

The Oxford Companion to English Literature

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The first edition of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, edited by Sir Paul Harvey, was published in 1932, and quickly established itself as the standard source of reference for scholars, students, and general readers alike. In 1985, under the editorship of Margaret Drabble, the text was thoroughly and sensitively revised to bring it up to date.

The sixth edition, published in 2000, was extensively revised, expanded, and updated. Almost 600 new entries covered new writers, genres, and issues, and existing entries were reworked to incorporate the latest scholarship. In addition to the extensive coverage of writers, works, literary theory, allusions, and characters, there are sixteen featured entries on key topics including black British literature, fantasy fiction, and modernism. The *Companion* remains an unrivaled work that places English literature in its widest context: no other book offers such extensive exploration of the classical roots of English literature, and the European and non-European works and writers that have influenced its development.

The sixth edition has now been revised to ensure that it remains absolutely up to date: the invaluable appendices - the chronology, and lists of winners of major literary awards - have been updated, as have many of the entries. Informed by the latest scholarly thinking, and comprehensively cross-referenced to guide the reader to topics of related interest, the *Companion* retains its position as the best guide to English literature available.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal
Grade 8 Up—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.—*Patricia D. Lothrop, St. George's School, Newport, RI*
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From Booklist
A familiar reference work undergoes some fine-tuning and updating in this revision. Thousands of alphabetically arranged entries cover authors, literary terms, works of literature, literary characters, and more in densely packed, double-columned pages. Among the concise entries are more than a dozen two-page survey articles addressing such topics as literary genres (e.g., "Ghost Stories," "Historical Fiction," "Romantic Fiction") and movements ("Modernism," "Structuralism and Post-structuralism"). Three appendixes complete the work: a chronology of principal literary works, a list of British poets laureate, and a list of literary award winners, including the Nobel Prize for Literature, the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, the Carnegie Medal, and the Man Booker Prize.

When RBB reviewed the sixth edition in 2001, several slight criticisms were registered: the omission of a number of contemporary authors (Nicola Barker, Thomas Kinsella, and Tim Winton) was noted; the article on *The Oxford English Dictionary* did not talk about the availability of an online version or the three-volume supplement to the second edition; J. K. Rowling was not included either in an entry or in the survey articles about fantasy fiction and children's literature; the chronology did not mention any literary works published after 1998. This revised edition improves upon only some of these points: Barker, Kinsella, and Winton are still left out; the article on the *OED* is still in need of revision; J. K. Rowling is at least mentioned in the survey article "Children's Literature" (as is Philip Pullman, but neither he nor Rowling rate their own entries). On the other hand, the chronology as well as the lists of literary award winners have been brought up to date and mention literary works published through 2005.

As noted in 2001, despite its slight imperfections, *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* continues to serve as a reliable handbook and general guide. Although large reference collections may want to acquire and even retain every edition and revision, smaller collections may want to postpone purchase until the seventh edition arrives. *Carolyn Mulac*
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Review
`Always good company' Ian Sansom, Guardian

`No guide could come more classic than The Oxford Companion to English Literature ... the literary reference source of first resort ... indispensable ... . Contemporary international writing is excellently covered ... excellent chronology' Malcolm Bradbury, The Times

`Everybody with an interest in English literature will want to own it' David Sexton, Evening Standard

`Remains irresistible' Sue Gaisford, Harpers and Queen

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