

Lesson K

Library Sources for Literary Criticism

Information

Literary criticism is, by definition, the art of evaluating or analyzing works of literature. By reading one or more critiques about a short story, novel, or play we can gain a fuller understanding of that work. Sometimes events in an author's life influence his/her writings and literary techniques. Literary critics will often include biographical information in their critiques which may be of help to you when trying to understand an author's work.

Before analyzing an assigned piece of literature, **it is important to read the complete work carefully and try to understand the meaning.** There is no substitute for reading the entire piece, but if you have difficulty following the plot or text, you might find help in a plot summary available in the library.

One important thing to remember about criticism is that it depends on the interpretation and knowledge of the critic. It is possible for a critic to completely miss the meaning the writer intended, making it a good idea to read more than one critique if possible. The more a critic knows about the author, his/her writings and other similar literature, the more reliable the criticism may be.

In our library works of literature have call numbers beginning with "P". "PR" call numbers include literature from Great Britain, "PS" call numbers include literature from the United States, "PQ" call numbers include literature from Mexico and Latin America, etc. In the Library Of Congress Classification system that we use at Hartnell College Library, **literature by an author is shelved close to criticism about the author's works along with books about the author's life.** Books with criticism of several authors in one volume will be shelved at the beginning of the call number section. When you use a book that analyzes the works of many different authors, look for an index in the back of the book so that you can go straight to the criticism you want.

Hartnell Librarians have prepared a handout to assist students in finding literary criticism available at our Library. It is entitled "How to Find Literary Criticism" and can be found on the rack near the Reference Desk.

Name _____

Lesson K: Literary Criticism Assignment

The following reference books and indexes will be used for this lesson:

<u>American Writers</u>	REF PS129 .A55
<u>Book Review Digest</u>	Index Tables
<u>Contemporary Authors (CA)</u>	REF PN771 .C6
<u>Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)</u>	REF PN771 .C59*
<u>Critical Survey of Poetry</u>	REF PN1111 .C7
<u>Humanities Index</u>	Index Tables
<u>Masterplots</u>	REF PN44 .M33
<u>Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature</u>	Index Tables
<u>Twentieth Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)</u>	REF PN771 .T94

If you have difficulty following the plot or understanding the meaning of a literary work, you may want to use a plot summary to get started. One example of plot summaries is the series Masterplots. This provides the bare outlines of plots of many different kinds of works. In Hartnell College Library, Masterplots are in both reference and circulating collections. Using the index at the back of Volume 12 find the entry for "Tamar" by Robinson Jeffers.

1. In Masterplots (1976), the entry for "Tamar" is in volume____, page_____.
2. In the basic information at the beginning of the entry, the locale of the poem is listed as:_____.
3. The major sections of the entry are:_____,
_____ and_____.

Short plot summaries and more in-depth critical analysis of the works can be found in reference books of the "critical survey" type. Find the set, Critical Survey of Poetry, in the reference section. (Use the call number given above.) Use the index at the end of the index volume and locate the article about Robinson Jeffers.

4. It is in volume____, pages_____.

In the section on "Analysis," notice that there are two pages of explanation of sources of his literary inspiration. The analysis of "Tamar" begins on page 1491 and does not always agree with the analysis in Masterplots.

At times, the Critical Survey series analyzes specific sentences and lines of literature. Notice the interpretation of lines from "The Place for No Story," on pages 1494-1495. There is a good analysis of Jeffers' "sense of pattern," which he used instead of rhymes or free verse.

5.A. The analysis on page 1495 states there is a "recurrence of _____ lines" and "longer lines run mostly to _____ stresses."
"Binding the whole together is a subtle pattern of _____."

5.B. What is meant by alliteration? If you do not know, you would need to use a dictionary. Use Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary on the special dictionary shelves or use Dictionary of Literary Terms by Harry Shaw, REF PN44.5 .S46, and give a short definition of alliteration.

6. The second paragraph on page 1495 explains some of Jeffers' symbols in the poem. Give the meanings for the following symbols:

ocean's violence _____
rock _____ flame _____
hawks _____

Some biographical sources give information about the relationship between an author's works and events in his life. The volumes of American Writers in the reference collection have long articles about writers' lives and works. (Use the call number on the previous page.)

7. Using the Supplements, find the article on Jeffers. (To find Jeffers, check the book spines for his name.) The article about Robinson Jeffers is in Supplement _____, part _____, pages _____ of this set.

8.A. On pages 416 and 417, excerpts from a poem show his grief over his wife's death. the title of the poem is _____.

8.B. Give two examples of alliteration in the lines from "Hungerfield" on pages 416 and 417:

9. In a late poem, Jeffers considers the possibility of man's self-extinction despite his present billions. What is the title of this poem?

There are several sets of reference books published regularly by Gale Research Company that deal with twentieth century authors and criticism. They are indexed, with some exceptions, in the volumes of Twentieth Century Literary Criticism. In a recent volume of TCLC, find the "Cumulative Author Index" near the back of the book and look for the listing about Robinson Jeffers. You would be especially interested in references with the codes "CA" (Contemporary Authors) and "CLC" (Contemporary Literary Criticism).

