

ROWSE REVIEWS

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Editorial Comment

Why Are We Here?

Librarians and bookstores are inundated with information about new books. Reviews and sales flyers fill the inbox every morning. The problem is not finding books to buy but rather plowing through all the source material. So why did we create Yet Another Review and send you a sample copy? We have our reasons.

Rowse Reviews focuses on the small press and self-published markets. Often these books get passed over or are given one-liners in the major reviews. Yet some of the most interesting writing is found among these efforts. For example the holistic healing book *The Circle of Healing* is well-written, well-made, and relevant for many readers in your audience. We suggest that even if holistic health is not your cup of herbal tea this book is worth buying for each branch. See the review and decide for yourself. We also evaluate a substantial music education entry. Most surprising is an excellent piece of historical fiction *The Midwife's Song*. In all honesty we did not expect work of this quality to be submitted for review in our first issue.

You are already familiar with our efforts. Maryland librarians (our initial target market) will remember the little spiral bound book called *Directory 2000*. This dog breeder directory is distributed free to your system every few years by Carroll Kennel Club. The editor of that book and the editor of *Rowse Reviews* are one and the same.

Finally, for those of you who didn't just skip the editorial page and go right to the reviews, be assured that *Rowse Reviews* is published right here in Maryland. So you can subscribe with a clear conscience, indeed with a little glow of righteousness. You are supporting Maryland industry. Kindly visit the back of the book for an order form. As you will recall from your school days, the back of the book was invariably where the correct answers were to be found.

Next month we will focus on books describing publishing in general and self-publishing in particular. Already we have some exciting entries. Don't miss it!

Self Help

The Circle of Healing

Cathy Holt, September 2000

8 1/2 x 5 1/2 210 p. paper

ISBN 0-9677777-0-4

List price \$14.95

Published by

Talking Birds Press

P. O. Box 13073

Berkeley CA 94712

1-800-404-9492

☆☆☆ Holistic medicine is not everyone's cup of herbal tea. But there is a steady readership for this genre. Not surprisingly, there is a steady flow of books addressed to this readership. Many, it must be said, are almost embarrassingly bad. Happily *The Circle of Healing* avoids such deprecation.

This book received a double review, from a Marylander and a Californian. Holistic health is after all somewhat a West Coast phenomenon. Our California reviewer felt that the book had many useful insights in areas such as judgementalism. The Maryland reviewer was impressed by the appearance of the book, especially the page design. Both agreed that the book was thoughtful, serious and well written.

Circle of Healing covers a broad range of holistic thought. Author Holt takes an approach that is anecdotal and highly personal; yet there are many quotations from other writers and practitioners. The extensive resource section forms a useful bibliography for this book and a pointer to further reading. Her conversations with nature, and even with her own body, have a certain charm.

The author's general philosophy is predictable. She is an environmentalist, communes with nature, protested the Vietnam war, is a vegetarian, and a bit of a feminist. An academic career that begins in Radcliffe and finishes with an advanced degree from U. of Cal. Berkeley together with her work as a biofeedback therapist forms the background for this point of view.

This is not a work of science. Clinical observations, urban legends, folklore and downright foolish assertions are mixed together without any evaluative process evident. Allowing a mosquito to sup undisturbed may be charmingly naturalistic, but the resultant exposure to deadly diseases is a factor to be considered. The author repeats as fact an assertion by John Robbins that vegetarian women have much lower breast cancer rates than meat eaters. In fact low fat diets in general, not just vegetarian ones, reduce cancer risk. An author with a Master's degree in Public Health Education needs to educate with more precision.

Despite these cautions this is a foundation work in the genre. and is well worth adding to your collection.

Order from Quality Books, Baker and Taylor, or the publisher.

M. A. Colwell, Ph.D. contributed to this review.

The Master Instructs

Richard Kuslan, Aug 2000

8 1/2 x 5 1/2 64 p. paper

ISBN 0-96788669-0-1

List Price \$8.95

Published by

Pellucid Press

P. O. Box 6112

Hamden, CT 06517

1-203-248-7063

☆ They say an Englishman laughs at a joke three times—once when it is told, once when it is explained, and once when he gets it. It took us several tours through Kuslan's slim volume (subtitled "How to Wake Up on Time") before we realized that the joke was mostly on us. Although we review this book under Self Help a classification as Humor-Parody would be equally appropriate.

