

from high school students to professionals and from artists to diplomats. The encyclopedia reads easily and is suitable for public and academic libraries alike, including technical libraries. It was disappointing to see "Industrial engineering" as the sole subject heading for this work, because it covers so much more.—*Dorothy F. Byers, Head, Engineering Library, University of Cincinnati, Ohio*

Chemical Compounds. Ed. by Neil Schlager, Jayne Weisblatt, and David E. Newton. New York: UXL, 2006. 3 vols. alkaline \$172 (ISBN 1-4144-0150-7).

This three-volume set, aimed at younger researchers, could provide the first details of chemistry and chemical compounds to pique the interest of a future scientist. The set covers 180 common chemical compounds, both organic and inorganic, along with a few common mixtures such as petrolatum and gelatin. Each four-to-five page article includes scientific names (with pronunciation), structural pictures (both line and ball-and-stick models), synonyms, basic physical properties, descriptions of the chemical's discovery, summaries of major ways to produce it, known or possible hazards, and major uses. Sidebars in all articles give "Key Facts," "Interesting Facts," and "Words to Know." The references following the articles tend to be largely Web sites accessed within the last year but often with the long complicated addresses that accompany such sites. Their reliability varies, running the gamut from Material Safety Data Sheets to government information sites, corporate sites, and electronic versions of articles.

Comprehensive tables of contents, glossaries, a timeline, appendixes, and indexes appear in all volumes, a nice convenience. In addition to the subject index, three types of indexes for the compounds exist: formulas, elements, and type. The awkwardly arranged formula index serves only to confuse. Students attempting to use this index would have a hard time finding what they needed. The elements index simply lists the compounds under each element contained in them, a much easier index for this age group. The type index catalogs all compounds under headings such as "Acids," "Bases," "Alkanes," and "Phenols." The bibliography section (for further information), located in the appendix, is divided into "Books," "Periodicals," and "Web sites" lists. Of forty-two items listed under "Periodicals," only about sixteen are scientific journals; the rest are from popular literature. For many of these items, it is impossible to tell which chemical is being discussed, as many titles of the articles are not specific. The lists appear to have been compiled directly from the references at the end of each article. The helpful comprehensive "Web sites" will assist in locating reliable sites for finding chemical information, as general chemical information sites are featured.

This set is designed to complement Newton's *Chemical Elements* (UXL, 2000) and to provide understandable chemical compound information to students from middle school and up. Recommended for middle or high school libraries and public libraries. Not recommended for academic

libraries.—*Marion S. Muskiewicz, Science Reference Librarian, University of Massachusetts, Lowell*

Concise Major 21st-Century Writers: A Selection of Sketches from Contemporary Authors. Ed. by Tracey L. Matthews. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006. 5 vols. \$469 (ISBN 0-7876-7539-3).

Concise Major 21st-Century Writers is a shortened version of Thomson Gale's *Major 21st-Century Writers* (2004), a title available only as an e-book. An advisory panel, including librarians and teachers, helped to select sketches from the larger work and added thirty emerging authors to these selections, for a collection of seven hundred writers. These writers were chosen for their relevance in middle school, high school, and college-level classroom discussions. Care was taken to represent various nationalities, ethnicities, and major genres in fiction and nonfiction. As its subtitle states, all sketches found in *Concise Major 21st-Century Writers* are available in Thomson Gale's *Contemporary Authors* series.

Typical of the sketches found in *Contemporary Authors*, the approach is descriptive rather than analytical. Each entry provides a quick overview of a writer's life and bibliography, emphasizing plot summaries, inspirations, and the critical receptions of individual titles. These observations are gathered largely from trade, popular, and substantive news periodicals. The source lists cite items found in other series by Thomson Gale. This is helpful because students requiring more scholarly approaches to a writer will need to consult these other series.

The practice of gathering together insights about curriculum-related authors is nothing new. Among the established sets of this type are those by Salem Press, which recently revised the titles formerly edited by Frank N. Magill. These are Philip K. Jason's *Critical Survey of Poetry* (2003), Charles E. May's *Critical Survey of Short Fiction* (2001), Carl Rollyson's *Critical Survey of Drama* (2003), and Rollyson's *Critical Survey of Long Fiction* (2000). Through uniquely written and signed essays on individual authors and complementary volumes of topic essays, resources, and indexes, the Salem titles provide much deeper critical contexts. Patrick O'Neil's *Great World Writers: Twentieth Century* (Marshall Cavendish, 2004) and Michael D. Sharp's *Popular Contemporary Writers* (Marshall Cavendish, 2006) are illustrated with works of art to reflect the multiple-intelligences approach used in high schools. With perhaps the exception of indexes by nationality, ethnicity, genre, and subject, there is little of added value in *Concise Major 21st-Century Writers*.

It is hard to see a purpose for *Concise Major 21st-Century Writers*. Most libraries offer guides that do a better job of presenting authors read in schools. Most libraries carry *Contemporary Authors* and its related series. Clifford Thompson's ongoing *World Authors 1995–2000* (Wilson, 2003) is a staple for discovering contemporary writers as they emerge or reemerge into prominence. Those who offer Thomson Gale's immense data file electronically through Literature Resource Center have numerous possibilities for cross-searching the variety of series and approaches to writers. Avoid this unnecessary and

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expensive purchase.—Nevin J. Mayer, *Coordinator of Instruction, John Carroll University, University Heights, Ohio*

Dictionary of Atheism, Skepticism, and Humanism. By Bill Cooke. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Pr., 2006. 606p. alkaline \$70 (ISBN 1-59102-299-1).

