

## Take a Behind-the-Scenes Look at Gale's Databases

Professor at Troy University, Kirk Curnutt, Shares His Passion for Literature

*Gale Literature* includes up-to-date biographical information on more than 160,000 authors, spanning from antiquity to present day. Working with Layman Poupard, our trusted publishing partner, enables us to draw on an incomparable network of experts, like Kirk Curnutt, professor and English department chair at Troy University.

Our partnership with renowned academics enables us to bring you the most authoritative and trusted databases available to meet the needs and standards of students, faculty, and librarians alike. We spoke with Kirk about his background, research interests, and what it's like to bring his passion to a worldwide audience through *Gale Literature*.



### KIRK CURNUTT

#### BIOGRAPHY:

Kirk Curnutt is professor and chair of English at Troy University in Troy, Alabama. He is the author of several studies on F. Scott Fitzgerald, Toni Morrison, Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, and other literary subjects. Kirk also serves as executive director of the F. Scott Fitzgerald Society and as managing editor of its annual *F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*.



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#### 1. How did you come to be a scholar in your chosen field?

I started my career in Montgomery, Alabama, which is Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald's hometown. The presence of the Fitzgeralds in the city, much of it curated by volunteers at the Scott & Zelda Fitzgerald Museum, resparked my interest in Fitzgerald studies—to the point where about 20 years in I became the executive director of the international Fitzgerald Society. Of course, I also had the benefit of apprenticing under some amazing mentors in American literature. They encouraged my fascination with modernism, genre studies like the American short story, and popular culture.

#### 2. For whom do you design your entries, and why do you target this particular audience?

I aim for the same audience I teach my students to write for: the general reader. That may be a student, whether high school or undergraduate, but it could easily be a colleague who knows a little about the subject but needs an introductory overview. My own feeling is that many professionals appreciate a resource that can get them up to speed in content and context quickly.



“I still teach from the DLBs [*Dictionary of Literary Biography*] on Fitzgerald and *The Great Gatsby* just because they include so many wonderful excerpts from essential criticism and hard-to-find images.”

### 3. Which entry are you most proud of? What makes it stand out?

I have to say my favorite is probably the entry on John Dickson Carr I oversaw. He was so prolific in his prime but somewhat forgotten today—he’s not as well remembered, that is, as G. K. Chesterton or Ellery Queen. He’s probably best remembered as a practitioner of the “locked-room” mystery, which is sometimes disregarded as a gimmick. I like that we were able to corral what scattered criticism on Carr’s work exists and boil down the essentials.

### 4. What needs does your work address to help further scholarship or learning?

I see these resources as a more in-depth introduction than you might find in a study guide or in an online reference guide. They provide much more breadth and depth than an encyclopedia entry. If a scholar of whatever rank wants the scoop on Ross Macdonald to start a project, or if a student needs to understand a topic like the short story in the 1920s, they can pull up these entries and find a solid footing in a subject’s cultural footprint, whether composition history, reviewers’ initial reception, or subsequent critical reactions. Many of my colleagues use these resources for class prep.

### 5. How do you see your work impacting researchers, or teachers?

I think the entries provide the foundation necessary for all of these audiences to plan their own deep dives into the subject matter. Ideally, they encourage audiences to seek out the primary sources related to the author or genre that aren’t the ones they’re researching. I also think these resources help us appreciate the necessity of bibliography, which is an underappreciated art.



“I think the structure of the resource helps readers compartmentalize information by organizing it for quick but thorough reference.”

### 6. What are the most important topics you’ve covered? Why are these topics important? Or why are these entries so important?

Obviously, for me personally, modernism and the short story are essential. But I’m also very proud of having contributed to mystery and to popular music, both of which are subjects I teach. I’m very proud of having helped out on the Rex Stout, Macdonald, and Carr entries, as well as those for Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie. All of these entries demonstrate the connections between the literary arts and either popular genres (like the detective novel) or other art forms (like folk music).

### 7. What fields of study would you recommend the use of *Gale Literature* for?

There will always be a demand for secondary sources to assist in the study of canonical works—certain texts will always be fixtures of syllabi that folks who aren’t yet “experts” in the subject matter need help appreciating. So I think anybody interested in American literature, my own field, can basically learn the entire history and development of the field through *Gale Literature*. But I also like that we address subjects considered “popular” culture.

### 8. How is this different than other products covering the same subject areas?

*Gale Literature* resources are notable for their ease of use. There’s a definite structure to these entries, offering composition history, critical interpretation, and legacy or critical reception. So I think the structure of the resource helps readers compartmentalize information by organizing it for quick but thorough reference.

### 9. Tell us a bit about some of your favorite authors, works, or topics featured in *Gale Literature*.

I was an undergrad and then a grad student in the pre-internet days, when mammoth DLB [*Dictionary of Literary Biography*] volumes were like freighters floating in oceans of space in library reference rooms. I used to love to pull them off the shelf and just read. That was my education. It was almost as if you had the whole Biography channel at your fingertips, except you were reading instead of watching television, which is much healthier! I still teach from the DLBs on Fitzgerald and *The Great Gatsby* just because they include so many wonderful excerpts from essential criticism and hard-to-find images.

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