The author tells a sad tale how oversleeping had ruined his life. Then he promises to divulge "The Secret" that turned his life around. There follows a long dream sequence involving a dialogue between the author and The Master, a character straight out of the TV series *Kung Fu*. Here is a sample of the Master's wisdom:

"Excellent!" said The Master, taking a sip of his tea.
"but remember Little One, these sounds should be soft and pleasant, like the spring wind that carries the butterflies from field to field."

Eat your heart out, Keye Luke. At the end the "secret" is revealed to the author by the Master. Well, we won't blow the Master's gig here. On page 61 the Master directs his pupil:

"Go into the world, Little One, and instruct those who ask to be taught." However on page 63 we are advised "Keep everything as secret as you can." That works for us.

A large part of the joke is the way the author has extended less than six thousand words to fill 64 pages (54 of actual text.) This book is in fact short story length. Generous margins and a large typeface, combined with a distance of 18 points or so between type baselines accomplish the stretch. There are only about 110 words per page.

Yes, Gentle Reader, there are words of advice for insomniacs. But don't lose any sleep wondering about them. They are for the most part conventional wisdom. There are only a few novelties.

We gave the author two stars for humor and audacity, but then took one away for excessive brevity. We recommend a buy only for those willing to expend 9 bucks just for a laugh. We were seriously concerned that the review might end up longer than the book.

Order from publisher.

Music

Jazz Guitar Chords and Accompaniment

Yoichi Arakawa 2000

ISBN 1-891370-07-3

9x12 128 p. paper

List Price \$15.95

Published by

Six Strings Music Pub.

P. O. Box 7718

Torrance, CA 90504

1-800-784-0203

☆☆☆☆ Arakawa has authored and arranged more than forty guitar books. Without question he has mastered both the instrument and the print medium. This large and profusely illustrated volume will be of interest to more than just the target audience. Interspersed among the guitar and jazz specific material he presents the basics of music theory as clearly and as concisely as could be asked. We asked guitarists (and siblings) Christopher and Kelley Graye to look over this work. They were especially impressed by the hints on technique. Overall it is a stunning book, worthy of your shelf or music stand. We would only wish that it were made available in a spiral bound edition for those who wish to play directly from the pages.

Arakawa published an earlier pair of books: *Guitar Chords and Accompaniment* and *More Guitar Chords and Accompaniment*. A followon to his current offering is promised in January 2001 (*More Jazz Chords and Accompaniment*.) There is obvious parallelism between the two series. The current work undoubtedly repeats some material from the earlier offerings. No matter, he has refined his presentation to create a master class work. Even if you already offer the earlier series we give this an unqualified buy recommendation, at least one per branch or outlet.

Order from Ingram, Baker and Taylor, or the publisher.

Musicians Christopher and Kelley Graye contributed to this review.

Fiction

The Midwife's Song
Brenda Ray Oct. 2000
8 1/2 x 5 1/2 256 p. paper
ISBN 0-9653966-8
List Price \$14.95
Published by
Karmichael Press
HC3 Box 155D
Port St. Joe, FL 32456
850-648-4488

☆☆☆☆☆ If this book gets any critical attention it should climb the charts. It deserves a hard cover edition. Fiction reader Peggy Stiegmann took on *The Midwife's Song—A Story of Moses' Birth* as a review assignment. Once she got into it she laid aside other distractions and read it cover to cover. Duty became pleasure.

History and tradition provide the setting, but the compelling qualities of the book are creditable to the author. Brenda Ray has woven a very personal and intimate story about the midwife who birthed and protected the infant Moses, and her long love affair with her husband, The Phaorah's goldsmith. There are no cardboard characters here—no Charlton Heston behind a false beard. This story has reality, tenderness, and poignancy. It is a woman's book, but one a man can read with pleasure.

Historical fiction must be good fiction ahead of all else. The history should be integral to the story, the characters alive, the drama gripping. *The Midwife's Song* passes all these tests. We are excited about this book. Here is a passage chosen at random:

“Batya slept peacefully most of the day, awakening in time for the midwife's visit. Puah breathed a sigh of relief and uttered a silent prayer when the examination proved normal.

Still, grief tinged Bayta's wan face. She remained quiet as Zayt fed her sips of broth. Like an obedient child she allowed her nurse to hover about straightening linens that didn't need smoothing and coaxing sips of tea and broth when it was obvious she wasn't interested. Like a mother hen Zayt fluttered about, hiding her concern with ceaseless activity. Finally even Batya tired of it.”

The Midwife's Song is the first member of a planned trilogy from the author Brenda Ray. We hope we are privileged to review the future members.

Order from Baker & Taylor, Spring Arbor, Brodart, Follett Library Resources, or from the publisher.

Peggy Stiegmann contributed to this review.

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