



HOW TO RESEARCH A LITERARY TOPIC

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I. BEFORE GETTING STARTED

- Feel free to ask a librarian for assistance.
- Determine what type of literature you are dealing with: is it a novel, short story, poem or play? Is it a modern, 19th Century, or ancient work? Is it by an American or an author from a different country?
- What type of information do you need? Do you need biographical information about the author? Do you need critical essays discussing specific novels or plays? Do you need both?
- Select an appropriate reference work or database (such as the *Literature Resource Center*) from the listings below.

II. FIND ARTICLES: USING ELECTRONIC RESOURCES FOR LITERARY RESEARCH

Access the following literary electronic resources on the VU Libraries **Find Articles** page.

A. LITERATURE RESOURCE CENTER

Currently searching *Literature Resource Center* with 1,185,520 documents.

Basic Search

Find:

Search for words in: Person - By or About Name of Work Keywords All Text

limit results:

to peer-reviewed publications

by publication date(s) i.e., 2005 or 11/01/1990 - 12/31/2005

by publication century:
21st Century A.D.
20th Century A.D.
19th Century A.D.

by content type: All

<input type="checkbox"/> Biographies	<input type="checkbox"/> Literature Criticism
<input type="checkbox"/> Multimedia	<input type="checkbox"/> Primary Sources & Literary Works
<input type="checkbox"/> Reviews & News	<input type="checkbox"/> Topic & Work Overviews

by publication title:

This database is probably the first place to check when seeking information on authors and literary criticism from all time periods writing in such genres as fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama, journalism, etc. Available in the Literature Resource Center are many ways of searching for both biographical and critical information about the author and his or her works. Here you will find electronic versions of many traditional library reference sources published by Gale, such as *Contemporary Authors*, *Contemporary Literary Criticism Select*, the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* and numerous full-text literary periodicals.

Also, you will find many selections from Gale publications such as *Children's Literature Review*, *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism*, *Drama Criticism*, *Drama for Students*, *Literature from 1400 to 1800*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*,

Literature of Developing Nations for Students, *Literature and Its Times*, *Novels for Students*, *Poetry Criticism*, *Poetry for Students*, *Shakespearean Criticism*, *Shakespeare for Students*, *Short Story Criticism*, *Short Stories for Students*, and *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*.

In addition, you will find *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*, the *Literary-Historical Timeline*, and the *Gale Literary Index* to many Gale print publications also found in Shake Library's Reference Collection (see below).

B. LITFINDER

LitFinder is an Inspire database that contains the full text of many primary literary works: poems, short stories, plays, essays and speeches. LitFinder contains both biographical and critical works.

C. EBSCOhost (INSPIRE) ACADEMIC SEARCH PREMIER

Academic Search Premier provides access to scholarly journals and other publications from a wide range of academic areas, including social sciences, humanities, education, general sciences, multi-cultural and general reference. Listed below are several **full text literary journals available**. Many of these should include critical reviews of literary works.

Note: * denotes outstanding for VU courses

*Black American Literature Forum, College Literature, Comparative Literature, Early American Literature, Literature Film Quarterly, Papers on Language & Literature, Studies in English Literature, Twentieth Century Literature, World Literature Today, Australian Literary Studies, Literary Review, Southern Literary Journal, Studies in the Literary Imagination, Studies in the Novel, Novel: A Forum on Fiction, Review of Contemporary Fiction, *Studies in Short Fiction, TDR: The Drama Review, Poetry, Ploughshares, American Poetry Review, *Explicator, American Scholar, American Theatre*

D. PROQUEST

PROQUEST contains many full text literary journals. ProQuest literary journals include:

American Literature, Canadian Literature, Children's Literature, College Literature, Comparative Literature, Contemporary Literature, Early American Literature, Essays in Literature, Journal of Biblical Literature, Journal of Modern Literature, Literature/Film Quarterly, Twentieth Century Literature, World Literature Today

E. CREDO REFERENCE

Credo Reference contains over 300 electronic reference books on many topics, including over 24 ebooks concerning literary research. They are listed in the VU WebCat catalog and also may be found on the Find Articles Page and on the Find Books page under the VU Library Electronic Book Collections link. Search such titles as *African-American Writers: A Dictionary, The Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English, Chambers Dictionary of Literary Characters, The Columbia Companion to the Twentieth-Century American Short Story, Continuum Encyclopedia of American Literature, Holocaust Literature: An Encyclopedia of Writers and Their Work*, and many others.

