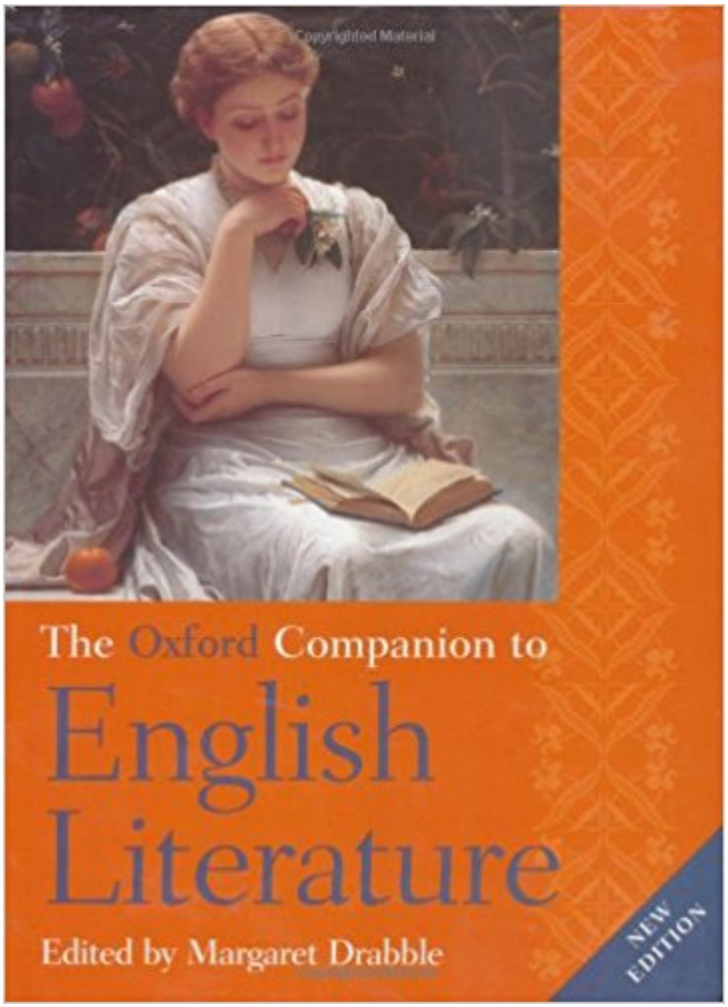
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The Oxford Companion To English Literature



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Synopsis

When the Fifth Edition of The Oxford Companion to English Literature appeared in 1985, it received a glowing front-page review in The New York Times Book Review, which praised it as "a wonderful, infuriating, amusing, and informative war horse of a book." Now comes the new Sixth Edition, thoroughly updated and greatly expanded by editor Margaret Drabble and a team of 140 distinguished contributors, who include Salmon Rushdie, Brian Aldiss, Penelope Fitzgerald, Ian Buruma, and Michael Holroyd. Readers will find over 660 new entries, over a third of which were written by Drabble herself, including hundreds of new biographies (from Kathy Acker to Stefan Zweig) as well as new entries on genres, literary terms, critical schools, and much more. In total, the new edition offers over 7,000 alphabetically arranged entries, providing incomparable coverage of the classical works of English literature, and of European authors and works that have influenced the development of English literature. Its wide range of articles cover not only authors and their works, but also fictional characters, plot summaries, composers and artists, literary and artistic movements, historians, philosophers, and critics, as well as publishing history, literary societies, newspapers and periodicals, critical terms and theory. In addition, there are sixteen new feature essays covering everything from gay and lesbian literature to modernism and science fiction, plus a thousand-year chronology that sets key literary works in their historical context, and complete lists of poet laureates and literary prize winners. Boasting a lightness of touch that makes the book a pleasure to read, the Sixth Edition is an indispensable volume for students, for teachers, and for everyone interested in English literature.

