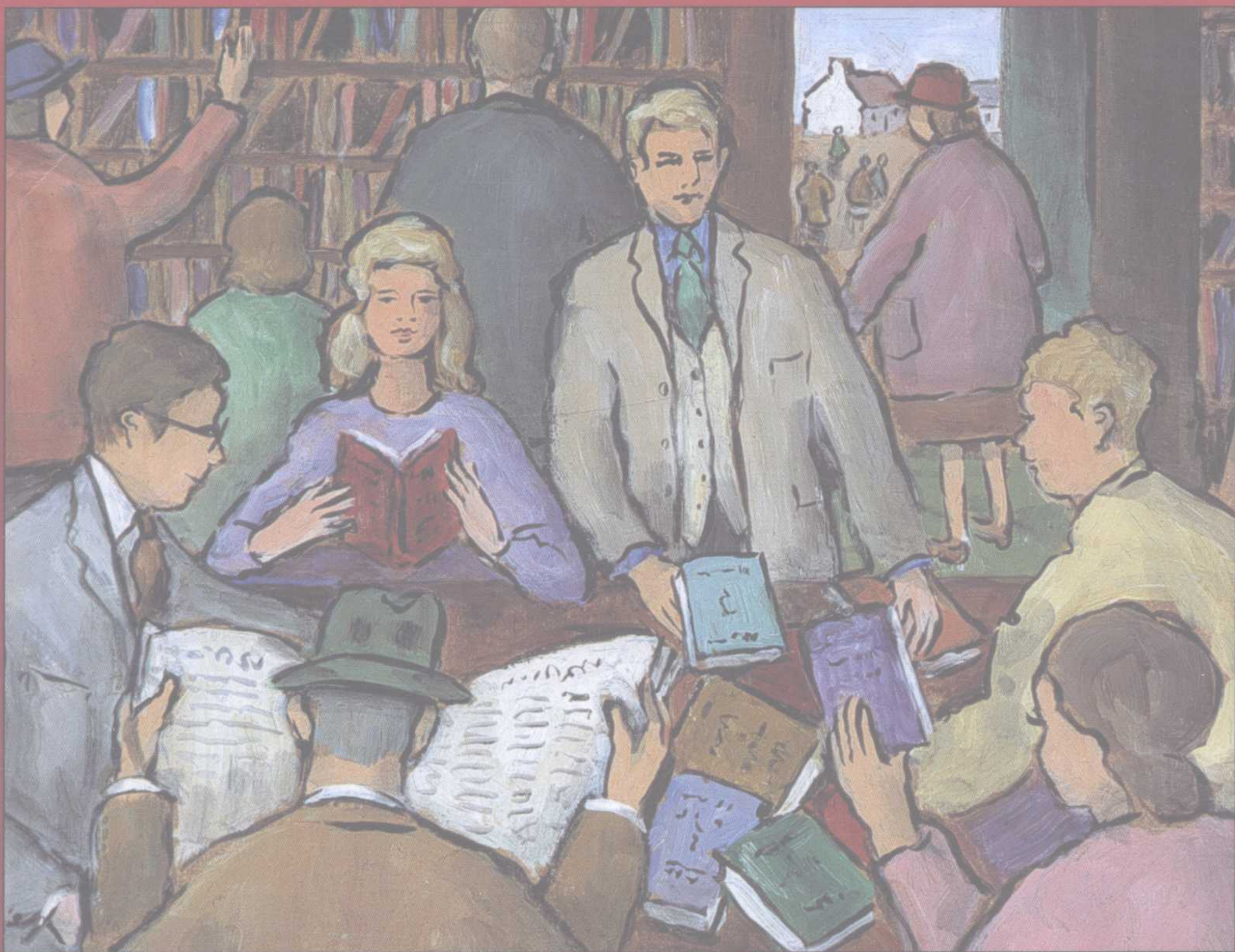


THIRD EDITION

The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English



Edited by DOMINIC HEAD

The definitive guide: completely revised and updated

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Contributors

Michael Abbott
Robert Ackerman
James Aikens
Margaret Allen
Susan Ang
Stephen M. Archer
Marie-Louise Ayres
Christopher Baldick
Cameron Bardrick
Gillian Beer
Alan Bell
Misha Berson
Delys Bird
Jeremy Black
M. H. Black
Alison Blair-Underwood
Paul Bongiorno
John L. Bradley
Andrea Brady
Andrew Brown
Frances Bzowski
Jo-Anne Carty
Paul Chipchase
Jean Chothia
David Christie
Henry Claridge
Alan Clark
Larry D. Clark
Michael Collie
Graham Coster
David Daniell