F. SIRS RENAISSANCE

SIRS RENAISSANCE (one of three SIRS databases) is a humanities-oriented resource that includes full-text published articles on authors and literature. Type your author or term in the blank to retrieve articles. Try subject headings first to see if your author is listed.

G. NEWSBANK'S AMERICA'S NEWSPAPERS

NewsBank's America's Newspapers is a full-text database providing articles from national and international newspapers and other sources. For good results try restricting your search to **Lead/First Paragraph**. Example: "jack kerouac" in quotes will retrieve articles with this author's name as a phrase (words appear next to each other).

III. WEBCAT: LIBRARY CATALOG FOR BOOKS AND REFERENCE BOOKS

Access WEBCAT, the electronic catalog for books and other library items such as CDs/DVDs, on the Find Books page. Do a **subject search** for an author (last name first) to find out books (biographies or literary criticism) written **about** the person. Do an **author search** to find works written **by** a particular person. Another option is to use **Command Search Keyword** to find terms (such as *realism, postmodernism*, etc.) or titles of literary works mentioned in a book listing (such as "*Catcher in the Rye*"--be sure to use quotations to search the words as a phrase).

Electronic Reference Book Collection. VU Libraries contains many electronic books and reference books, all of which are cataloged in WebCat. Ebooks may be accessed on-campus without restrictions, and off-campus access is available for students, faculty, and staff by first logging in to their MyVU accounts and clicking on the MyVU **VU Libraries** link. There are over 300 ebooks about poetry along from the VU NetLibrary collection. For instance, **The Oxford Digital Reference Shelf** contains the following: *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Literature, The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature, and The Oxford Encyclopedia of Children's Literature.*

Print Reference Book Collection. Besides using books and articles, some of your most important resources are to be found in the VU Library's Reference Collection. Even if there is no book listed in the library's circulating collection about a particular topic--especially an obscure one--you might locate a great deal of material in reference books. **Ask a librarian for assistance.**

A. CONTEMPORARY AUTHORS/OTHER GALE RESEARCH CO. SOURCES: A GOOD STARTING POINT

Gale Research Co. publishes several major cross-indexed literary research reference sources. Of these, VU owns the following, which are comprehensive, multi-volume sets found in the **Reference Collection**. These are being replaced by the online version, **Literature Resource Center** (see above), but the print editions may be useful at times.

- Contemporary Authors* (Ref. 928.1 C761c), - Biographical.
- Contemporary Authors. New Revision Series* (Ref. 928.1 E93c) - Biographical, more up to date.
- Contemporary Literary Criticism* (Ref. 809 R573c) - Reprints of published critical articles.
- Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (Ref. 809 G151t) - Reprints of published critical articles.
- Nineteenth-Century Literary Criticism* (Ref. 809 H314n) - Reprints of published critical articles.

How to Use These: The above sets are cross-indexed with one another, with indexes found in the back of many of the books. A good approach is to find the paperback **Cumulative Index (Ref. 928.1 C761c)** to *Contemporary Authors* and look up your author (all the above except the *Nineteenth Century Literary Criticism*, which has its own index, are found in this). Refer to the table of abbreviations in the front of the index to find out which reference set your author is listed in. Note VU does not have all the Gale reference sets listed, so look for those mentioned above.

