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## Review of The Undergraduate's Companion of Women Writers and Their Websites

Lesley Jorbin

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# Review of Hearing All the Voices: Multicultural Books for Adolescents

Lesley Jorbin

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Lesley Jorbin

**THE UNDERGRADUATE'S COMPANION TO WOMEN WRITERS AND  
THEIR WEBSITES**

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THE UNDERGRADUATE'S COMPANION TO WOMEN WRITERS AND THEIR WEBSITES. Katharine A. Dean, Miriam Conteh-Morgan and James K. Bracken. *Westport, CT. Libraries Unlimited, 2002.*

Literary research can be daunting to undergraduates. The authors of the present volume--librarians at Ohio State University--have produced a useful, concise guide to researching women writers and their works, which will serve as a starting point for students in navigating the Internet in conjunction with traditional reference sources. This is the second volume in Libraries Unlimited "Undergraduate Companion" series. The first was *The Undergraduate's Companion to American Writers and Their Web Sites*.

The present work covers 180 women writers in the literary canon, from the fourteenth century to the present, writing in English. This is admittedly an incomplete listing; of the 180 authors, for example, only 10 were born after 1950, making the work less useful for contemporary writers. The arrangement of entries is alphabetical beginning with "Abigail Adams" and ending with "Anzia Yezierska." The authors narrowed their choices through the application of definite selection criteria: authors must be represented by "at least one research-oriented web site" available freely on the Internet. Thus, websites accessible by subscription or licensing have been excluded from coverage (e.g. Brown University's excellent "Women Writer's Project" at <http://www.wwp.brown.edu/> is excluded). Additionally, the author must be featured in standard reference sources. Web sites devoted to each author are listed first, with critical annotations ranging from a few sentences to a paragraph. These are followed by highly selective listings of "Biographies and Criticism," and "Bibliographies." The more extensive entries, for major authors, also list "Dictionaries, Encyclopedias and Handbooks," "Indexes and Concordances," and "Journals." The majority of reference sources are given with little or no annotation. Sources from Gale Publishing are prominently featured. The number of books and

journals listed per author ranges from 2 (Anne Royall) to 27 ("The Brontes"). The number of web sites ranges from 1 (Louise Erdrich) to 7 (Cynthia Ozick), with an average of 2 or 3 for most authors.

Websites have been carefully evaluated, and may include biographical and critical information as well as electronic editions of texts. Extensive introductory sections entitled "Frequently Cited Web Sites," (pages 1-7) and "Frequently Cited References" (pages 9-17), give complete bibliographic information for titles repeatedly cited in the work, for multiple authors. The web sites include a variety of well established, important sites. Yet, some excellent ones have been omitted, e.g. "The Bluestocking Archive" <http://omega.cc.umb.edu/~fayeng/toc.html> at the University of Massachusetts (Boston), and the "African American Women Writers of the 19th Century" [http://digital.nypl.org/schomburg/writers\\_aa19/](http://digital.nypl.org/schomburg/writers_aa19/) (New York Public Library). For both print and reference sources, the authors have achieved some superb indexing of major reference compendiums and comprehensive websites. Thus, students researching Sarah Orne Jewett, for example, will be led to the appropriate entries in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Gale) and Lillian S. Robinson's *Modern Women Writers* (Continuum)--sources which might be overlooked by undergraduates untrained to locate information in general reference sources. They will also be directed to the "Domestic Goddesses" website, which includes Jewett and many other writers. This extensive content analysis makes the volume especially useful to undergraduates. However, in poor application of bibliographic practices, citations to reference sources are abbreviated in the main text: they are given without dates of publication, forcing the reader to flip backwards to the "frequently cited references." While this is explained in the introduction, it is nevertheless inconvenient for the reader, adding an unnecessary level of complexity to the research process.

Potential users are advised to read the "Introduction" very carefully; it explains not only the criteria used for selection of authors and reference sources, but the criteria for *exclusion*, as well. Library subscription databases are excluded from coverage; these will vary greatly from one library to the next. Readers are advised to explore the availability of resources in their own institutions for such essential databases as the *MLA International Bibliography* (Introduction, p. xi). Many libraries, including the authors' own Ohio State University, and members of the large OhioLINK system, have access to hundreds of full text electronic journals and editions of electronic books. No monograph can completely do justice to the vast amount of electronically available material, or keep pace with changing Internet links and new and evolving web sites. A one page section, "Strategies for Research" (Introduction, p. xii) based on guidelines from the Association of College and Research Libraries, gives further suggestions for research and evaluation of resources.

The question arises as to whether the entire project could not have been presented as a web site. The advantages of such an approach would include live connections to selected full text electronic journal articles and electronic books, e.g. the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* for which a library may purchase subscriptions.

In summary, the work is a highly useful starting point for undergraduates; it is concise, and easy to use overall, leading students to a broad variety of print, electronic, and Internet resources, and encouraging them to explore a multiplicity of sources. Its main advantage is its integration of both Internet sites and print sources in the research process. It cannot be considered a complete research guide to any of the authors listed. It is most useful for established authors in the literary canon, and less useful for contemporary writers, regional writers, and minority writers in the United States and worldwide. It should be used in

conjunction with library catalogs and resources at students' home institutions, and electronic indexes and other subscription databases available locally. The "Introduction" should be carefully read, and students should realize the selection of resources is, of necessity, incomplete.

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