
Literary Resources

A Pathfinder

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Guest Columnist

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Librarians responsible for the collection development of their library's literary criticism section know that it is a difficult task to select the right book. Is the Oxford World's Classic or the Penguin the best imprint of *Jane Eyre*? Which translation of *War and Peace* best captures Tolstoy's language? Does the collection need both the 1818 and 1831 editions of *Frankenstein*, and if not, which edition? These questions are in addition to the issue of cataloging. Just how many records for *Pride and Prejudice* are we comfortable asking patrons to navigate?

Once past the primary sources, collection development gets even stickier. Librarians new to the subject area must navigate an alphabet soup of titles—CLC, DLB, CA (green and orange)—and a confusing run of titles that are so similar you almost need a key to remember what slight difference in approach might make a big difference in your collection.

And then there are the readers—facing deadlines for papers, navigating difficult and layered texts, or simply exploring books they love. How do we build collections that are responsive to their various needs? If only it were as easy as securing the complete run of Twayne's Masterwork Studies Series and keeping our subscription to Gale's Novels for Students up-to-date.

To help navigate the lush but messy waters of literary criticism, I asked Stefanie R. Bluemle to create a guide that both surveyed the resources and modeled the process of crafting a responsive collection. Stefanie is a reference librarian and library liaison to the departments of history, philosophy, and religion at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. She earned her MLS in 2008 at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB). Prior to entering the library science program, she earned her MA in English, also from IUB; her focus was nineteenth-century American literature. While conducting her graduate studies in English, Stefanie worked at IUB as an associate instructor, teaching a variety of composition classes to first-year undergraduates.—*Editor*

Literary criticism, the explication of the meaning and function of all forms of poetry and prose, exploded in terms of scope and even sheer quantity in the twentieth century. From a mid-twentieth-century emphasis on texts as discrete, self-contained entities to a blossoming of interest in the larger historical, social, and political contexts from which such texts arise, criticism expanded to address the variety of ways in which even those questions traditionally

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under the purview of other disciplines take shape in literature. In the early twenty-first century, literary criticism continues its interrogation of and departure from the traditional canon as its primary unit of analysis, embracing lesser-known authors, popular texts and other media, and lesser-read texts by prominent literary figures. Cultural studies remains influential to literary criticism, as evidenced by continued examination of the categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality, as well as the political sources and implications of cultural production. Postcolonial studies lends critics a means of grappling with literature and power in a global context. A variety of other methodologies persist as well, including deconstruction, Marxism, psychoanalysis, New Historicism, and feminism, to name only a few. At the same time, new trends and lines of inquiry constantly form. Even as scholarly interest in the body faded, for example, animal studies emerged. And more marginal trends, like ecocriticism, continue to clarify their particular methodologies. All told, literary criticism is a dynamic discipline with an interest in the implications of literary production that go well beyond the confines of text and language alone.

To extract a “core” set of resources from a field so wide-ranging in scope and methodology would be reductive, to say the least. Therefore this resource guide does not recommend specific works so much as it functions as a pathfinder in that word’s most literal possible sense: that is, this guide assists primarily in finding and discriminating among the resources it highlights. In recognition of the fact that every library’s collection must serve its particular reading community, the specific works listed here should be regarded as representative examples of high-quality work rather than the best that any given genre has to offer. That said, however, two basic assumptions do underlie the construction of this guide. First, the guide is intended more for smaller, especially public, libraries that are limited in the number of resources they can acquire. This guide takes the wide-ranging levels of readership at such libraries into account; at the same time, it assumes that the ultraspecific, highly theoretical, graduate- or higher-level texts common at research libraries will be mostly outside such collections’ scope. Second, although this guide does not assume an audience of high-level researchers, it does strive to identify resources that would be considered high-quality by such researchers. Put simply, all of the resources here—those the guide lists directly and those to which it indirectly points—are written by respected authors, released by quality publishers, and recent enough to reflect up-to-date trends in literary scholarship.

