — a little extra cash, a book publication for the ol' vita, shouldn't take too long... However, the book is filled with filler statements that match some of the best **Darraj** has probably had to wade through from her students. "Young **Garcia Marquez** quickly showed a keen intellect and a great thirst for knowledge. He was also very well balanced" (33). Book length, glorified encyclopedia entries such as this are hard to write, especially for scholars who are trained to be creative and to tease out subtle, fine points. Sadly, the result in this case is a labored read.

Librarians love to see books like the ones reviewed here when placing orders and when helping junior and senior high school students burdened with a report assignment. Those patrons want/need a book



on **Garcia Marquez** and, thanks to **Chelsea House** and the like, we

are able to fulfill that need in a tidy, uncomplicated way. Yet, I would venture to say that few of us actually read the dreary and uninspired prose contained in the bright covers and shaded insets. This is not to say that these books do not contain useful information and that their layouts are not clever and well considered, nor that the timelines and bibliographies are not useful — they are. My point is larger and perhaps more rhetorical. Many of the monographs that we present young people in the name of education are deathly dull regurgita-

tions. I do not have any easy answers to correct this reality, but I do think that we are all complicit. To meet the needs of our patrons, we simply have to continue to buy the stuff being pumped out by the publishers of the world. But, as librarians and educators who are concerned with students, society, and the future, perhaps we should demand more quality and innovation. 🐼

## Rumors from page 65

And speaking of eBooks, the fantastic **Kim Steinle** (Library Relations Manager, **Duke University Press**) <ksteinle@dukeupress.edu> tells me that **Duke** is launching the **Carlyle Letters Online: A Victorian Cultural Reference**. This is the electronic edition of *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*. The **Carlyle Letters Online** features thousands of letters written by Scottish author and historian **Thomas Carlyle** (1795-1881) and his wife, **Jane Welsh Carlyle** (1801-1866), to over six hundred recipients throughout the world. In part because of grants from the **National Endowment for the Humanities** and the **Delmas Foundation**, the **Carlyle Letters Online** is currently available at no charge to institutions and individuals. Undertaken in partnership with **HighWire Press**, the **Carlyle Letters Online** is one of the first electronic scholarly editions to be published by a university press.

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**Thieme Publishing Group** has become one of the first publishers to convert user statistics of its electronic book libraries according to the standards of the **COUNTER (Counting Online Usage of Net-**

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