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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)
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trum from obscurity to celebrity? How is popular culture determined? *Merriam-Webster* defines “popular” as “adapted to or indicative of the understanding and taste of the majority” and “frequently encountered or widely accepted.” It wasn’t until almost 40 years ago that popular culture hit the academic radar with *The Journal of Popular*

What characteristics must something possess in order to gain popularity? How does someone move along the spec-

Culture; now, there are more than 30 periodicals devoted to its study and some 599 books bear its subject heading in the *Library of Congress* catalog. Each of the books in this month’s *Monographic Musings* uniquely adds to the phenomenon of popular culture.

Rosemarie Ostler investigates twentieth century popular vocabulary in her book *Dewdroppers, Waldos, and Slackers*. *Joy Sperling’s Famous Works of Art in Popular Culture* explores 30 artistic creations and how they have become visual staples in society. In *The Television Crime Fighters Factbook*, *Vincent Terrace* provides a glut of particulars about a popular tube genre. Happy reading, everyone! — DV

Ostler, Rosemarie. *Dewdroppers, Waldos, and Slackers: A Decade-by-Decade Guide to the Vanishing Vocabulary of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford UP, 2003. 0195161467. 256 pages. \$25.00.

Reviewed by **Debbie Vaughn** (College of Charleston)

My mother was a soda jerk in high school. Upon hearing this for the first time, she had to interpret this job title for me (in my defense, I was only nine years old when I heard the earliest stories of her teenage employment). A few years later, I learned that my father was a curve killer throughout prep school and college. While my folks have rarely follow trends and avoid fast fads, no one is ever immune to language fashion. The way in which society verbally communicates constantly evolves; though basic elements of modern English have existed for centuries, it is the sometimes-quick-lived expressions that we sprinkle into our vocabulary that add excitement and pizzazz to our speech. *Rosemarie Ostler* pays homage to the rise and fall terminology in her book *Dewdroppers, Waldos, and Slackers: A Decade-by-Decade Guide to the Vanishing Vocabulary of the Twentieth Century*.

Ostler’s introduction addresses the array of events and people that generate the creation of words and phrases: mechanical inventions, proper names, other tongues, conflict and combat, newsworthy episodes, and “linguistic exuberance” (to name a few). As its title suggests, *Dewdroppers* is divided into chapters by decade; the only exception to this categorization is the combination of 1900-1919 in the first chapter. *Ostler* prefaces each section with broad information about each era’s major influencing factors upon language. Vocabulary words and phrases are then sectioned by varying major categories, the titles of which largely follow that era’s language trends. For example, categories from the 1920’s include “Something on the Hip” (words describing alcohol and then-illegal activities), “Lucky Lindy” (words describing aeronautics), and “Dateable Men” (words describing young, eligible bachelors). Amusing photographs and callout boxes with related text are scattered throughout the book. An extensive bibliography and detailed index conclude *Ostler’s* work.

Two things about *Dewdroppers* strike me. First, it is enjoyable to learn about popular vocabulary from my grandparents’ and parents’ heydays. Somehow, knowing their lingo makes me feel more akin to them. Second, after reading through popular vocabulary from the 1970’s through the 1990’s, I am amazed at the number of words and phrases that have slipped away from my verbal repertoire. On top of that pair of observations, *Dewdroppers* is an entertaining, engaging, and often humorous read. It would be an excellent addition to a high school, public, or academic library.

Sperling, Joy. *Famous Works of Art in Popular Culture: A Reference Guide*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003. 0313318085. 296 pages. \$55.00.

Reviewed by **Debbie Vaughn** (College of Charleston)

Cheers to *Joy Sperling!* Her new book, *Famous Works of Art in Popular Culture: A Reference Guide*, is a well-organized and enlightening masterpiece. It is no surprise that *Sperling’s* most recent publication is so thorough and mesmerizing; she received her doctorate from the *University of California* at Santa Barbara in the field of fine arts and is not new to the academic publishing trade. *Sperling* has penned another book as well as a handful of peer-reviewed journal articles covering a variety of art subjects.

Famous Works of Art in Popular Culture is broadly categorized into five artistic periods/genres: ancient monuments, modern world monuments, Renaissance art, nineteenth century art, and twentieth century art. Each section is introduced with an essay discussing what characteristics make art from that period iconoclastic. Within each section, works of art are briefly described and are accompanied by a black and white photograph. *Sperling* also explains the social and historical environment of each work of art. Her *piece de resistance* is the “original and changing meaning” of each artistic effort, in which she delves into the transition from art to icon. Notes and bibliographic information are given at the close of each section.