B. ADDITIONAL BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL ESSAYS

For a definitive, often lengthy essay about an author and her or his place in literature, try the literary biographies in one of the following reference sets:

- African American Writers* (Ref. 810.9 A258a)
- American Writers* (Ref. 928 U57a)
- Ancient Writers: Greece and Rome* (Ref. 880.09 A541)
- British Writers* (Ref. 928.2 S426b)
- European Writers* (Ref. 809 E89e)
- Major Authors and Illustrators for Children and Young Adults* (Ref. 928 M234m)
- Modern American Women Writers* (Ref. 810.9 M689m)
- Research Guide to Biography and Criticism* (Ref. 809.2 B365r)
- Science Fiction Writers* (Ref. 823 S416s)
- Supernatural Fiction Writers* (Ref. 809.3 S959s)
- Twentieth Century Crime & Mystery Writers*. 3rd ed. (Ref. 809.3 T971t)
- Writers for Children: Critical Studies of the Major Authors Since the 17th Century.* (Ref. 809 W956w)

In a special category is the multi-volume, ongoing **Dictionary of Literary Biography** (Ref. 810.9 D554). This massive work of scholarship provides essays and references to different literary topics such as the following selected examples (VU has many others):

Afro American Fiction Writers After 1955
Afro American Writers After 1955
American Colonial Writers 1606-1734
American Novelists Since World War II
American Short Story Writers 1880-1910
American Writers in Paris 1920-1939
Beats: Literary Bohemians in Postwar America
Twentieth Century American Science Fiction

C. PLOT SUMMARIES, SHORT CRITICAL ANALYSES

Other reference works provide plot summaries and short critical analyses of specific works or several works by an author, as do the following:

Beacham's Popular Fiction in America (Ref. 809.3 P831b)
Critical Survey of Long Fiction (Ref. 809.3 M194c)
Magill's Literary Annual (Ref. 809.04 M194m)
Masterplots (Ref. 809 M175m)
Masterplots II. African American Literature Series (Ref. 810.9 M423a)
Masterplots II. American Fiction Series (Ref. 809.3 M423a)
Masterplots II. British and Commonwealth Fiction Series (Ref. 823.009 M423)
Masterplots. European Fiction Series (Ref. 823.00994. M423)
The Nobel Prize Winners: Literature (Ref. 809.04 N751)
Popular World Fiction: 1900-Present (Ref. 809.3 P831p)
Survey of Contemporary Literature (Ref. 809 M194s)
Survey of Modern Fantasy Literature (Ref. 809 M194su)
Critical Survey of Short Fiction (Ref. 809.31 M194c)

D. ADDITIONAL REPRINTS/EXCERPTS OF CRITICAL ARTICLES

The New Moulton's Library of Literary Criticism (Ref. 820.9 B655n)
Short Story Criticism: Excerpts from Criticism of the Works of Short Fiction Writers (Ref. 809.31 S559)
Twentieth-Century American Literature (Ref. 810.9 B655t)
Twentieth-Century British Literature (Ref. 820.9 T286t)
Twentieth-Century Criticism of British and American Literature to 1904 (Ref. 820.9 B655c)

E. POETRY ANALYSIS

Many of the above literary sources contain references to poets and poetry; the following are of special interest.

The Columbia Granger's Index to Poetry (Ref. 809.81 G758i)
Contemporary Poets (Ref. 809.1 V788c)
Critical Survey of Poetry. English Language Series (Ref. 821 M194c)
Critical Survey of Poetry. Foreign Language Series (Ref. 809.1 M194)
Guide to American Poetry Explication (Ref. 811.009 G946g)
Masterplots II. Poetry Series (Ref. 809.1 M423m)
The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics (Ref. 809.1 E56e) *Poetry Criticism* (Ref. 809.13 P745p)

F. DRAMA REFERENCES

Many of the sources listed above contain a great deal of information about dramatists and plays. However, there are many specialized theatre references.

Criticism

Critical Survey of Drama: Authors (Ref. 822 C934c)
Critical Survey of Drama: Foreign Language Series (Ref. 809.2 M194)
The Crown Guide to the World's Great Plays: From Ancient Greece to Modern Times (Ref. 809.2 S557g)
Masterplots II. Drama Series (Ref. 809.204 M423m)
New York Theatre Critics' Reviews: Index, 1940-1960 (Ref. 792 N532n)
New York Theatre Critics' Reviews. Microform Issues, 1940-1957 (In Microform Cabinets)