This collection of essays, apothegms, and admonitions by Bill Cooke is a topical guide to the rationalist-humanist worldview, written for a popular audience. Cooke defines concepts, gives biographical sketches, explains philosophical and religious movements, and critiques cultural trends. He traces historical and contemporary traditions of atheism, skepticism, and humanism from around the world, and exposes some of the excesses of their opponents, religious and nonreligious. To his credit, Cooke's tone is not combative and his overall goal is a positive one, as he shows in his introduction: "this book is not about the falsity of religion—it is about the possibility of a morally engaged, intellectually full, and laughter-filled life without it" (14).

Cooke is an enthusiastic and chatty writer who editorializes freely. In the introduction he nods to those famous single-author dictionary predecessors, Voltaire and Ambrose Bierce. His best passages are indeed reminiscent of Bierce's *The Devil's Dictionary*, as in this assessment of Descartes: "A mathematical genius and (along with Plato) by far the most influential philosopher whose main conclusions were almost all wrong" (144).

The character and direction of the entries vary greatly. Some are careful and coherent essays (for example, "Humanism in the Ancient World"). Some are statements of ethical positions ("Abortion"). Some offer advice on writing and rhetoric ("Scare Quotes"). Some are summary accounts of their topics drawn from a single source ("Twentieth Century Philosophy, Main Features of"). Some are appreciations of popular writers, comedians, and musicians written in the tone of a fan Web site ("Pink Floyd"). Several entries contain errors or odd omissions. For example, the entry on "Apostate" is mostly a discussion of Epicurus because, Cooke claims, "the word derives from *Apikoras*, the Greek spelling of Epicurus; a sign of Christian fear of him and his subversive message" (41). (In fact, the word "apostate" has a straightforward Greek cognate meaning "to revolt.") Another example is the entry on Immanuel Kant, which does not mention his *phenomena-noumena* dualism. Though the entry on Helen Keller notes she was blind, it does not mention that she was also deaf.

Dictionary of Atheism, Skepticism, and Humanism cannot be recommended as a scholarly reference work. A better alternative would be to rely on general dictionaries and encyclopedias of philosophy and theology or to use *The Encyclopedia of Unbelief* (edited by Gordon Stein and Paul Edwards, 2 vols., Prometheus Bks., 1985). This is not to say it does not belong in the library at all. It is an earnest, popular statement of a worldview that is usually misrepresented.—Alistair Morrison, *Product Manager for LexisNexis, Bethesda, Maryland, and MLS Candidate at the University of Maryland, College Park*

Encyclopedia of Chinese-American Relations. Ed. by Yuwu Song. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2006. 367p. alkaline \$55 (ISBN 0-7864-2406-0).

There has been a spate of books published recently on the rise of China as America's rival for superpower status. Amidst the rampant speculation about future relations between the reigning world superpower and its potential rival, reference staff may see an increase in interest in the past relations between the two countries. To assist library users who want a basic overview of Sino-American relations, librarians may turn to reference works that focus on U.S. foreign relations. The four-volume *Encyclopedia of U.S. Foreign Relations* (Oxford Univ. Pr., 1997) has one of the best articles on the topic. With the entire range of U.S. foreign relations to cover, however, this excellent work can devote only one fifteen-page article and a handful of shorter articles to Sino-American relations.

Encyclopedia of Chinese-American Relations fills the need for a reference book focusing entirely on the relations between the two countries. More than four hundred articles written by experts in the field cover such topics as the "Anti-American Boycott of 1905," "Spy Plane Incident of 2001," and "Ping Pong Diplomacy," subjects that are difficult to find in other reference sources. Biographical entries on lesser-known Chinese political figures and on American diplomats and missionaries who devoted their careers to China are another feature that sets this work apart. And although entries on well-known military and political leaders, writers, and businesspeople, such as Franklin D. Roosevelt, Mao Zedong, and Clare Booth Luce, can be found in plenty of reference sources, in this work the focus is on their contributions to Sino-American relations. Each article includes a short list of references. Useful appendixes include a chronology of events from 1784 to 2005, lists of ambassadors, two maps, and a conversion table showing the different methods of romanization of Chinese names.

It is unfortunate that such an important reference work contains many entries that are riddled with typos, misprints, and grammatical errors. For example, the title of the entry for President William McKinley lists his birth year incorrectly: "McKinley, William (1943–1901)"—it should be 1843. In the entry on the transcontinental railroad there is this indecipherable sentence: "By 1867, 12,000 of the 13,500hinese immigrants." Several entries incorrectly omit articles and misuse singular and plural word forms, making the text difficult to read. Better editing and proofreading would have eliminated these and other mistakes that detract from the usefulness and readability of this source.

This work fills an important gap in reference collections for large academic and public libraries. A revised and better-proofread edition would be welcome.—Peter Bliss, *Reference Librarian, University of California, Riverside*

Encyclopedia of Erotic Literature. Ed. by Gaetan Brulotte and John Phillips. New York: Routledge, 2006. 2 vols. alkaline \$350 (ISBN 1-57958-441-1).