Sperling’s “art biographies” are rich in detail and are, quite simply, fascinating. Upon reading *Famous Works of Art in Popular Culture*, I realized that I take popular pieces of art for granted by seeing them without paying attention to detail. Case in point: *Leonardo da Vinci’s Mona Lisa* is arguably the most recognized work in Western civilization. Twice I have been lucky enough to gaze upon her, and I have studied da Vinci’s masterpiece in history and art history classes. *Sperling* discusses the mysterious matron with a combination of observation, narration, and summarization of the literature surrounding the painting (both popular and academic). In six pages, *Sperling* presents an abundance of facts regarding the Louvre, da Vinci’s training, the portrait sitter, and *Mona Lisa* mugs; yet, her writing style never seems overwhelming or forced.

Famous Works of Art in Popular Culture is, undoubtedly, a must-have for high school, public, and academic collections. Art lovers and those interested in popular culture will also want to add it to their personal libraries. Hopefully, a second volume is in *Sperling’s* future.

Terrace, Vincent. *The Television Crime Fighters Factbook: Over 9,800 Details From 301 Programs, 1937-2003*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004. 0786415339. 222 pages. \$30.00.

Reviewed by **Debbie Vaughn** (College of Charleston)

Ask anyone who knows about my television viewing habits and they will inform you that I am addicted to crime dramas. “Law and Order,” which airs in syndicate approximately four times a day on the cable channel TNT, is my favorite; in fact, I never tire of watching it, even if I have previously seen a given episode more than once (and I have seen at least 200 of its more than 300 episodes). I know

continued on page 57

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Book Reviews from page 56

that, as a librarian, my ability to sit in front of my television, mesmerized in 60-minute blocks of time, might be considered unprofessional, lazy, or even rogue. My criminal addiction started at an early age; under the influence of my grandmother, I watched many an episode of "Columbo," "Hunter," "Mike Hammer," "Murder She Wrote," and "Spencer: For Hire." By the time I was in grade school, I was watching "21 Jump Street" and "Moonlighting" on my own accord. Somehow, attending college seemed to refine my viewing preference to edgy, pulled-from-the-headlines productions: "In the Heat of the Night" and "NYPD Blue" were among my weekly television line-up. Another crime drama darling of mine was "Homicide: Life on the Streets," which, sadly, ended its series run in 1999, to much critical acclaim. It is understandable, then, that when *The Television Crime Fighters Handbook* by Vincent Terrace came across my desk, I jumped at the chance to investigate it.

It is also understandable that when anyone sets out to accomplish such a formidable task as compiling over 9,800 details from 301 crime-fighting programs, he or she has creative license over the series that are included in said compilation. What is not understandable to me, however, are the crime-fighting staples that are absent from Terrace's collection, without so much as an explanation or even mention in his intro-

duction. Since he does not detail his selection criteria, the reader can only wonder why such popular and award-winning shows as "Homicide," "Law and Order," "NYPD Blue," and "The Shield" are excluded from *The Television Crime Fighters Handbook*, while other shows—such as "Crossing Jordan," "C.S.I.: Crime Scene Investigation," and "Hack"—made the cut.

Nevertheless, Terrace has assembled a multitude of information about television law enforcers and the series to which they belong. Arranged alphabetically by show title, each entry summarizes main plot arcs and provides intriguing character facts. Information about

related series, spin-offs, and projects is also detailed. Terrace offers two appendices: the first, "Television's Experimental Crime Fighters," briefs the reader on programs broadcast between 1937 and 1946; the second lists numerous unsold detective pilot films. An actor index completes the volume.

The Television Crime Fighters Handbook, while not exhaustive, is a respectable collection of interesting facts about a hefty number of small-screen series. Appropriate for high school, public, and possibly academic libraries, it will doubtlessly appeal to any patron with a bend for crime drama/comedy. 📺

Rumors from page 16

the U.S. Marines during the Vietnam War period. Check it out on BUSCA's Website: www.buscainc.com.

My daughter told me about this. University professors, students and legislators from around the country have released a new report which finds that textbook publishers engage in a number of market practices that drive up the price of textbooks for students. The report, entitled, "Rip-off 101: How the Current Practices of the Publishing Industry Drive up the Cost of College Textbooks," surveyed the most

widely-taught books at colleges and universities in California and Oregon and the faculty that teach those books. The report found that even though students already pay \$900 year for textbooks, textbook publishers artificially inflate the price of textbooks by adding bells and whistles to the current texts, and forcing cheaper used books off the market by producing expensive new editions of textbooks that are barely different from the previous edition. The report also found that most of the faculty members surveyed in the report do not think many of these add-ons are useful and are supportive of efforts to streamline textbook costs and extend the shelf life of current textbook editions. CALPIRG

continued on page 64