
OFF THE SHELF

Book Reviews

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FICTION

The March: A Novel by E. L. Doctorow (Random House, 2005; ISBN 0-375-50671-3, \$25.95). From the author of such acclaimed works as *Ragtime* and *Billy Bathgate*, *The March* is E.L. Doctorow's first full-length work in five years. Doctorow's novel covers the Civil War march of General William Tecumseh Sherman and his soldiers as they move through Georgia and the Carolinas. The swath cut by Sherman's troops is an uprooting for black and white, young and old, North and South. With scant notice, plantation owners and their families flee the approaching army, leaving behind livestock, provisions and their former slaves. Foraging parties raid and collect those supplies that help keep the army on the march. Former slaves, now free, who follow the Union army, swell the numbers of people on the move but are left behind whenever the march's pace demands it. *The March* is an epic journey brought to life in a skillful blend of fact and fiction, told through the fog of war, with impressions of life and death on the march in its various states. As the Union army makes progress, fighting Confederate forces they encounter, the march itself becomes its own essential, structured world. There is an advance, there is a battle, a city captured, and then the move to the next stage, where the cycle of events repeats. In its best moments, *The March* captures the intense, mythic quality of the Civil War. The novel depicts scenes of the corporeal, physical state of war, but it also offers insight into the simple human response during that historical age. History is illuminated through Doctorow's varied and vivid characters who populate the novel. As a glimpse into Georgia during the Civil War era, Doctorow's novel is compelling and revealing. Overall, this work is recommended for any general fiction collection, not just as a work of literature, but also for its insights and impressions of a particular time in American history.—Sansanee Graves, McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP, Atlanta.

Don't Look Down by Jennifer Crusie and Bob Mayer (St. Martin's Press, 2005; ISBN 0-312-34812-6, \$24.95). *Don't Look Down* is a first pairing for the two novelists Jennifer Crusie and Bob Mayer. Fans of Jennifer Crusie will recognize her contribution to the novel in the main character of Lucy Armstrong, a strong, long-legged, 30-something woman who produces dog-food commercials; Armstrong is hired to finish a movie after the original producer dies suddenly. Bob Mayer provides the action and the macho characters of Green Beret J.T. Wilder and Australian Connor Nash. Things seem to be wrong on the set from the beginning, and Armstrong has to contend with her ex-husband, Connor Nash, as the stunt coordinator. Even so, the mood remains light due to ridiculous situations for our heroine (at one point dressed in a Wonder Woman costume) and the sharp wit she uses to deal with them. The love interest in Captain Wilder is a little predictable, but he works well as a straight man for Armstrong. The setting of the novel is Savannah but could be anywhere; there are suspension bridges and alligators in close proximity. This book is a fast-paced escape into suspense and quick repartee. Think Jamie Lee Curtis and Arnold Schwarzenegger in the movie *True Lies*. The authors' fans might be disappointed because their collaboration results in a work that is unlike either one's previous novels. If the reader doesn't take it all too seriously, it's a good weekend read that is definitely worth a trip to the library. Recommended for all public libraries.—Reviewed by Jane Summey, Southeastern Technical College.

The Celestial Jukebox: A Novel by Cynthia Shearer (The University of Georgia Press, 2005; ISBN 0-8203-2838-3, \$18.95). This charming book revolves around the Celestial Grocery and the malfunctioning jukebox in a small farming town in Mississippi. *The Celestial Jukebox* tells the story of an old Chinese

grocer and his love of an attractive Honduran woman, a successful black farmer with a gambling problem, a white farmer who may be facing the end of his marriage, a young woman searching for her roots, a middle-aged woman with a fear of bridges, a young immigrant from Africa who discovers his love of music, and a homeless woman who creates birdcages out of books and bottle caps. Eventually everyone stops at the Celestial Grocery to play the jukebox that has been there since 1938 even though it has not played the right song in years. Through the eyes of the young immigrant, we see how the small kindnesses of strangers help him to acclimate to the American culture. Boubacar fears that he will face disapproval from his family if they learn of his playing the steel guitar. Much to his surprise, he comes to learn that the love of music is universal and can bring people of different cultures together. This book tells the stories of people from diverse social and economic backgrounds, yet they all share a deep empathy for others. *The Celestial Jukebox* is a sound acquisition for all high school, college, and public libraries.—Reviewed by Linda Costin McCormack, Hunter Maclean Exley & Dunn, Savannah.