The guide has two main sections. The first introduces a broad set of high-quality literary resources: series, publishers, databases, and Web resources. This section includes only a small number of specific titles, as its main purpose is to suggest general pathways for locating material. The second section models the process suggested in the first section by highlighting books and other resources that might be relevant to a library updating its collection of material on a specific author: Herman Melville.

PRIMARY SOURCES

Fiction and Nonfiction

The series listed here focus on “classic” works of literature: So many publishers print editions of such works that it can be difficult to discriminate among them. These series provide significant context or guidance and thus can be valuable aids in approaching difficult texts. All three include bibliographies or supplementary reading lists; otherwise, the presentation of each is unique.

Norton Critical Editions

Generally the most extensive critical editions available. Norton includes little introductory material, and footnotes are often brief. But each primary text is followed by numerous excerpts from other works in such categories as background material, sources for the text and other contemporary contexts, contemporary reviews, and modern literary criticism.

Oxford World’s Classics

Oxford’s introductions are readable guides to a basic understanding of some of the texts’ main questions and themes. Notes may be lengthy but are usually not great in number; some editions also contain brief appendixes that provide context or reprint material that was associated with the text in earlier editions.

Penguin Classics

Penguin’s introductions are brief (perhaps twenty to thirty pages) and provide readable critical and historical background. Notes are often numerous and in-depth, but they are placed at the end of the volume so the flow of the text itself is not interrupted. Many volumes also contain appendixes devoted to contemporary contexts.

Poetry

“Classic” works of poetry, especially longer poems, will likely be available as critical editions from the publishers listed above. However, recent or obscure poetry may be much more difficult to locate.

The Columbia Granger’s Index to Poetry. Columbia Univ. Pr.

A series of books that index poems—by title, author, subject, first line, and last line—and identify the anthologies and collections in which those poems were published. Also available as an electronic resource.

Web Resources

The resources here are among the broadest and most comprehensive electronic book collections available on the Internet. Additional high-quality sites devoted to more specific collections can be located through resources like the Librarians’ Internet Index (accessed Jan. 23, 2010).

Bartleby.com: Great Books Online. www.bartleby.com.

An online publisher of fiction, verse, and nonfiction works in the public domain. All works are available full-text for free.

Internet Archive: Text Archive. www.archive.org/details/texts.

From the same project that provides the “Wayback Machine,” an online archive that seeks to preserve books and other texts in digital form. The text archive includes collections of American and Canadian literature and children’s books, among others.

Internet Public Library. www.ipl.org/div/subject/browse/hum60.60.00.

This URL leads directly to the Online Texts page of the Internet Public Library’s literature collection; the links provided here are excellent gateways to more specific collections of e-books.

Project Gutenberg. www.gutenberg.org.

The oldest project designed to provide e-books for free. Project Gutenberg offers texts for download or for reading online in plain-text format.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Reference Resources

Almost innumerable reference resources exist in literature and literary criticism. For the most part, then, this section of the guide addresses major series and publishers rather than individual titles. Of course, not every high-quality reference resource is published as part of a series; catalog searching will unearth these titles.

Bibliographies

The two texts listed here are the most important bibliographies of literary reference works; they can provide invaluable assistance in selecting reference resources that go well beyond those mentioned in this guide. Additional bibliographies (of primary and secondary resources in all areas of literature) are available from publishers like Greenwood, Gale, Scarecrow, Oxford, and Cambridge.

Harner, James L. *Literary Research Guide: An Annotated Listing of Reference Sources in English Literary Studies*. 5th ed. New York: Modern Language Association, 2008 (ISBN: 978-0-873-52808-5).

An indispensable, comprehensive guide to reference resources in all areas of literature. This text is divided into sections by either the type of resource (e.g., bibliographies of bibliographies, biographical resources) or the broad area of literature under study (e.g., American literature, Irish literature).

