

FINDING LITERARY CRITICISM

A guide to sources available at ACC Libraries

Why use literary criticism?

Reading how other people evaluated a novel, short story, play, or poem can help you define your own views.

- Maybe they see aspects of the work that you didn't notice.
- Maybe they give historical background that explains why the work was written the way it was.
- Maybe you will disagree with them and it will help you focus your opinion.

Criticism doesn't substitute for reading the original work because it won't give a detailed plot summary. But it can help you understand the point of a story and identify the significant parts.

Many critical sources discuss an author's overall writing and may not mention the specific work you have read. This is especially true for poems and short stories. This sort of criticism can still be useful if you apply the overall interpretation of an author to your particular work.

Before you start searching

Research will be easier if you know as much of the following as possible:

- Correct title of the work
- Author's complete name
- Original publication date
- Other useful information includes when and where the author lived. This can help with sources that focus on a time period or geographical area.

The librarians can help you find this information.

The **online databases** mentioned here can be accessed from the library website (<http://library.austincc.edu>). Click on "Articles & Research," then on "Articles & More". If you're off campus, your ACC eID will give access.

Collections of literary criticism

The following reference books and online databases are collections of criticism of many authors.

Contemporary Literary Criticism
Literature Resource Center
MagillOnLiterature Plus

(Online Databases. See instructions in box, above)

Short Stories for Students (Part of online database *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Also in print in most ACC libraries, REF PN3373 .S3485.)

Large collection of criticism that was published elsewhere and is collected here. Usually you can get several different sources of criticism for a story.

Short Story Criticism (Part of online database *Literature Resource Center*. Also in print in most ACC libraries, REF PN 3321 .S5.)

A large collection of criticism that was originally published elsewhere. For most stories you can get several different critics' views all in this one source.

Critical Survey of Long Fiction
Critical Survey of Short Fiction
Critical Survey of Poetry
Critical Survey of Drama

(Part of the online database *MagillOnLiterature Plus*. Also in print in most ACC libraries.)

Short, critical examinations of an author's works. Individual works aren't explored in depth. Good starting point because it gives an overview of a writer's works. Also has short biographical information.

There are many other reference sources that are useful, including sources that define literary terms and discuss types of criticism. Ask the librarian or browse in the Reference section in the call number areas PN - PS.

Books on a specific author

For notable authors, the library will have entire books of literary criticism. There may also be entire books of criticism on individual titles. These books usually check out, so you don't have to stay in the library.

- From the library's home web page, go to the library catalog, then select the "General Subjects" method of searching.
- Type in the author's name, last name first.
- If there are books about the author listed, check to verify which campuses have the books you want and if they are available for check out.
- Once you have the book, look in the index at the end of the book to find the pages about the specific title you are researching.

Other sources

If the above suggestions don't satisfy you, ask a librarian for help. The sources listed here are only a small portion of what the library offers you.