JUVENILE LITERATURE

This Is the Dream by Diane Z. Shore and Jessica Alexander, illustrated by James Ransome (HarperCollins, 2006; ISBN 0-06055-519-X, \$15.99). This powerful picture book provides an opportunity for a child to learn about and an adult to revisit the struggles during segregation in America. The authors and illustrator combine talents to provide details of controversies that African Americans faced during segregation and the fight for civil rights in the United States. The authors' descriptive text embodies imagery and rhyming language style that bring the reader into the time period of Jim Crow's signs and practices. Pictures bring attention to violence and hate, as well as to the determination of people involved in demonstrating views of whites and African Americans. Black-and-white and color pictures and beautiful illustrations are excellent examples of all people of color coming together to show unity and respect for each other. *This is the Dream* is an ideal book to introduce elementary school students to the concepts of hate, violence, injustice, determination, and equality, while simultaneously allowing adults to strive to rejuvenate their lives to the dream of the drum major for justice, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The authors and their families live in Atlanta, Georgia.—Reviewed by Evelyne LaMar, DeKalb County School System, Redan High School.

NON-FICTION

Flannery O'Connor's Radical Reality edited by Jan Nordby Gretlund and Karl Heinz Westarp (University of South Carolina Press, 2006; ISBN 1-57003-601-2, \$39.95). Like Thomas Aquinas, O'Connor was convinced that "the good is the ultimate reality . . . and that the ultimate reality has been weakened in human beings as a result of the Fall, and it is this weakened life that we see," quotes Marion Montgomery in her essay. O'Connor's fiction reflects her profound concern for the degenerate state of humankind and a desire to purify the ills of society. Lila Meeks in her essay on Flannery O'Connor's art states that Flannery O'Connor's intention was to make the supernatural as real as the natural. This superb group of O'Connor scholars has captured the essence of the juxtaposition of good and evil that were characteristic of Flannery O'Connor's writing. This text, unlike many other textual criticisms, seeks to assess the impact of mid-20th century political, religious, and social milieus on O'Connor's writing. Four of the scholars (Jack Ashley, Ashley Brown, W.A. Sessions, and Marion Montgomery) were acquaintances of Flannery O'Connor. No Flannery O'Connor collection is complete without this excellent work.—Reviewed by Ravonne Green, Valdosta State University.

Understanding Carson McCullers by Virginia Spencer Carr (University of South Carolina Press, 2005; ISBN 1-57003-615-2, \$18.95). As an award-winning biographer of Carson McCullers, Virginia Spencer Carr is well qualified to write *Understanding Carson McCullers*, one installment in the Understanding American Literature series edited by Matthew J. Bruccoli. Carr shines a light on McCullers's famously troubled life, marked by tumultuous romantic relationships and debilitating illness, and shows how issues related to abandonment, unrequited love, and being a woman raised in the South cast shadows over her work. Carr takes the reader on a journey through the creative process McCullers went through while writing her four novels, two plays, and short fiction. She demonstrates how the circumstances and struggles of McCullers's life weave their way into her storytelling. For example, Carr describes how McCullers's

training as a pianist led her to structure her novels *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and *The Member of the Wedding* as literary fugues with characters' voices presented contrapuntally. *Understanding Carson McCullers* contains a brief overview of McCullers's life and career followed by chapters covering each of her major works in the order of their creation, a chapter covering McCullers's short fiction, and an epilogue. Carr's explications are clear, concise, well-supported by source material, and supplemented with remarks from other scholars, from critics, and from McCullers herself. Extensive chapter notes and the comprehensive annotated bibliography are excellent sources of information for those interested in further study. Useful for scholars as well as nonacademic readers desiring a closer look at a favorite author's work, *Understanding Carson McCullers* would be a valuable resource for inclusion in academic and public libraries. McCullers was born and raised in Columbus, Georgia, and since her writing is deeply rooted in Southern culture, this book is particularly important for libraries which emphasize Georgia studies and/or Southern literature.—Reviewed by Leslie R. G. Bullington, Augusta, Georgia.