Bracken, James K. *Reference Works in British and American Literature*. 2nd ed. Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1998 (ISBN: 978-1-563-08518-5).

Highlights reference resources that focus on a single author. This category is outside the scope of Harner’s bibliography, which makes Bracken’s book a potentially useful supplement despite its age.

Encyclopedias and Dictionaries

Broadly construed, literary encyclopedias and dictionaries fall into two categories. The first focuses on the literature of particular historical periods, movements, or genres; these resources may define terms as varied in type as authors, settings, events, texts, and concepts. The second broad category defines literary terms and concepts from critical theory; these resources largely retain their relevance across literary movements and time periods insofar as they approach literature from a disciplinary rather than historical perspective. The encyclopedia- and dictionary-type reference works listed here are representative examples; numerous other publishers have released similar titles.

Facts on File encyclopedias.

Encyclopedias of terms relevant to particular historical periods, literary movements and/or ethnic literatures; they include cross-references and suggestions for further reading. Most are suitable for audiences at high school level and higher.

Greenwood encyclopedias.

Similar in function to Facts on File encyclopedias. Greenwood’s website distinguishes more thoroughly between texts suitable to high school, college, and public library audiences.

Oxford Companion to . . . Oxford Univ. Pr.

Volumes of alphabetically arranged entries, ranging in length from a few paragraphs to a few pages, that define terms from particular places, time periods, and movements in literature. Oxford Companions tend to be weighty and comprehensive, but they are accessible for nonexperts with a serious interest in literature.

Critical Survey of . . . Magill.

Encyclopedia-style introductions to the work of major authors. Each set focuses on one genre (e.g., long fiction or drama) and devotes an entry to each featured author; the entries provide basic analysis of the author’s significant works. Suitable for high school and college students.

Harmon, William et al. *A Handbook to Literature*. 11th ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009 (ISBN: 978-0-1360-1439-3).

Definitions, often detailed, of literary terms and concepts;

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well suited to college-level audiences. While this handbook is one of the more ubiquitous texts of its kind, similar reference works are available from publishers like Oxford, Blackwell, and Routledge.

Murfin, Ross and Supryia M. Ray. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. 3rd ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009 (ISBN: 978-0-3124-6188-1).

Definitions of concepts from critical theory as well as literary terms; useful to students and other readers who are venturing into critical methodologies. Again, similar texts are available from other publishers.

Myers, Jack Elliott and Don C. Wukasz. *Dictionary of Poetic Terms*. Denton: Univ. of North Texas Pr., 2003 (ISBN: 978-1-5744-1166-9).

Another dictionary of literary terms, this time with an exclusive focus on poetry; Myers and Wukasz claim both poets and readers of poetry as their intended audience.

Biographical Resources

The series addressed here—all by Gale—are the most notable biographical reference series on literary figures. Numerous other publishers, including Greenwood and Facts on File, also release reference works that are largely or exclusively devoted to biography.

Contemporary Authors. Gale.

Biographical and brief bibliographical information on authors from television and film as well as print media. The featured writers are typically alive when first included in the series, so updated entries often appear as new volumes are published.

Dictionary of Literary Biography. Gale.

Series of more than three hundred volumes devoted to in-depth biographical discussions of authors, including novelists, poets, playwrights, and screenwriters, among others. Each volume addresses a particular place and period in literary history; while entries include reference lists of primary and secondary works, the main focus is the biography itself.

Dictionary of Literary Biography: Documentary Series. Gale.

A supplement to the Dictionary of Literary Biography, this series provides additional photographs, as well as facsimiles and reprints of original manuscripts, some of which are otherwise rare or difficult to find.

Single-Author Reference Resources

Numerous reference works serve as guides to individual—usually major—authors. These may be author-specific dictionaries

or encyclopedias, concordances, or essay collections suggesting critical perspectives. The latter differ from monographs and other scholarly essay collections in that their purpose is less to make original contributions than to introduce newer readers to critical study of the featured author; they are best shelved, however, with the circulating books.