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Customer Reviews

Grade 8 UpÃ¢â ¬â •This revision of the sixth edition adds material but not pages. The chronology, awards lists, and entries include works published through 2005, but entries from the previous edition have not been revised; the last case of Internet censorship cited is from 1999. Of the 16 two-page essays on various genres, only 2 have been given slight alterations ("Children's Literature" has lost its condescending conclusion). This edition contains more information on female and ethnically diverse writers. There are some omissions; for example, Alan Furst is left out of the "Spy Fiction" essay, and Martin McDonagh (The Beauty Queen of Leenane) earns only one sentence, in "Irish playwrights, new." "Gay and lesbian literature," which is no longer a separate essay, fails to mention several significant works, though they are treated elsewhere. Altogether absent from the book are authors such as W. G. Sebald, David Mitchell, and Ismail Kadare. Some choices are puzzling: Denise Levertov has twice Richard Wilbur's space; readers are told how to pronounce "Carew," but not "Bewick" (or Coetzee, Milosz, etc.). Flashes of wit-on "horror": "for every King there are a dozen or more knaves"-and verve ("Lads' literature"), leaven the learning. This is still the title to heft if you need elegant plot summaries, or help with anaphora, isocolon, and their ilk. However, for most purposes the previous edition still suffices.Ã¢â ¬â •Patricia D. Lothrop, St. George's School, Newport, RI Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A staple in reference collections since it first appeared in 1932, The Oxford Companion to English Literature (OCEL) only improves with age. The eminent British writer Drabble assumed the editorship of this venerable work with the fifth edition, published in 1985, and she oversaw its two revisions, the first in 1995 and the second in 1998. Of the more than 7,000 entries in this sixth edition, approximately 660 are new. Many other entries have been revised and updated, while a sizable number (among them Cable, George Washington, Infernal Marriage, Mrs. Norris, Risorgimento, and Will's Coffee House) have been dropped. Approximately one-third of the new entries were authored by Drabble, and the others were contributed by a team of more than 140 noted writers and scholars (who are identified near the beginning of the volume); however, all entries remain unsigned.During her tenure as editor, Drabble has dropped the policy of excluding

authors born since 1939, thus opening the door to broader coverage of contemporary writers. For example, new to this edition are entries for Pat Barker, Jim Crace, Roddy Doyle, Brian Friel, and Vikram Seth. Also appearing for the first time are a number of significant twentieth-century women authors who had previously been overlooked, including Zora Neale Hurston, Elizabeth Jolley, Angela Thirkell, and Eudora Welty. Among other new articles are Censorship, Gay and lesbian literature, Intertextuality, and New historicism. In addition, the volume includes 16 two-page survey articles, most of which provide historical overviews of particular genres and movements, for example, "Biography," "Gothic Fiction," and "Romanticism." Although 14 of these articles are essentially the same as when they were first introduced in the 1998 revision, "Metre" is a completely new essay, and "Structuralism and Post-Structuralism" replaces the earlier essay that focused only on structuralism. Following the dictionary portion of the work are a chronological chart, a list of British poets laureate, and lists of winners of four major literary prizes.Drabble is to be commended for the breath of fresh air that she continues to infuse into this compendium. It is obvious that she has made a concerted effort to represent more women and minorities and to reflect the ways in which literary criticism and publishing are changing. Unfortunately, however, some entries have escaped needed updating. For instance, the article on The Oxford English Dictionary does not mention the three-volume supplement to the second edition or the availability of the online version. Moreover, the chronology does not include any literary works published after 1998. Among a number of contemporary authors whose omissions are surprising are Nicola Barker, Thomas Kinsella, and Tim Winton. Furthermore, J. K. Rowling, author of the phenomenally successful Harry Potter books, is not accorded an entry, nor is she mentioned in the survey articles on children’s literature and fantasy fiction.These quibbles aside, the OCEL continues to be a valuable, reliable, and readable guide to the entire spectrum of English literature from its beginnings through the twentieth century. In light of its substantial number of new entries and revisions, most high-school, public, and academic libraries will want to purchase this new edition, even if they acquired the 1998 revision to the fifth edition. RBBCopyright Ã Â© American Library Association. All rights reserved

I teach English literature, so this book is invaluable to me, but also for anyone who watches movies based on nineteenth-century. Want to know characters and plot of such novels? This will give you enough information to distinguish Bingley from Darcy, or why Emma is such an idiot. If you want to know more, this has plot summaries of major works from Beowulf to the time the book was written. She has updated (usually) entries from previous editions and given much more information about women authors. Also included is major American writers. Everything is clearly written with

occasional flair. I recommend this highly. Get the hardback; it will take wear and tear better and look good on your shelf.

