1-1-2001

Masterplots Complete 2000 Edition (Review)

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LI LITERATURE IN CONTEXT ONLINE
Greenwood Electronic Media
(800-225-5800; gem@greenwood.com)
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www.litcontext.com
Date reviewed: 10/26/00
Price: Starts at $105 per online
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Based on Greenwood's print series of
the same name, this product consists of ten
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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glossaries, and historical references.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 an Austen
book listed. No brainer).

So I clicked on "Pride & Prejudice"
and entered "Understanding Pride &
Prejudice by Debra Teachman" (which 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: Red Pony 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
influences—and influences.

For those interested in getting to
specific information quickly, the system also
offers search features. Action buttons at
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 ac-
cessible. It is targeted at school audiences,
but I highly recommend it for public and
academic libraries. too A gem.—Cheryl
LaGuardia

MASTERPLOTS COMPLETE
2000 EDITION

Salem Press (800-221-1592:
www.salempress.com)
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 avail-
able for searching in one place are obvi-
ous, and a simple Title Search is very intui-
tive. Typing in the search box "heart is a
lonely hunter" quickly yields three results:
the plot synopsis from Masterplots Clas-
sics, the synopsis from Masterplots
Women's Literature, and the entry from
Masterplots Character Profiles. Each en-
try includes hyperlinks to an author profile
and to character profile (yet, disappoint-
ingly, no links to the other Carson Mc-

LIBRARY JOURNAL/JANUARY 2001
New book review in Library Journal

Dec. 2000 issue pg. 110

★ Natural Medicines
Comprehensive Database. 3d 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."

"There is also hard-to-find information on lab tests, diseases, known and possible interactions with foods (e.g., grapefruit juice), and what many brand-name products contain. The entire text is supported by 8,204 references. Libraries will also need access to the web site, www.NaturalDatabase.com, which is updated daily and easy to navigate."

"Although this book is geared to health practitioners, the consumer who wants up-to-date, accurate data will also find it useful. Highly recommended for public and academic libraries and essential for all medical and health science libraries."

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DATABASE & DISC REVIEWS

Cullers' 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 McKenzie, Access Svcs., Widener Lib., Harvard Univ.

Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online

Routledge (800-634-7064, rep@routledge-ny.com).
www.routledge-ny.com
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 1,500-plus experts do an excellent job of rendering these thematic and biographical entries accessible. Although it contains articles on Aesthetics, German Romanticism, and Thomas Hobbes, REP Online covers Western 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 weblog 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 price 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 quick 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 Contributor 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.