A [Name of Author] Encyclopedia. Greenwood.

Definitions of terms—people, places, events, texts, concepts, and literary influences—relevant to the work of individual major authors; a preface, chronology, bibliography, and appendixes containing other relevant information are usually included. Useful to beginning students and other nonexpert readers.

[Name of author] A to Z. Facts on File.

Encyclopedias similar to Greenwood's (above) in function and audience. Facts on File's books differ from Greenwood's author encyclopedias, however, in that they contain photographs and other images to complement the definitions.

Cambridge Companions to Literature. Cambridge Univ. Pr.

Essays on major works as well as important topics in the study of each author. The essays are by literary scholars and often present a unique argument or point of view as well as an introductory overview. Cambridge Companions are accessible to college students as well as interested laypeople.

A Critical Companion to . . . Facts on File.

Guides to authors widely read in high school and college, these companions are typically divided into four parts: (1) biography; (2) alphabetically arranged entries on each of an author's works, including synopses and very brief critical introductions; (3) alphabetically arranged encyclopedia-type entries on relevant terms; and (4) an appendix, which may include chronologies, bibliographies, reprints of relevant documents, and critical discussions.

Student Companions to Classic Writers. Greenwood.

Introductory guides to the featured author's major works. Biographical overviews and bibliographies bookend the primary content: one chapter on each major work. These chapters include sections on basic issues like plot, characters, contexts, themes, and literary devices, as well as possible interpretive approaches. Best suited to secondary-school students.

Critical Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers. Greenwood.

Nearly identical in structure and audience to Greenwood's Student Companions to Classic Writers series, except with a focus on recent, best-selling writers.

Critical Responses in Arts and Letters. Praeger/Greenwood.

An introduction to each author, followed by criticism—

in the form of both reviews and scholarly articles—on each major work. This series differs from the Greenwood Companions in that the articles here are critical studies, not specially written overviews intended to guide readers through a work's major features.

Single-Text Reference Resources

The most familiar of these resources—to desperate students, in particular—are CliffsNotes (www.cliffsnotes.com) and SparkNotes (www.sparknotes.com). Although both often provide assistance to struggling readers, other guides offer higher-quality help with literary scholarship on a particular work.

Casebooks in Criticism. Oxford Univ. Pr.

Selected critical essays that represent the most significant themes and issues in scholarly study of the work in question. The casebooks also include introductory overviews as well as some primary material from the author, such as interviews or the author's own written commentary on the work.

Novels for Students. Gale.

Explanations of context, plot, characters, structure, and other significant information on fifteen to twenty major novels per volume. Novels for Students is intended primarily for a high school audience.

Routledge Guides to Literature. Routledge.

Introductions to various elements of each featured work, including the author and text, contemporary contexts, and literary criticism; suggestions for further reading also are included. Routledge's guides are useful to both students and laypeople.

Monographs

Although a considerable amount of journal literature exists in literary studies, this discipline is dominated by the monograph, which is the best format for the extensive analysis and synthesis required to make a significant contribution to criticism as a whole. It would be impossible to highlight the best academic publishers because they are so great in number; moreover, what constitutes the “best” varies significantly depending on the area of literature in question. Likewise, so many series exist that any listing would ultimately be arbitrary.

It is possible, however, to suggest means of locating and selecting monographs. *Choice* reviews, well-known among librarians, are explicit about audience and include judgments of a book's significance to the field. *Resources for College Libraries* highlights books suitable to undergraduate-level readers that have also made an impact on the field.

In looking for monographs on a selected literary topic, a catalog search—in WorldCat or at a major research library's website—can quickly reveal some of the most important

academic publishers on a specific author, theme, region, or time period. Additionally, journals like *American Literary Scholarship* and *The Year's Work in English Studies* provide bibliographies and reviews of recent scholarship.