Biographical and Ready Reference

The Biographical Encyclopaedia & Who's Who of the American Theatre (Ref. 792 R567b)
The Cambridge Guide to World Theatre (Ref. 792 C178c)
The Encyclopedia of the American Theatre: 1900-1975 (Ref. 792.0973 B869)
The Facts on File Dictionary of the Theatre (Ref. 792.03 F142f)
McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Drama (Ref. 809.2 M147m)
Notable Women in the American Theatre (Ref. 792.082 N899n)
The Oxford Companion to American Theatre (Ref. 792 B727o)
The Oxford Companion to the Theatre (Ref. 792 H333o)
Who's Who in the Theatre (Ref. 792.028 H536w)

Shakespeare References

Companion to Shakespeare (Ref. 822.33 S527cs)
Oxford Companion to Shakespeare (Ref. 822.33 O98s)
The Reader's Encyclopedia of Shakespeare (Ref. 822.33 C189r)
Rough Guide to Shakespeare: The Plays, the Poems, the Life (Ref. 822.33 D554r)
Shakespeare A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Plays, His Poems, His Life and Times, and More
(Ref. 822.33 B789s)
Shakespeare for Dummies (Ref. 822.33 S527d)
Shakespeare Said It (Ref. 822.33 L677s)
Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays (Ref. 822.33 S527so)
Shakespeare's World and Work: An Encyclopedia for Students (Ref. 822.33 S527s)
William Shakespeare (Ref. 822.33 S527h)
William Shakespeare: His World, His Work, His Influence (Ref. 822.33 S527h)

Miscellaneous

American Theatre History. Bibliography (Ref. 792.0973 T246a)
Creative Production Source Book. Directory (Ref. 792.02 A849)
Dramatists Sourcebook. Directory (Ref. 792.02 D763d)
Guide to Play Selection (Ref. 822.008 N655g)
Ottomiller's Index to Plays in Collections (Ref. 808.82 O91i)
Play Index (Ref. 808.92 P722p)

G. SHORT STORY ANALYSIS

Although many of the works mentioned above will have information about short story writers, the following reference books focus in this area of literary research.

American Short Story Writers, 1880-1910 (Ref. 813.01 A5125)
American Short Story Writers, 1880-1910 (Ref. 813.01 A5126)
Critical Survey of Short Fiction (809.31 M194c)
Masterplots II: Short Story Series (Ref. 809.3 M423s)
A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway (Ref. 813.52 H488r)
A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Herman Melville (Ref. 813.3 M531)
A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne (Ref. 813.3 H399ne)
A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Mark Twain (Ref. 813.4 T969)
Short Story Criticism: Excerpts from Criticism of the Works of Short Fiction Writers (Ref. 809.31 S559)
Short Story Index (Ref. 808.83 C771s)

H. MISCELLANEOUS LITERARY REFERENCE BOOKS

- Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia* (Ref. 803 B435r)
Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature (Ref. 810.9 B465b)
The Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature (Ref. 809.9 B655b)
Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable (Ref. 803 B847b)
Brewer's Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Phrase and Fable (Ref. 803 B847b)
The Columbia History of the American Novel (Ref. 813.009 C726c)
Classic Cult Fiction (Ref. 809.3 W576c)
Critical Survey of Mystery and Detective Fiction (Ref. 809.3 C934c)
The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (Ref. 809.38 E56e)
Genrelecting: A Guide to Reading Interests in Genre Fiction (Ref. 813.009 R813g)
Harlem Renaissance and Beyond (Ref. 810.9 R816h)
Horror Literature (Ref. 808.83 H816h)
The Literary Guide to the Bible (Ref. 809.93522 L775)
Literary Research Guide (Ref. 820.9 H289l)
The New Arthurian Encyclopedia (Ref. 809 N532n)
Now Read on...A Guide to Contemporary Popular Fiction (Ref. 823 H628n)
A Reader's Guide to the American Novel of Detection (Ref. 813.0872 L138r)
Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Reference: An Annotated Bibliography of Works about Literature and Film (Ref. 809.38 J96s)
Spy Fiction: A Connoisseur's Guide (Ref. 809.3 M121s)
10,000 Ideas for Term Papers, Projects, Reports and Speeches (Ref. 808.02 L232t)
What About Murder (1981-1991): A Guide to Books About Mystery and Detective Fiction (Ref. 809.3 B832w)