It’s hard to answer questions about fiction when what you’ve got is a reference book :) This edition is somewhat outdated but still useful for quick reference, about on the level of wiki.

As a Scottish-American, I must take exception to the very title of this mammoth work, as it should have been titled ’The Oxford Companion to British Literature’ seeing as how it deals with Scottish, Irish and Welsh writers as well as English ones. Scotland is not part of England! Furthermore, what possessed Drabble to greatly expand the bulk of an already bulky book with so many articles on foreign writers? So what if they "had an influence" on British writers? At least she got it right by including an article on Neil Miller Gunn, an often overlooked Scottish writer. But there are a number of worthy authors who get no article at all, such as Eric Eddison, David Lindsay (the novelist), E. H. Visiak, Richard Middleton, M P. Shiel, etc. She did include John Meade Falkner and Howard Overing Sturgis, however, and Eddison is mentioned in the Fantasy article.

The first ’Oxford Companion to English Literature’ was published in 1932 under the editorial direction of Sir Paul Harvey (no relation the American radio commentator). Half a century and five editions later, this is still a standard, authoritative reference work necessary for scholars and interested non-experts alike.Under the editorship of Margaret Drabble, author and biographer (known for ’The Witch of Exmoor’ and the more recently published ’The Peppered Moth’), this volume remains faithful to Harvey’s intention of placing English literature in its widest possible context while exploring the deep classical and continental connections that underpin much of the history.How can literature be divorced from cultural context? Surely it cannot be -- hence the newest entries into the edition include topics that read as if they were taken from today’s best-seller shelf:- Anglo-Indian Literature- Simon Armitage- Kate Atkinson- Louis de Bernieres- Censorship- Ben Elton- Gay and lesbian literature- Hypertext- A. L. Kennedy- Lad’s literature- Literature of science- New Criticism- New Irish Playwrights- Carol Shields- Travel writingThis sample listing of the latest entries is representative of the more established categories, in that the entries (encyclopedic in character) include Authors, Subjects, Titles, Events, Characters and Critical Theory. The entries are unsigned (an ever-controversial practice in reference works such as this) -- well over a hundred contributors assisted in this volume, including the likes of Matthew Sweet, Salman Rushdie, Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, Katherine Duncan-Jones, and Brian Vickers.This volume serves the

general reader well in that one may follow cross-reference trails through the text. Take, for instance, Aaron the Moor -- the reader will be directed to Titus Andronicus, to which one is directed to Shakespeare, and from there a host of other cross-references historical and modern. Under the entry of Gabriel Josipovici, one is led back the entries of Rabelais and Bellow, influences as well as objects of Josipovici's study.The appendices are new features of this edition. The first appendix is a Chronology that lists the chronology of the production of English literature from c.1000 to 1999 side by side with major historical events in Britain and beyond, and the significant events in the lives of literary figures. Appendix 2 lists the Poets Laureate in chronological order, from 1619 (when the office unofficially began) to the present -- surprisingly, there have only been 21 (19 official). Appendix 3 lists major literary award winners: Nobel Prize, Pulitzer Prize, Library Association Carnegie Medalists, and Booker-McConnell Prize for Fiction. Obviously not all of these are British authors, but it helps to place British literature in the wider world context of the twentieth century (as all of these prizes are twentieth-century creations).In addition to the encyclopedic entries, there are major essays scattered through the text. These include the following topics:- Biography- Black British Literature- Children's Literature- Detective Fiction- Fantasy Fiction- Ghost Stories- Gothic Fiction- Historical Fiction- Metre- Modernism- Post-Colonial Literature- Romanticism- Science Fiction- Spy Fiction- Structuralism and Post-StructuralismThese essays include history and current development of the genre or topic, as well as bibliographic information for further research, which (regrettably) the smaller encyclopedic entries rarely have.This is a terrific, one-volume reference that should serve well anyone with a need for quick and ready reference material. It should find a welcome home on the shelf of any avid reader, fan of literature and modern fiction, history, religion, or any devoted Anglophile.