Electronic Databases

Numerous niche databases provide full-text access to primary works of literature in various areas; the databases listed here are the most noteworthy sources for critical material.

Literature Resource Center. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale. Varied coverage.

Includes not just criticism but also biographical and reference material. Much, though not all, of the criticism and other articles come from Gale's own series, including Contemporary Authors, Dictionary of Literary Biography, and Novels for Students, all of which are listed in this guide. Well suited for students through the undergraduate level.

MLA International Bibliography. Ipswich, Mass.: EBSCO, 1963–.

The most important and comprehensive index of articles and books in literary criticism. *MLA* is primarily intended for scholars and serious students of literature; thus, it encompasses material that is wide-ranging in difficulty.

Web Resources

Hundreds of high-quality, literature-focused sites and pages exist on the Internet. These range in focus from very broad areas or genres to specific authors and works. The sites listed here are not literary resources; rather, they are comprehensive directories to those resources.

Internet Public Library: Online Literary Criticism Collection. www.ipl.org/div/litcrit.

A guide to full-text online works of literary criticism. This collection is browsable by author or title; it also includes pathfinders that aid in researching criticism both in general and on this site in particular.

Lynch, Jack. Literary Resources on the Net. <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Lit>.

A guide to the most valuable resources available on the Internet in all areas of literature, with primary focus on English-language literatures. Lynch is a professor of English at Rutgers University.

Voice of the Shuttle. <http://vos.ucsb.edu>.

Humanities-focused directory of links to relevant, high-quality Web resources. This page is the gateway, which points to other pages on all areas of literature and literary theory. Those pages further subdivide their topics to facilitate browsing. From the English Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

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MODELING THE PROCESS: A HERMAN MELVILLE COLLECTION

Of course, any American library with a literature collection will already include texts by and about Herman Melville. However, a canonical author provides a suitable focus for a model of resource selection: First, the abundance of material by and about Melville creates the necessity for discrimination among multiple viable options, a process that this guide ultimately intends to facilitate. Second, and perhaps more importantly, any collection devoted to a prominent, popular author will need updating as new editions and studies are published. That updating process requires more discrimination than, for example, building a new collection devoted to a less-studied author.

Recency, function, organization, and quality all figured prominently in the selection of these texts. With an eye to the types of libraries under consideration here, the imagined audience consists of general readers and beginning students of literature.

Primary Sources

Many would consider *Moby Dick* and *Bartleby, the Scrivener* Melville's most important works; they are certainly his most famous. In addition to these texts, *Omoo*, *Typee*, and *Pierre* are available as Penguin Classics, and *The Confidence Man* is available from Norton and Oxford (to highlight examples of editions cited in this guide).

Melville, Herman. *Moby Dick; or, The Whale*. New York: Penguin, 2001 (ISBN: 978-0-1420-0008-3).

Critical edition containing the unabridged novel and information about the novel, including an introduction, bibliography, and explanatory notes on the text itself.

Melville, Herman. *Melville's Short Novels: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*. Ed. Dan McCall. New York: Norton, 2002 (ISBN: 978-0-3939-7641-0).

A Norton Critical Edition, this volume includes *Bartleby, the Scrivener*; *Billy Budd*; and *Benito Cereno*.

Melville, Herman. *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings*. Ed. John Bryant. New York: Modern Library, 2001 (ISBN: 978-0-6796-4105-6).

Depending on readers' needs, this is a potential substitute for *Melville's Short Novels* because it includes those three texts as well as lesser-known writings—including the poem *Clarel*—in genres other than the novel.

Reference Resources

The texts listed below are reference resources in the sense that they provide definitions, contexts, and other introductory material rather than original contributions to Melville

criticism. Nevertheless, the books by Johnson, Kelley, and Talley may best be included in the circulating collection.

Johnson, Claudia Durst. *Understanding Melville's Short Fiction: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2005 (ISBN: 978-0-3133-3129-9).

