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Masterplots Complete 2000 Edition (Review)

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Date reviewed: 10/26/00

Price: Starts at \$105 per online sourcebook, \$900 for all 10.

Based on Greenwood's print series of the same name, this product consists of ten sourcebooks of the "most studied books in schools": *The Crucible*, *Hamlet*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Macbeth*, *Of Mice & Men/The Red Pony/The Pearl*, *Pride & Prejudice*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *Things Fall Apart*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Each sourcebook is available separately or as part of the set of ten. The distinctive pricing policy is worth special note: purchase prices give lifetime access to the files, with no other annual subscription fees or charges. Libraries get unlimited on-site and remote user access, and special pricing is available for buying all the sourcebooks (each sourcebook starts at \$105 for libraries and institutions and the price to libraries for all ten sourcebooks starts at \$900).

And you get a lot for these prices. Each book has primary source materials, expert commentary, multimedia (audio/video clips, virtual tours), study questions, web links to related sites, time lines, glossaries, and historical references. I had review access to all ten titles and had to make a hard choice to start (as if. Austen book listed. No brainer).

So I clicked on "Pride & Prejudice" and entered Understanding *Pride & Prejudice* by Debra Teachman (who was immediately identified on the title page, along with a linked background statement about where she teaches and other publications). Also displayed was a Table of Contents with these chapters: Introduction, Literary Analysis, Law and Custom, Inheritance and Marriage, Eighteenth-Century Views of Marriage, Unmarried Women: Conduct and Law (another hard choice: Old Maids or Fallen Women? so I skipped to the next chapter—Women's Education and Moral Conduct), Issues in the 1980s and 1990s, and finally a set of web-based study questions.

At first I browsed the text in the chapters directly from the outline and found interesting essays with imbedded mnemonic icons to a variety of related materials providing a wealth of background for understanding the work in the context of the time and place, as well as relating it to current social and cultural issues. Links lead to the text of the book, illustrations, related readings, "topics for written or oral exploration," multimedia (including music, speeches, video clips, etc.), and historical essays (some of them

within the system itself, some of them linking to other web sites), among other resources. One essay described the writer William Hayley's patronistic insults "in the defense of" spinsters, while another gave an insightful assessment of Mary Wollstonecraft's works and contemporary influence—and influences.

For those interested in getting to specific information quickly, the system also offers search features. Action buttons at screen top and bottom let you search by keyword and navigate through the sourcebook rapidly (buttons include: Top, Contents, GEM Online Home, Search, Clear Search, Search Results, and Table of Contents). My search on "marriage and business" found 11 hits that took me directly to the book text and gave me ample evidence for an essay argument. The system also provides excellent, readily accessible search tips. The only change I'd suggest for the future is to put the Getting Started link at the top of the Table of Contents, rather than at the bottom of the list.

The Bottom Line: Literature in Context Online is an irresistible file of depth and substance, yet delightfully accessible. It is targeted at school audiences, but I highly recommend it for public and academic libraries, too. A gem.—*Cheryl LaGuardia*

**CD-ROM MASTERPLOTS COMPLETE
2000 EDITION**

Salem Press (800-221-1592;
csr@salemexpress.com).
www.salemexpress.com
Windows 95+. 2000.
ISBN 0-89356-268-8.
Price: \$650.



Updating the 1999 edition, **Masterplots Complete CD-ROM 2000 Edition** has two major things going for it: it includes even more information (the entire contents of 21 sets of

Masterplots reference books: that's 104 print volumes' worth) and it's cheaper than the last version.

The benefits of providing a disc that makes more than 100 print volumes available for searching in one place are obvious, and a simple Title Search is very intuitive. Typing in the search box "heart is a lonely hunter" quickly yields three results: the plot synopsis from *Masterplots Classics*, the synopsis from *Masterplots Women's Literature*, and the entry from *Masterplots Character Profiles*. Each entry includes hyperlinks to an author profile and to character profile (yet, disappointingly, no links to the other Carson Mc-

LEGEND

WEB Web-based Database CD-ROM CD-ROM

New book review in *Library Journal*

Dec. 2000 issue pg. 110

★ **Natural Medicines
Comprehensive Database**, 3d ed.
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1530p. ed.
by Jeff M. Jellin. Index. ISBN
0-9676136-4-7. **pap.** \$92

"Although numerous herbal books are available for both the consumer and the healthcare practitioner, this is the one that every medical library, pharmacist, physician, and healthcare student must have because of its accuracy, objectiveness, and comprehensiveness."