Seasoned in the South: Recipes from Crook's Corner and from Home by Bill Smith (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2005; ISBN 1-56512-479-0, \$19.95). Bill Smith, celebrated chef, has published his first book of recipes made famous at Chapel Hill's Crook's Corner restaurant. These recipes draw from the belief engrained in him by his family for good food done economically. Smith also states that his aim is to provide recipes for "good food as a backdrop for good conversation." These somewhat competing goals—making good food, while using every last morsel as economically as possible—are proven artfully in *Seasoned in the South*. Using the four seasons as chapters, Smith provides recipes highlighting the bounty of each season. Beginning with fall—which as every college-town denizen knows is the real harbinger of the new year—Smith tempts us with savory rutabagas, baked sweet potato soup, and oyster stew. Heading into winter, we see the menu change to reflect the cold weather cravings for comfort food—chicken pot pie, meatloaf, and for the more adventurous cook...sweetbreads. Spring brings the promise of renewal along with jambalaya and honeysuckle sorbet. Long hot summers mean less cooking and more salads—green peach, mango, and a tomato and watermelon, to name a few. Smith's artistry in the kitchen is complemented by introductory reminiscences particular to the season, and each chapter provides a personal historical anecdote about Smith's gastronomic experiences, most of them specific to Crook's Corner, including one vignette on Jimmy Carter's visit to this culinary landmark. This volume is designed for the seasoned cook. The more daring recipes are tempered by more simplistic ones, including a recipe for mashed potatoes. This book would make a nice addition to the cookbook section of public libraries. For a sample of the cooking found in these pages, visit the restaurant's website at <http://www.crookscorner.com>. —Reviewed by Diana Hartle, University of Georgia.

A Georgia Native Plant Guide by Tina M. Samuels (Mercer University Press, 2005; ISBN 0-86554-878-1, \$23.00). This book is a small but valuable compilation of plants native to Georgia. *A Georgia Native Plant Guide* contains many color photographs as well as descriptions of plants. Common names, habitat, scent, and height are all offered. A unique aspect of this work is that the author gives the medicinal qualities and historical uses of many of these plants. A potential improvement would be to ensure that fuller descriptions of all the rare plants listed in the county-by-county section could be found in the earlier flowers, trees, shrubs, or grasses sections of the book. An unusual and especially useful part of the volume defines the secondary (description) part of botanical names. For example, "inodorus" is the unscented variety and "humilis" is the low-growing variety. Endangered and protected plants are highlighted. There are sections on pest plants and weeds, including an entertaining history of kudzu. Additionally, there is a section on the botanical significance of Rome (Floyd County), Georgia, where the author resides. Particularly desirable is the listing of "Where to Buy Georgia Native Plants: A Store Guide" at the back of the volume. A helpful index is also included. This volume is unique in its focus and would be especially useful to Georgia gardeners and a practical addition to their public libraries.—Reviewed by Mary-Frances Panettiere, Georgia Institute of Technology.

New Orleans, Mon Amour: Twenty Years of Writings from The City by Andrei Codrescu (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2006; ISBN 1-56512-505-3, \$14.00). By now we are all too familiar with the images of New Orleans lying in ruin in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Andrei Codrescu, author and commentator for NPR's *All Things Considered*, brings the city of New Orleans back to life with his collection of essays on his adopted city. Codrescu, originally from Transylvania, recreates the sights and sounds that were distinctly New Orleans. As readers we are treated to a collection of essays, some only two pages long, that

provide vivid images of the city and its inhabitants from 1985 through the aftermath of Katrina. Reading the essays one can feel the excitement and party atmosphere of New Orleans during Mardi Gras. The rich, descriptive language allows you to conjure up images of fresh warm beignets and café au lait. The essays are storytelling at its finest, some funny, some sad based on observations of twenty years of life in New Orleans. One would never know the author was not a native of New Orleans. The city which gave birth to jazz and was home to many authors, such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Faulkner, now struggles to rebuild in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The essays recount the rich history of the city and what makes it truly an American icon. After reading this book one understands why she or he must work to rebuild this one-of-a-kind city. Whether or not you have been to New Orleans, this book is engrossing and entertaining. It is wonderfully written and should be part of the collection of all libraries.—Reviewed by Diane Fulkerson, University of West Georgia.

Safe At Home: A Memoir of God, Baseball, and Family by Marc A. Jolley (Mercer University Press, 2005; ISBN 0-86554-740-8, \$20.00). *Safe At Home* is a man's very personal account of his life in the South and the personal passions that shaped it. Marc Jolley describes the events of his life growing up in his Christian family through the lens of the world of baseball. He states in his opening sentence, "I know I was alive before I was introduced to baseball, but I never really breathed until I started playing." We see him learn his life lessons as he moves through the stages of pre-T-ball plastic bat play, T-ball, and Little League until his "career" ends at his high school tryouts. Little boys and reminiscing men will live with him through the excitement of baseball card collecting, newspaper scorecards, and the thrill of watching great major and minor league players of the past at baseball stadium games. The history of Jolley's life was marked, not by typical world events like Martin Luther King's death or the Vietnam War, but by when the Yankees won the World Series and Hank Aaron hit his record-breaking 715th home run. Jolley's book takes us through his college years and decisions regarding his Christian calling and career purpose in life until shortly after his father's death. This pivotal event in Jolley's life prompted a re-evaluation of his life and a new appreciation of the reality of mortality. This book was the outgrowth from that experience and was written, not originally for publication, but as a legacy to leave to his own boys that they might know him and what was important to him. Georgia author Marc Jolley is the director of Mercer University Press. This book is recommended for public libraries.—Reviewed by Crystal Renfro, Georgia Institute of Technology.