10. List **all** the volumes of CLC that have references about Jeffers? _____

Now find Volume 15 of CLC and the article in that volume about Jeffers. You will find articles by literary critics analyzing Jeffers' works.

11. The last complete paragraph on page 301 gives one critic's ideas about Jeffers' use of four "natural agents." Which one was the most often important?

12. In several poems, fire is used as a symbol of destruction. In these poems, families live in self-contained worlds in _____ and fires give the impression of _____. (Read the paragraph and fill in the blanks.)

13. Turn to page 300 and read the criticism by Babette Deutsch of the poem "Tamar." Is her opinion of Jeffers' poetry positive or negative? _____
Write one sentence that is an example of her opinion _____

In volume 54 of "CLC" find the long section about Jeffers. Notice that it has a biography as an introduction to the criticism.

14. On pages 249-251 is an article by Robert Ian Scott that originally appeared in the magazine The Humanist, January-February 1986. If you wanted to read the entire article, would you find the issue in Hartnell College Library? _____

Scott uses Jeffers' poetry in explaining major elements of poetry such as the use of symbols and omens. After detailed analysis, he includes both negative and positive opinions.

15. On page 251, second column, second paragraph, are some negative opinions. Write two negative comments. _____

Many other reference books help in the understanding of literary works or lead you to more information in magazines and circulating books.

Magazines and scholarly journals help add to literary criticism of all major authors. The print index, **Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature** and the database, **EBSCOhost** list articles in popular magazines. Use **EBSCOhost** on the computers near the Reference Desk and find articles about Jeffers that offer criticism and interpretation. Type in "Robinson Jeffers" in the "Find" bar. If you need assistance ask at the Reference Desk. Most of the instructions are on the computer screen.

16. How many articles are listed? _____
- a. Click on the article entitled "**Jeffers's Science.**" What is the first listed "Subject" of the article?

- b. Click on that "Subject." When you click on the subject, how many articles on Jeffers are you linked to? _____

17. Now we know Jeffers is still famous and articles are written about him even though he died several decades ago. EBSCOhost begins in the 1980's. How would you find articles written about him in the 1960's? _____

Humanities Index is the specialized index to articles in the fields of literature, philosophy, religion and history. Find Volume 2 covering the time period April 1975 to March 1976 on the index tables. Write down the following information from a citation listed in Volume 2 about Jeffers.

18. Title of article _____
Author _____
Magazine _____
Volume _____ Pages _____ Date of issue _____
Does Hartnell have this issue? _____

The online catalog leads you to books about Jeffers and his works. Do a **subject** search in the online catalog and find the titles of three books that would explain the meanings of his works.

19. Three titles:

Give the call number of one of the books _____

Book reviews, which are published in newspapers and magazines when a book is new, are often summaries of the plot or give general criticisms rather than a critical analysis of the book. However, knowledgeable critics' reviews can be useful for book reports or for some kinds of research. Book reviews are listed in Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature in a special section in the back of each

volume. Book Review Digest is an index to book reviews and includes excerpts from many reviews.

To use Book Review Digest, choose a volume for the year in which a book was published or use the cumulative indexes. These indexes list volumes of Jeffers' poetry and the years they were published. One volume of Jeffers' poetry was published posthumously and came out in 1963. Find Book Review Digest for 1963 and look up Jeffers.

20. The title of the book of poems is _____

21. The first review has statements about Jeffers as a poet relating to the wild natural scene. What is the reviewer's opinion in these statements?

22. The review comes from the magazine: _____

23. Date of the issue: _____

24. Total number of words in the review: _____

25. Does Hartnell College Library have this issue? _____

GaleNet Literature Databases:
Literature Resource Center and Scribner Writer Series

The **Literature Resource Center** (LRC) provides access to biographies, bibliographies, and critical analyses of authors from every age and literary discipline.

The foundation of the Literature Resource Center is built on the three databases: Contemporary Authors Online, Contemporary Literary Criticism Select, featuring entries on all authors appearing in Contemporary Literary Criticism since vol. 95 of the print series and complete profiles of 266 most studied authors from editions prior to vol. 95; and the Dictionary of Literary Biography Online.

The Literature Resource Center also includes selected full-text from other Gale publications such as 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, Poetry Criticism, Shakespearean Criticism, Short Story Criticism, and Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism.

As was stated earlier, when analyzing a work of fiction, it is sometimes helpful to get background information about the author.

In the online **LRC**, conduct an author search for the name **Robinson Jeffers**.

26. What literary movement and time period characterize his work?

Click on a link to a biography (profile of the author's life).

27. Where and when was Jeffers born? _____

28. Where and when did he die? _____

At the top of the screen, you will see tabs for different subtopics, click on the tab, **Literary Criticism, Articles & Work Overviews**. Next, click on the link to "**An overview of "Hurt Hawks"** by David Rothman.

29. Scroll down to the fifth paragraph and read it. In the critic's opinion, "Hurt Hawks" is an excellent introduction to all that is best in Jeffers such as (list three):

30. In the eighth paragraph of this essay, Rothman states that Robinson Jeffers felt that many of civilization's problems "grew out of a childish insistence considering ourselves to be..."

Do you have any comments or suggestions regarding this lesson? _____