Disliking an Oxford Press book makes me feel like a heretic. The majority of their Companion books are superb, remarkably concise yet thorough works of scholarship. The English Companion is an unfortunate and surprising exception.The entry for 'New Criticism' is an efficient example of the book's shortcomings. For one thing, there's a laundry list of authors, dates, and books but very little is said of the IDEAS that characterize New Criticism. The entries are generally hamstringed by a focus on the sociopolitical and historical aspects of writers and works. The effort is laudable but inappropriate and uneconomical for a reference work. In its most extreme form, the historical emphasis goes into bizarre detail about an author's upbringing -- is it really necessary that we know where an author went to grade school and when? Entries love to entertain tales of writers' deaths and and of their insignificant travellings. I often felt as though I were reading minibiographies.One

will also notice, in the case of 'New Criticism', the absence of any mention of the 'organic'. This is ridiculous and indicative of the book's lack of attention to concepts as such. There is a non-cross-referenced mention of 'organic' under Coleridge, yet even there it is only mentioned as one of his ideas, not in terms of what the theory tried to say. I would compare it to someone's asking, 'What does X mean?' This book's reply: 'X was one of so-and-so's ideas'. Too often, the response ends there. Literary theory entries are usually on the thin side, though the deconstruction essay is solid. However, even in the longest lit theory essays there is more of an emphasis on people and movements -- far less on ideas.Along with the lack of depth (or conceptual emphasis), there's little sense of the overall significance of ideas, works or characters (ironic given the attempts at a social-historical approach): Caliban is mentioned in the Tempest entry, and even gets his own paragraph elsewhere, but there's nothing about his character as it's been re-elaborated and re-invented by a long tradition of English writers (Auden, Browning, Joyce, and Wilde for starters). There's nothing about Caliban's portrayal in that tradition, nor mention of Caliban's mirror, etc. Under 'hubris' (which is found, in turn, under a terse account of 'the Poetics'), there's nothing about Icarus, nor is there anything about hubris as a specific theme in so many works.Speaking of hubris, it's baffling to me that Drabble's entry is longer than either Hill's or Heaney's. The general editor would have been better off focusing more of her energy on other writers: that expansive babbling space could have been put to stronger use had a more thorough background been given on either of those poets, among others.Readers seeking to understand why an author alludes in his work to a character or poet will be little helped by nebulous terms like 'icily poised' or 'sensuously textured', which are more suggestive of gastronomic, rather than literary, criticism. To my mind a reference's primary function should be to offer a quick source of the 'essentials' of a book or of a writer's ideas, an understanding of which would illuminate one's reading of the alluding work. While I appreciate that entries shy away from 'this or that' critiques or strict (canonical) interpretations, giving lists of facts does an injustice to the works themselves and to the way these works have been interpreted by others. (Believe it or not, people CAN come to their own conclusions even after being introduced to an opinion.)The book's scope is appropriate to literature, as literature tends to allude to so many disparate disciplines. But if one were truly trying to give an encyclopedic account of literature, the book would have to be much bigger. In this case, specialization suffers. I would have preferred a much more focused account of 'literature' as such; I'd then supplement this with other references focused, for example, on English history. One gets the sense that too many entries end up attenuated in this book.On the positive side the plot summaries are strong and more nuanced, though many entries are badly written (full of odd, obscuring, convoluted syntax). Again, good

editorship would have recognized this.The book primarily succeeds as an enervated survey. Nevertheless, readers will occasionally happen upon some interesting, well-summarized topics.I'm going to check out the Cambridgean counterpart to the Oxford Companion, and I'm hoping it will give a more in-depth account of ideas and themes. The other Oxford Companions are, however, truly amazing works and deserve a close look.

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