Pursuing a Promise: A History of African Americans at Georgia Southern University by F. Erik Brooks (Mercer University Press, 2006; ISBN 0-88146-018-4, \$35.00). Racial integration and acceptance are the subjects of F. Erik Brooks' new book *Pursuing a Promise: A History of African Americans at Georgia Southern University*. Brooks, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Georgia Southern University, traces the history of his institution, focusing on the impact of African Americans at the institution, employees and students alike. Set against the backdrop of *Brown v. The Board of Education* and the Civil Rights Movement, this well-researched work about the integration of African-American students into Georgia Southern University paints a picture of tension between minority students and the university administration over social, economic, and educational opportunities. Georgia Southern University's integration of African Americans into the university population was a slow process without the national attention that plagued the state's flagship university. The focus of *Pursuing a Promise* is that the implementation of equal education for all minorities at Georgia Southern University was not simple. Brooks reveals that the process was fraught with barriers from the beginning. Brooks details the experiences of the first African-American students at Georgia Southern University and their subsequent interactions with hostile locals, prejudiced faculty, and apathetic administrators. As the decades passed, clashes over the display of the Confederate flag, minority employee wages, inclusion of minority speakers on campus, and the hiring of more minority professors and administrators helped break through barriers. Georgia Southern University has moved down the road of integration towards the goal of racial equality and acceptance on campus. This work is easy to read, well documented, and offers an excellent introduction to the history of Georgia Southern University. Although there are occasional copy errors throughout the book, it has a great deal to offer scholars of the history of higher education and the history of race relations in Georgia. Recommended for college-level students and Georgia libraries with collections focused on Georgia history and African-American Studies.—Reviewed by Elizabeth White, University of Georgia.

Talking with the Turners: Conversations with Southern Folk Potters by Charles M. Mack (University of South Carolina Press, 2006; ISBN 1-57003-600-4, \$45.00). This rich, informative book is the product of a foray down the back roads of the American South taken by Charles R. Mack of the University of South Carolina to interview folk potters living and working in South Carolina, North Carolina, Kentucky, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. Most of the “turners” (the term by which most traditional potters refer to themselves) whom Mack interviewed during his trip are the products of family traditions of turning that extend back in time for generations. Replete with historical information, the book is also of value as a source of technical information on the craft of pottery. Mack provides a commentary in which he explains the changes that progress has wrought upon folk pottery, which is now created for collectors rather than for utilitarian purposes. It is fortuitous that Mack conducted these interviews at a time when those who witnessed these changes firsthand were still around to relate their experiences. The turners describe their own working methods and techniques; technical matters, such as glazing and kiln firing, are also discussed in detail. The interviews are augmented with an extensive section of color photographs of the turners’ pieces which Mack collected during his travels. The author also provides photos of the turners and their shops. Perhaps the most notable addition to the printed interviews is the accompanying compact disc, which contains audio excerpts of the interviews, thus allowing us to hear the turners’ own voices as they relate their wealth of information. *Talking with the Turners* is recommended for anyone interested in pottery; it is of great value as both a history and as a technical guide.—Reviewed by Edward Whatley, Georgia College & State University.

Technology for the Rest of Us: A Primer on Computer Technologies for the Low-Tech Librarian edited by Nancy Courtney (Libraries Unlimited, 2005; ISBN 1-59158-233-4, \$40.00). Have you ever wondered just how a network works or how to make your own blog? *Technology for the Rest of Us* offers an interesting collection of essays taken from a 2004 seminar. Some of the topics covered include networks, network security, blogs, XML, and digitization. Each essay is short and concise but manages to give an excellent overview of the topic. There are few details provided; however, each essay includes a list of references or a list of sources for further reading. Not only will you discover the basic terminology but also the background mechanics of how the technology works. Some authors assume that the reader has absolutely no knowledge of the subject while others assume that the reader has a higher level of knowledge. Fortunately, there is an excellent glossary in the back of the book to help with terminology and those pesky acronyms that were not covered in the text. Several essays also provide practical instructions on how to bring these technologies to your library. Most essays provide examples of how these technologies were successfully integrated into libraries by librarians. While the intended audience is clearly librarians, there are essays appropriate for anyone interested in learning more about technology.—Reviewed by Carmel Chaille, Georgia Perimeter College, Dunwoody Campus.

