



7-16-2019

Significant Literary Characters Identified in New Faculty Book

Samira Kassem
Illinois Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news>

Recommended Citation

Kassem, Samira, "Significant Literary Characters Identified in New Faculty Book" (2019).
News and Events. 3904.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/3904>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

Significant Literary Characters Identified in New Faculty Book

July 16, 2019

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Some of the most impactful figures in fiction are identified in a new book, *The 100 Greatest Literary Characters*, written by R. Forrest Colwell Chair of English at Illinois Wesleyan University James Plath, along with co-authors Gail Sinclair and Kirk Curnutt.

Released on Monday, July 15, *The 100 Greatest Literary Characters* profiles the likes of Huckleberry Finn, Anna Karenina, Harry Potter and Hester Prynne, with a focus on how these significant characters from fiction help readers comprehend history, culture, politics, and even their own place in today's world.

A former Fulbright Scholar and the [author of many books](#), Plath is president of the John Updike Society, an active member in the Fitzgerald Society, Contemporary American Literature series editor for Rowman & Littlefield, faculty advisor for *The Argus* student newspaper, an active member of the Online Film Critics Society and former president of the Illinois College Press Association. All that, plus two years of chemotherapy couldn't stop Plath from working on his newest publication.

"I initially signed on to do the book by myself, but it was a gargantuan task rendered impossible when I got lymphoma and had to spend two years doing chemo," Plath said. "At that point, I didn't want to lose the project, because I was emotionally invested in it, so at a literature conference, I asked two colleagues I've known for many years through the Hemingway and Fitzgerald societies — Gail Sinclair and Kirk Curnutt — if they'd be willing to come onboard."

Sinclair is scholar-in-residence and executive director of the Winter Park Institute at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, and Curnutt is the chair and professor of English at Troy University in Troy, Alabama.

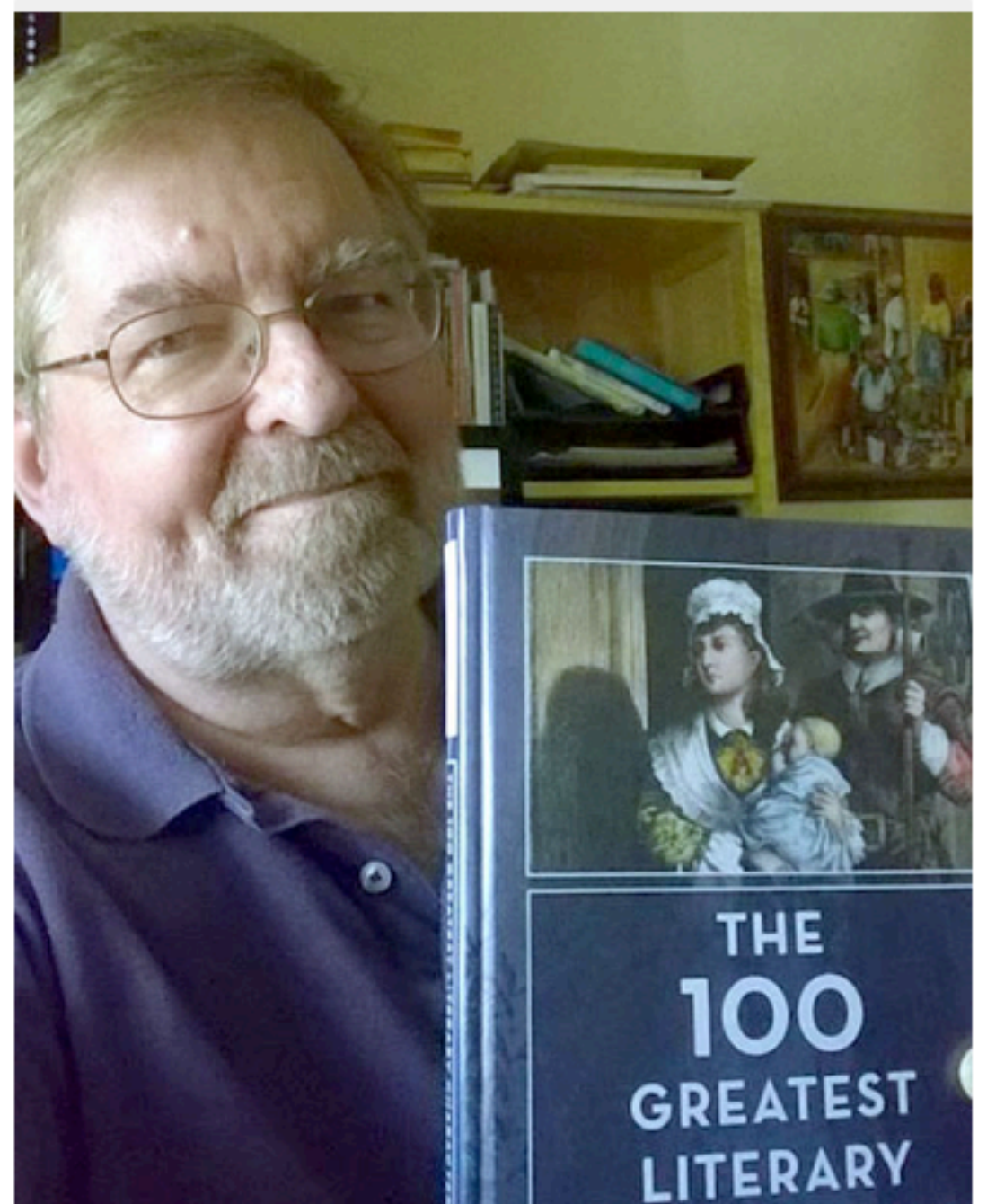
"Writing 33 or 34 character entries seemed more manageable than writing 100," Plath continued. "Happily they agreed, and at a Fitzgerald conference we met for a time to go over all of our notes."

The 288-page book features characters ranging from Aladdin to Jay Gatsby to Katniss Everdeen. The book illustrates how these characters can create and reinforce popular culture and inform us about society and ourselves.

Plath and his co-authors considered literary and popular fiction, making selections from classic and contemporary novels as well as children's literature. They drew some inspiration from Suzanne Keen, author of *Empathy and the Novel*, who said "Fictional characters can become mental companions to last a lifetime, and relationships across generations can be built around affection for a character or a fictional world." Not all of the featured characters are heroic, or even likeable, but each was selected because of their unforgettable impact on literature, society and popular culture.

"But let's be clear," Plath said. "These are our 100 greatest fictional characters, and we understand perfectly well that readers will agree with some of our choices and question others. That's okay. After all, isn't it part of the nature and the fun of such lists? That's one reason why we decided to include not just the usual suspects but also lesser-known characters that are so psychologically complex or richly drawn that they deserve to be in a volume such as this."

The 100 Greatest Literary Characters is available now on [Amazon](#) in Kindle and hardcover formats.



"But let's be clear," Plath said. "These are our 100 greatest fictional characters, and we understand perfectly well that readers will agree with some of our choices and question others. That's okay. After all, isn't it part of the nature and the fun of such lists?"