

An English Library

SIXTH EDITION

Edited by

NIGEL FARROW

BRIAN LAST

VERNON PRATT

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PUBLISHED IN ASSOCIATION
WITH BOOK TRUST

Gower

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INTRODUCTION

An English Library is for everyone who likes reading books. It has been compiled with one objective: to identify the books from the classical and modern heritage that will extend your enjoyment of reading. Over 2500 titles have been selected by a group of some 20 men and women who write, teach or publish books for a living but read them for enjoyment. If a book is listed in these pages it is because it has given an experienced reader real pleasure, not because it fits a particular critical theory of literary excellence.

An English Library should be used in the same spirit. If reading a recommended work is not proving to be a rewarding experience, do not persist with it. Perhaps its selection or its assessment was ill-judged, or perhaps you have a 'blind spot' for this type of book. Reading is not a competition; challenge yourself but do not waste valuable time reading without enjoyment. On the other hand, no book which is generally accepted as a great work should be written off by a disappointed reader for all time. One of the joys of literature is that personal taste changes both under the influence of reading and through the experience of life itself. It is one of the purposes of *An English Library* to be ready with a word of explanation or

encouragement about a book which has been abandoned in the past and to which the reader now feels like returning.

HISTORY

The origin of *An English Library* lies in two contrasting effects of the Second World War. The bombing of London destroyed publishers' stocks of books and paper just when the demand for books increased. As the public had little idea what was available, the National Book Council invited F Seymour Smith in 1941 to compile a forty-page booklet entitled *The English Classics*. Its success prompted the first edition of *An English Library* in 1943, a greatly expanded work, aimed at librarians, booksellers, students and book buyers. Up to 1963, five editions of *An English Library* were compiled by F Seymour Smith and published in association with the National Book League, the successor to the National Book Council. This edition is published in association with the National Book League's successor, the Book Trust.

NEW FEATURES IN THIS EDITION

An English Library is built around its representation of the English classics. Previous editions excluded writers who were alive at the time of publication and

INTRODUCTION

only included nineteenth century classics from the literature of the United States of America. Children's literature was included but only if the books were classics which continued to be read throughout adult life.

This new, sixth edition appears more than 25 years after the last one. It remains true to the spirit of the original work but a number of changes in the scope and treatment of the entries have been made in order to serve the needs of a reader in the last decade of the twentieth century. As in previous editions, the coverage is based on the humanities subjects. It is these creative disciplines that most readers turn to in their hours of leisure.

Certain sections are entirely new: *Children's Literature*, *World Literature in English*, *The Bible* and *Fine Arts*. *Children's Literature* has been included in order to acknowledge both the volume and quality of literature for children that is now available. In this section specific editions of the texts are recommended where appropriate, so as to guide readers — or parents of readers — to the version which may be most suitable for a young reader. The presence and excellence of illustrations has particularly influenced the choice of edition. Another completely new section appears under the heading *World Literature in English* and includes some of the writing from beyond the UK and the USA which has clearly developed our understanding of the capabilities of the English language as well as widening our cultural heritage.

American Fiction is presented as a separate and substantial unit within the *Fiction* section. The previous edition accepted nineteenth century Americans that were 'part of the main traditional streams of English writing'. The same criterion now clearly admits such

'universal' twentieth century American writers as Scott Fitzgerald, Hemmingway, Faulkner, Salinger, Bellow and Heller. A section on *The Bible* has been added. To read much of classical English Literature and history without a knowledge of the content and language of the Bible in English is to read through a glass darkly.

The ban in previous editions on living authors has been lifted. Writers, like the rest of the population, are living longer and today many great names live to see their works become classics. However, two specific pieces of information provided in previous editions have been omitted: price and edition. Stable prices are as much a thing of the past as the three-decker novel, although the growth of paperback publishing in the last 25 years has made much good literature available at a reasonable cost. Indeed the 'paperback revolution' is one reason why specific editions are no longer cited. There are too many editions available of the major classics, such as Dickens and Shakespeare, to list all of them and choosing the 'right' edition is a personal choice that depends on your taste, budget, and reason for reading the particular work.

In certain sections, notably *History* and *Biography*, the texts cited may be out of print. These are included because of the perennial nature of their content and authority and because they will be available from a good library. Alternatively, a second-hand copy can be purchased both as a joy and often as a good investment.

ARRANGEMENT OF ENTRIES

Each section has a short introduction which discusses the range of literature that is included in the list and the principles used in the selection of

individual titles. The entries are arranged alphabetically by author. The author's selected titles are then given with their date of first publication, so that the reader can place the texts in their historical context. In the *Reference* section, the title of the text only is given since such works are often collective efforts.