A guide to *Bartleby, the Scrivener* and *Billy Budd*, including chapters on important issues, primary documents for context, and bibliographies.

Kelley, Wyn. *Herman Melville: An Introduction*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2008 (ISBN: 978-1-4051-3158-2).

A volume in the series Blackwell Introductions to Literature, not yet discussed in this guide. Kelley provides introductory essays on Melville's most important works. This text is best suited to an adult- or college-level readership.

Rollyson, Carl E., Lisa Olson Paddock, and April Gentry. *Critical Companion to Herman Melville: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*. New York: Facts on File, 2007 (ISBN: 978-0-8160-6461-8).

Easy-to-use reference work with four clearly defined sections: biography; encyclopedia-type entries on works by Melville; an A–Z list of entries on important terms and concepts; and appendixes, which include, among other information, a chronology and bibliographies of primary and secondary sources.

Talley, Sharon, ed. *Student Companion to Herman Melville*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2007 (ISBN: 978-0-3133-3499-3).

A volume in Greenwood's Student Companions to Classic Writers series, discussed above; perfect for high-school students, many of whom will require very basic assistance if asked to read Melville.

Monographs, Essay Collections, and Other Studies

These texts were selected using WorldCat, *Choice*, and other book review sources, with numerous factors being considered. WorldCat identified the most recent studies that are owned by the largest number of libraries. *Choice* and other book reviews helped determine not only the quality of these texts but also their focus, the assumption being that general studies will be better suited to public libraries and even many undergraduate audiences than narrowly focused studies.

Of course, using WorldCat as a selection tool can generate empty reinforcement of certain books' popularity: Commonly owned texts become even more commonly owned. And relying too exclusively on *Choice* means risking excessive uniformity in libraries' collections. This, ultimately, is why a number of factors in combination, including the needs

of each particular readership, should be employed to select monographs and other books.

The texts listed here are recent Melville studies that would also be suitable to a general readership. The other most recent studies tend to have a very narrow focus; which of these are best for any given library will depend on its patrons' needs.

Delbanco, Andrew. *Melville: His World and Work*. New York: Knopf, 2005 (ISBN: 978-0-3754-0314-9).

A biography from a popular publisher, written by a scholar of American studies. The author's credentials give this title authority, although it remains accessible to a general readership.

Parker, Hershel. *Herman Melville: A Biography*. 2 vols. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Pr., 1996–2002 (ISBN: 978-0-8018-5428-6 [vol. 1] & 978-0-8018-6892-4 [vol. 2]).

A hefty biography from a scholarly publisher. Libraries serving a college-level readership might consider this study instead of or in addition to Delbanco's.

Gunn, Giles, ed. *A Historical Guide to Herman Melville*. New York: Oxford Univ. Pr., 2005 (ISBN: 978-0-1951-4281-5).

A collection of essays representing contemporary themes in Melville studies and literary criticism more broadly; those themes include social class, ethnicity, and capitalism. Suitable to college students and interested laypeople.

Severin, Timothy. *In Search of Moby Dick: Quest for the White Whale*. New York: Basic, 2000 (ISBN: 978-0-4650-7696-3).

A travel narrative about Severin's journeys in search of a white sperm whale in the same parts of the world the Pequod visits in *Moby Dick*. This text would be most suitable to libraries serving a general readership.

Web Resources

The websites listed here are in addition to the more general literary sites mentioned above.

The Life and Works of Herman Melville. www.melville.org.

From the Herman Melville Internet Society, a collection of links to both primary and secondary material. Types of information available here include biography and criticism, as well as links to other Melville-related sites for additional context.

Roberts, Ken. Great Books Index: Herman Melville (1819–1891). <http://books.mirror.org/gb.melville.html>.

Part of a personal project to locate online full-text editions of famous books; this site can provide access to various writings by Melville that are not owned in print.

Moby Dick. www.princeton.edu/~batke/moby.

From Princeton University, a full-text searchable edition.