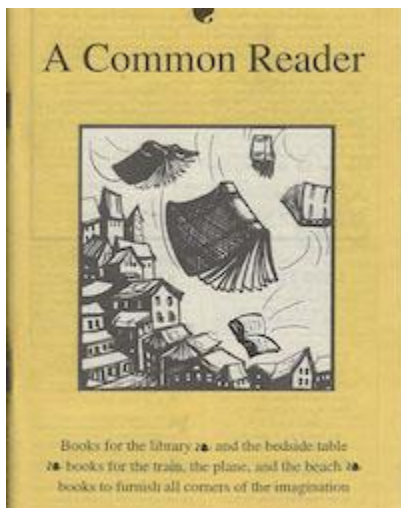


7-15-96

Books

My favorite catalog arrived in the mail today. *A Common Reader* it's called, and it's even more fun than that clever catalog from J. Peterman's. However, it is far from being "common" despite the fact that it appeals to a trait common to a lot of us - a love of reading and owning books. The editor, James Mustich, Jr., seems to have an uncanny way of selecting a wide variety of books and describing them briefly in tempting fashion. His descriptions obviously rest on his universal love and respect for books. All of his descriptions are attractive, even those about books that generally do not interest me. The appeal comes not from a heavy use of adjectives but from a pithy, engaging description, sometimes of a single attribute of the book.



Some of the titles appear repeatedly in successive editions of the catalog. But there are always newly published books. Today I am tempted by this description of a book that I've not seen before: "When you go to a bookstore after work, thus arriving home late at night, do you lie about where you have been, telling your spouse you were in a bar?" After a single sentence describing the contents of the book, he ends with this statement: "If there are nights when you can't find your bed beneath the books, you'll find this book as amusing as I did." I'm strongly tempted to order this *Biblioholism: The Literary Addiction* even though I really need to eliminate some of my books, not add to them.

He sorely tempts me also with his preface to the catalog in which he mentions a note he received a year ago from Barbara Holland, a Bluemont, Virginia, author, enclosing a copy of her *Endangered Pleasures* and suggesting that it was the sort of book for *A Common Reader*. The intervening year has proved her estimate of his readers to be right; the book has sold well since last year.

The catalog has sections of two or three pages devoted to favorite authors, not only their books but also books about them and relating to their subjects. Notably in this edition is a new book by Dean King which supplements his lexicon of the world of Patrick O'Brian's novels. I consider Mustich a reliable guide to books because he has for a long while listed

all of Ellis Peter's books as well as several volumes about her work and about her Shrewsbury countryside. Now he includes videos of the BBC dramatization of four of the twelfth century adventures of Peter's Brother Cadfael.

For the moment, I may have dodged the temptation to buy another book or two from this issue of *A Common Reader*, but I know that sooner or later I will have to buy several of them. For instance, it sounds as though I'd like to read Thomas Cahill's *How the Irish Saved Civilization* which tells how the monks in Ireland, when Rome fell, frantically copied as much Western literature as they could. Or I would find it good to read Steven Pinker's *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language*. For fun, I'd like to have *So Many Dynamos! & Other Palindromes*. And perhaps *The Art of Memory* could give me tips for my capricious memory. For a long snow-bound series of reading sessions, I'd like to try Edmund Wilson's *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War*. And I want to dip into Barbara Holland's *Endangered Pleasures*, mentioned above, particularly since I saw her subtitle, *In Defense of Naps, Bacon, Martinis, Profanity, and Other Indulgences*. There are several pages of intriguing titles under the general classification of "Solitude." Many of them could be great reading. The editor (he admits to being two men but only one is identified by name) even recommends *The Book of Common Prayer* as good reading, especially for non-Anglicans. Under "Guides for the Perplexed," he groups a motley collection including wine, chess, computers, Miss Manners, physics, and statistics. There are art books, music books, gardening books - something for almost every one, including young readers. When I win the lottery, I intend to try a great many of them.