Every entry is annotated with a brief comment which is designed to indicate why the book is well regarded. Where appropriate to the content of the book, the comment highlights those aspects of the work which may attract new readers.

The arrangement by author is for convenience of use: the objective of the selection and annotation is to focus attention on individual books rather than their authors. There are several good reference books which give details of author's lives and works (see the *Reference* section). For those searching for a particular book there is a title index which lists all the books in *An English Library* alphabetically by their title. There is also an author index which is of particular use when checking whether there are books by the same author listed in other sections.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The books which appear in this edition of *An English Library* have been selected by a process of consultation within the group of contributors and editors, as well as individual suggestions from a larger number of people. The introductions and annotations were largely written by the sections' compilers, with additions and amendments made by the editors in order to achieve a general consistency in the treatment of the works described. This edition of *An English Library* is therefore very much a collective work.

All the contributors are named in the

list which follows this introduction and I thank them for their patient work which was done largely for the love of their particular subjects. The editorial work was divided between three of us: Vernon Pratt assembled and organised the contributors to many of the sections, and Brian Last undertook much of the text editing as well as making a substantial contribution to the annotations. I enjoyed selecting and annotating many of the entries, especially in the *Fiction* and related sections, and taking overall editorial responsibility for this edition.

In the early planning stage of this edition we benefited from advice from a number of distinguished writers and commentators who are closely associated with the work of the Book Trust. Martyn Goff, Margaret Drabble, Michael Holroyd, Richard Hoggart, Martin Seymour Smith and Peter Stockham were among those who made helpful comments on the structure of the edition and the criteria for selection of entries.

Andrea Spurling undertook much of the research work in the early stages of preparing this edition. I am also grateful to Lesley Brown who entered the text into a computerised database so the editors could make repeated revisions and updates.

The final acknowledgement must go to F Seymour Smith who developed the original concept of *An English Library* and compiled the first five editions. In his introduction to the first edition Edward Blunden hailed it as 'a masterly list of standard reading'. Today we are less certain about the existence of absolute standards in literature or in life. But the editors and contributors to this edition have tried to carry on F Seymour Smith's commitment to persuading people to read and to read well.

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FICTION

This section is concerned with fiction in the form of the novel or the short story. Other sections of *An English Library* embrace works which contain large elements of fiction: drama, poetry, essays and even (or especially) autobiography. Conversely, the story or characters in a novel do not have to be pure invention in order to qualify as fiction. The entertaining guide *The Originals: Who's Really Who in Fiction* illustrates the extent to which novelists draw from life, or are drawn into their own fiction, as in the 'faction' novels of Norman Mailer and Truman Capote.

The short stories included in this list are mostly in the form of recommended collections by individual writers. The titles of some specific stories are given where these are generally recognized as outstanding examples of the author's work. There is a view that in classic short story writing English fiction cannot compete with French or Russian fiction. However, the modern English team has probably had the better of the match in the twentieth century when the emigrés (James and Conrad) and the Americans (Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald, Malamud and Updike) are included.

English fiction means fiction in English. As the novel was born after the Act of Union and before Irish Home Rule it grew up within one political boundary as well as one linguistic tradition, and the works of writers from all four countries of the British Isles have been included in this section. The special relationship between English and American fiction is recognized by providing a listing in a sub-section entitled 'Some American Fiction'. It is not a comprehensive survey of American works but a selection of those which are studied and enjoyed by readers in Britain and elsewhere as frequently as home-grown fiction.

A rapidly growing body of fiction in English is written by those who are neither British nor American. Their works are presented in a separate section, *World Literature in English*. In this section can be found the works of such major authors as Patrick White and Chinua Achebe.

Another issue of selection has been the publication date for works which are eligible for inclusion. There needs to be some distance between the immediate reputation of works by new authors and their acceptance as part of an established body of English fiction. A clear line would be to exclude the works of living authors, but in an age when, happily, novelists like the rest of the population are living longer such a rule would exclude a large number of modern classics. Another clear cut approach would be to set a specific date, say 1960 or 1970, by when a work had to be published

in order to be eligible. This would severely limit the usefulness of the list for those whose enjoyment of fiction is based on exploring the works of particular authors. A cut off at a specific date of publication would preclude the listing of recent and possibly superior works by authors who were well established as modern masters before that date. For instance, a line drawn at 1960 would remove the last volume of Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy. Iris Murdoch, Angus Wilson and Anthony Burgess would only be represented by their earliest works.