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DATABASE&DISC REVIEWS

Cullers's works that show up in, say, an author search). Plot synopsis entries for the 20 titles I looked at are well written and extremely detailed (the entry for John Irving's *The World According to Garp* is an example full of astonishing specifics). Although I was initially disappointed that references in essays are not hyperlinked within the text, a list of links at the text's end ensures that readers don't get sidetracked.

Less impressive is the "search dialog" interface since it is not intuitive. Detailed Search lets you browse the index. Global Search lets you full-text search the entire contents of the CD, including using Boolean operators to link keyword searches. I didn't trust the results here, as I ran a search on "widow" and "year" as keywords and got zero hits—yet I'd just seen, from a previous search on Irving, that this database does include a plot synopsis entry for his book *A Widow for One Year*.

The Bottom Line: Even if you're not looking to free up over nine linear feet of shelf space in your reference room, **Masterplots** is a definite bargain. Your reference staff may need to offer more help than with the printed version (the search interface could be improved), but I strongly recommend this for its content to high school media centers and public and college libraries.—*Elizabeth McKeigue, Access Svcs., Widener Lib., Harvard Univ*

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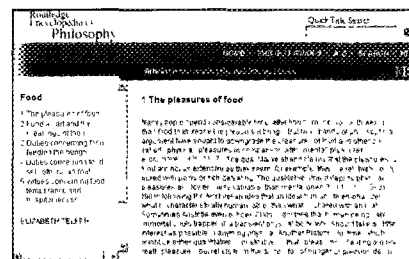
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Date Reviewed: 11/10/00

Price: Negotiated by site.

After creating a monumental philosophical work in 1998 in both print and CD-ROM, Routledge has taken full advantage of the web's power and flexibility with the web version of **REP Online**. General editor Edward Craig views this new product creatively, yet pragmatically: "I won't say that the possibilities are endless, but I certainly can't see any end to them at present."

The integrity of the 1998 edition continues in the web version with all 2,056 original entries, plus six new ones: Philosophy of Food, Genetic Modification, Globalization, Integrity, Simulation Theory, and Sustainability. The 1300-plus experts do an excellent job of rendering these thematic and biographical entries accessible. Although it contains articles on Aristotle, German Romanticism, and Thomas Hobbes, **REP Online** covers worldwide philosophy from Islamic and Buddhist topics to country-specific entries, such as Philosophy in Ethiopia. For additional background, some entries, e.g., Aesthetics and Philosophy of Latin America, are labeled "Signpost," i.e., they provide an overview of the subdisciplines or regional coverage.



In moving to the web, the exemplary content receives primary focus amidst an uncluttered screen design. Those familiar with the print version will recognize the basic entry here easily. A tool bar provides clickable access to the entry's major components (Article, Bibliography [of references and further reading and a list of works], Related Articles—with see also links and links to further discussion—and, new to the web version, a webibliography of annotated links). Below the tool bar, two frames contain the Table of Contents of the Article and the selected text. The TOC has a boldface title providing access to a general overview, followed by links to the subsections and the signature.

REP Online reveals what it means to reinvent the conventional encyclopedia dynamically. Editor Craig likens **REP Online**'s production to that of a quarterly journal. Every January, April, July, and October the encyclopedia will include new, revised, and updated content, with a special page devoted to listing updates. Regular updating also opens up the option for ephemera, which currently entails a useful "Coming Soon" section of philosophy projects, names, and contacts. Archived copies of editions can be supplied upon request. Other additions to the web version include subject guides for Time Periods and World Religions, and the web's strength—numerous imbedded links interconnecting more information than one could possibly unite in print.

Although it is still possible to read entries alphabetically, multiple search options increase navigability. Quick Title Search provides swift access to entries and produces a result even if the search query is not inverted. Other search methods are Full Text, Advanced, Bibliography, and Contributors. The straightforward Contributors search and keyword searching of Full Text and Bibliography searches make for easy use. Advanced searching is an intricate tool for those interested in more targeted searching, and options here include pattern, expert pattern, and Boolean searching. In the end, every search method produces a results list with links to the appropriate portion of an entry, with highlighted query terms.

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