For these reasons the selection has been made from the works of authors who had achieved their first publication by 1980; this allows the list to include relatively recent novels by established authors and thereby reflect their mature achievements. Inevitably a wobbly boundary line is drawn through the work of contemporary fiction, with a few authors excluded even though their works are as meritorious as those of contemporaries who achieved their first publication a year or two earlier.

The great majority of fiction of the past and the present takes the form of popular novels written in a particular genre: the murder mystery, the thriller or spy-novel, the historical romance, science fiction, or the mass-market bodice-rippers and pulp westerns. There is much craft and enjoyment to be found in genre fiction, although much of it is written with the sole aim of amusing the reader for as long as it takes to turn the pages. Such works have only been included in this list if, as well as belonging to a particular genre, they have gained a literary status. However, a few writers and their works are listed as sign posts towards the large, popular genres which lie outside the boundaries of this list: Agatha Christie points to the many skilled authors of who-dunnits and Elmore Leonard is a distinguished representative of the hard-boiled crime novel, while John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* is the sole example of a specialist form of imaginative writing. Reference books, such as *Now Read On* and the *Bloomsbury Good Reading Guide* (see the *Reference* section) will provide a path to and through the works of some of the best writers of contemporary popular genre fiction.

The largest single genre today is children's fiction. More and more children's books have been published over the last thirty years as it has become possible to issue both classics and new works in well designed and colourfully illustrated editions at popular prices. This literature is considered separately in the *Children's Literature* section. A few of these works appear in this section because they are also read as adult fiction: the best example being the enjoyable but disturbing adventures of Alice.

Some genres and sources of fiction may not be as well represented in this list as their supporters might wish, for limitations of choice rather than reasons of literary merit. The predominant experience of life reflected in the English novel of the last two hundred and fifty years is that of the middle class male. Although some of the greatest fiction in this list was written by women more than a hundred years before the 1980 cut-off date, it has taken the intervening century for a consciously feminist fiction to be established. Some of this work has been published too recently to be eligible for consideration, but the reprinting by publishers such as Virago of earlier twentieth century novels has ensured that writers like Rebecca West, F Tennyson Jesse or Jean Rhys are not overlooked.

The apparent class bias in the source and subject of fictional writing is more difficult to correct: the genuine working class novel is a rare item. The themes of

1950s novels like Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* or Keith Waterhouse's *Billy Liar* have more recently been developed in drama, especially for television, or in the lyrics of John Lennon than in contemporary novels. The following generation of potential working class heroes went to university and wrote the campus novel and the novel about the novel.

It is only possible to select from what is available and only right to choose those works that are considered to have lasting merit. What distinguishes the authors of such works from the writers of popular genre fiction is not the treatment of socially significant subjects or the making of fine moral judgements, but the intensity and richness of their imagination. In the best works this imagination is communicated through a high degree of literary skill to a general, continuing readership.

Brian ALDISS (1925-)*Non-Stop* 1958

Aldiss has done more than most to make science-fiction respectable – although he is also a good 'straight' novelist, as in *Hand Reared Boy* or the later *Life in the West*. In this early novel, a space-ship inhabited by the degenerate descendants of its crew, and choked by flourishing vegetation, is the setting for a 'quest' novel.

Hothouse 1962

In the world of the far future, the land is covered by one giant tree, and a variety of fierce, vegetable life-forms rule. A kind of odyssey, full of humour, and containing some remarkable visions.

The Dark Light Years 1964

A sharp satire on the well-worn theme of the meeting between man and alien. What if the aliens are repulsive?

Eric AMBLER (1909-)*The Mask of Dimitrios* 1939

An early work by a masterly writer of thrillers whose stories are comic-sinister sub-plots to the world of international politics and business. Latimer, a detective story writer, encounters mystery and adventure as he uncovers the strange life of Dimitrios, whose body he believes he has seen in a Turkish morgue.

Dirty Story 1967

The shady exploits of the dubious Arthur Simpson are described with humour and a powerful economy of words.

Kingsley AMIS (1922-)*Lucky Jim* 1954

A pioneering work in the campus novel genre, and still the funniest. Jim Dixon, sufferer from every kind of complex, fights for respectability and love through a world peopled by ghastly academic bourgeoisie.

Take a Girl Like You 1960

The virginal Jenny Bunn comes down from the North to teach in an infant school. This is the story of her efforts to hold out in the face of a variety of seduction ploys – nicely ridiculed by a sense of the crudeness and sham of sexual confrontations.

Jake's Thing 1978

An example of later Amis. Back to the campus, but youthful frustration has been succeeded by middle-aged impotence and what was previously ridiculed as the comic pretensions of modern science and manners are now feared as the enemies of civilization.

Martin AMIS (1949-)*Money - A Suicide Note* 1984

New York, the film world and the sexy Selina Street are good subjects for the younger Amis's flashing phrases and well developed sense of disgust. So far, moments and attitudes in Amis's novels are stronger than the works as a whole.

Daisy ASHFORD (1881-1972)*The Young Visitors* 1919

A remarkable, misspelled, precocious piece of writing completed at the turn of the century by Daisy Ashford, aged nine. It has all the ingredients of a traditional novel distilled by its author's innocence into a refreshing clarity of perception.

Jane AUSTEN (1775-1817)*Sense and Sensibility* 1811

The title refers to each of two sisters, Elinor and Marianne, and their respective reactions to the dastardliness of their lovers, as they set about the necessary search for, and final attainment of, husbands.

Pride and Prejudice 1813

Although *Pride and Prejudice* is 'lighter' than Jane Austen's later works, her irony is here at its best. For this reason, and for the delightful portrayal of the Bennet family, *Pride and Prejudice* is probably the most read and quoted of Jane Austen's novels.

Mansfield Park 1814

Fanny Price is the stoic heroine who is rewarded with the conventional happy marriage by the end of this delicate and detailed study of the affairs, intrigues and betrayals of a group of young people gathered in a country house.

Emma 1816

Emma Woodhouse is one of the great character portraits in English fiction: simultaneously fascinating and appalling. Her self-satisfied attempts at match-making and social manipulation go wildly astray. All is well in the end - by the standards of the times - thanks to the virtuous Mr Knightley, but some modern readers may prefer the unreconstructed Emma.

Northanger Abbey 1818

The dark and draughty mansion at the centre of this satire on both readers and writers of fashionable Gothic fiction is the catalyst for the active imagination of Catherine Morland, in love, of course, with its owner.

Persuasion 1818

Less sharp in its satire and ironic wit than previous works, Jane Austen's last completed novel deals sensitively, almost romantically, with the intricate love affairs of Anne Elliot and her sisters.

Beryl BAINBRIDGE (1934-)*Another Part of the Wood* 1968

Joseph and his girlfriend, Dotty, take his son Roland to the remote Welsh countryside along with several other friends, one of whom, the strange boy Kidney, provokes different reactions from the various characters.

Harriet Said ... 1972

Harriet and the narrator become obsessed with the 'Tsar', a middle-aged man whom they wish to study at a distance but towards whom they gradually begin to approach more and more closely. Centred on Beryl Bainbridge's common themes of responsibility, respect and selfishness disguised as altruism.

The Bottle Factory Outing 1974

A black comedy of ordinary people caught up in extraordinary circumstances.

J G BALLARD (1930-)*Short Stories* 1976

Starting as a leading writer of science-fiction in the fifties and sixties, he has more recently emerged as a novelist producing the vivid, autobiographical story of the Second World War in China, *The Empire of the Sun*. His short stories are full of powerful and distressful episodes as in the collections *The Terminal Beast* and *The Disaster Area*.

H E BATES (1905-74)*My Uncle Silas* 1939

'Uncle Silas' features in a series of short stories in which this rural reprobate recounts his adventures, which vary from his being the all-conquering hero in the Crimean War to the seducer of many beautiful women.

Fair Stood the Wind for France 1944

An adventure set in occupied France, following story-lines used before and after. An airman escapes from the wreckage of his plane and seeks shelter and sexual comfort from a native girl.

The Darling Buds of May 1958

A comedy featuring the crazy Larkin family, made up of caricatures with predictable idiosyncrasies.

Samuel BECKETT (1906-)*More Pricks than Kicks* 1934

A series of ten stories centering on Belacqua Shuah, an outsider in Dublin. His life largely consists of his various adventures with women, until death on an operating table, followed by burial and simultaneous disappearance from the minds of all.

Watt 1953

What does not happen to Watt in Mr Knott's house is the basis of this punning, funny novel that philosophizes on the non-events of everyday life through the mind of an inmate of a lunatic asylum.

See also: *Trilogy* – published separately as *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnameable*.

William BECKFORD (1759–1844)

Vathek 1786

An extraordinary little book which alone has given Beckford a name in literary history. A Voltairean tale of oriental adventure, suffused with gloomy and terrible perception.

Sybille BEDFORD (1911–)

A Legacy 1957

A first novel which is interesting for its social and historical setting. It deals with the dubious marriages between two families in Germany, followed by the introduction of the saving spirit of an English woman.

A Favourite of the Gods 1963

A Compass Error 1968

Set in Italy and France, these two novels follow the fortunes of three generations of women – Anna, her daughter Constanza, and her daughter Flavia – all of whom, as sexual and intellectual rebels, must face the problems of living in a rigid society.

Sir Max BEERBOHM (1872–1956)

Zuleika Dobson 1911

Mildly amusing story of the effect of the arrival of a beautiful woman on the young in Oxford. As Zuleika says, for people who like this kind of thing, this is the kind of thing they like.

Aphra BEHN (1640–89)

Oroonoko, or the History of the Royal Slave 1688

Although often forgotten, this is the first English philosophical novel. Significantly, it is written by a woman, and is remarkable for showing sympathy for oppressed Negro slaves in the colonized West Indies.

Arnold BENNETT (1867–1931)

Anna of the Five Towns 1902

One of the first of Bennett's novels to use the five pottery towns as dismal background to detailed representations of life. Anna, who refuses to conform in a Methodist society, is portrayed with care and sympathy, whilst the dispassionate style of writing represents the Methodists without passing explicit judgement.

***The Old Wives' Tale* 1908**

A brilliant portrait of the lower middle classes. Set partly in the Potteries and partly in Paris, this is a story of Constance and Sophia Baines who begin life in a draper's shop.

***The Clayhanger Trilogy – Clayhanger* 1910, *Hilda Lessways* 1911, *These Twain* 1916**

The most celebrated of Bennett's works, following the life of Edwin Clayhanger, his undulating relationship with Hilda Lessways, and his strange friendship with Hilda's son, George.

R D BLACKMORE (1825–1900)***Lorna Doone* 1869**

The times of Charles II and James II and the valleys of Exmoor are the settings for this much-loved story of the conflicts of passion and family loyalty in the romance between Lorna Doone and John Ridd.

George BORROW (1803–81)***Lavengro* 1851*****Romany Brye* 1857**

Adventures of gypsies and vagrants, tinkers and thieves, as the central character wanders from place to place in this inextricable mixture of fiction and autobiography.

Elizabeth BOWEN (1899–1973)***The Death of the Heart* 1938**

A subtle story of innocence and sophistication.

***The Heat of the Day* 1949**

Set in Second World War London, Stella Rodway is in love with a traitor to his country and her values.

William BOYD (1952–)***A Good Man in Africa* 1980**

The setting is West Africa (where Boyd was born) and tells of Morgan Leafy's attempts to come to terms with the environment.

***An Ice-Cream War* 1982**

No-one told the English and German armies in East Africa that World War I had ended, so they carried on fighting for three weeks after the armistice. The novel is told through the eyes of various characters such as Temple Smith, a boisterous American, and two contrasting brothers, Felix and Gabriel Cobb. Amusing and compassionate.

Malcolm BRADBURY (1932-)*Stepping Westward* 1965

Like Malcolm Bradbury's first novels *Eating People is Wrong*, a satire on academic life, this time set in America. With its convoluted story-line and caricatures of people, it is less funny than Amis's *Lucky Jim*, but more savage in its humour.

The History Man 1975

An exact record of the era of hopes and betrayals that is epitomized in life at a new university in the sixties and seventies. Funny, sad, and serious, with a style which apparently removes authorial judgement, but not the moral of the story.

Ray BRADBURY (1920-)*Fahrenheit 451* 1953

'The temperature at which book-paper catches fire and burns.' A science-fiction story in which imagination is threatened by the destruction of books, until a resistance group is formed and creativity is finally allowed to triumph.

Dandelion Wine 1951

This work bears out Ray Bradbury's reputation as a short story writer. Lawnmowers, trolleys and cars become objects of horror in these fantastic tales, each of which represents a flask of dandelion wine stored away for winter use in the summer of 1928.

John BRAINE (1922-)*Room at the Top* 1957

Angry young man, Joe Lampton, plans to use the system whilst maintaining his hatred of it. But his working-class rebellion loses its power and we are left to wonder if there can be room at the top for any but the unprincipled.

Charlotte BRONTE (1816-55)*Jane Eyre* 1847

A great, romantic novel: the first to present a woman as a passionate and independent being. Orphan Jane survives the hardships of the cruel Lowood school to become governess to the illegitimate daughter of the dark, byronic Mr Rochester and ultimately, his redeemer or his emasculator, if D H Lawrence's view of the relationship is preferred.

Shirley 1849

Less of a consuming read than *Jane Eyre* but again remarkable for its strong and wilful characters. Set in Yorkshire at the time of the Luddite riots, a mill-owner marries Shirley for her wealth, but both their loves lie elsewhere.