Geoffrey Day
Seamus Deane
Denise deCaires Narain
Nicholas Drake
Dorothy Driver
Rod Edmond
Colin Edwards
Hazel Edwards
John Elsom
Geraint Evans
Mark Fisher
Gerald Fitzgibbon
Michael Freeman
Marelle Freiman
Helen Fulton
Colin Gardner
Robin Gilmour
Jon Glover
Andrew Gurr
Paul Hartle
Dominic Head
Laura Henigman
Ann Hill
Errol G. Hill
Anna Hodson
Meridel Holland
Andrea Holland
Richard Hollick
Coral Ann Howells
Robin Howells
Jane Hughes

Roz Kaveney	Geoffrey Parrinder
C. L. Innes	Graham Parry
Christopher Innes	Sandra Ponzanesi
Russell Jackson	Neil Powell
Elizabeth Jay	G. J. V. Prasad
David Johnston-Jones	David Profumo
Douglas Killam	Richard Proudfoot
Philip Kolin	Gay Raines
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Daniel Lea	Bronwen Rees
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Grevel Lindop	Lucy Rinehart
Tony Lopez	Gareth Roberts
Eric Lott	Jane Roberts
James Lynn	Nicola Lynne Robinson
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James Malpas	Anne Rooney
Robyn Marsack	Clare Rossini
Desmond Maxwell	George Rowell
David McKitterick	Frank Salmon
Margaret Meek	Jack Salzman
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Tim Middleton	Andrew Sanders
Tice L. Miller	Christopher Scarles
Stephen Morton	Raman Selden
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W. R. Owens	Ann Stonehouse

Bernard Stonehouse	Norman Vance
Sally Stonehouse	Lindeth Vasey
Barbara Strang	Elizabeth Webby
Jordan Sullivan	Judy Weiss
Peta Tait	Gillian Whitlock
Ashley Tellis	Margaret Williams
John Thieme	Don B. Wilmeth
Helen Thomson	Barry B. Witham
Peter Thomson	Barry Wood
Nicholas Tredell	Robert Wyke
Nicholas Tucker	Alan Young
Ann Turner	

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Introduction

Since the first edition of this *Cambridge Guide* was published it has sometimes seemed that the priorities of academics working in the various (and expanding) fields of literary study have not always corresponded with the priorities of non-academic enthusiasts: those so-called 'ordinary' or 'general' readers. In a practical sense, for an editor of a literary Guide, this is less important than one might imagine, because there has been far greater consensus about *who* to read than about *how* they should be read. In compiling a factually based Guide, then, some of the disputes about how literature should be read or valued become invisible: if, by and large, students and general readers, specialists and non-specialists alike, can find the information they need, why worry about the debates that underpin the collection of that information, and which disappear from view when it is presented in a succinct and objective style? It will not do, however, to ignore this issue, since the wide constituency served by the *Cambridge Guide*, from the student, to the literary editor, to the book-club member, deserves some account of the intellectual arguments within academia that help to justify the continuing existence of this kind of reference work. Indeed, it would be strange to sweep these arguments aside, since there are those who have proposed that we should do away with the category of 'literature' altogether.

The literary theory that appeared in the 1970s and really took root in universities from the 1980s onwards, although it is now adopting a less radical hue, can be credited with having revolutionized the study of literature. The influx of ideas drawn from feminism, Marxism, linguistics, psychoanalysis and postcolonial theory, among other sources and influences, necessitated a dramatic re-evaluation of what constitutes 'literature', and how it should be interpreted. The unconscious class, or gender, or cultural biases of earlier generations of critics were held up for scrutiny – if over-zealously, at times – and a re-reading of literary history commenced, involving modified principles for literary study. Questions concerning class, race, gender and imperialism now figured prominently in critical discussion, with the inevitable consequence that the composition of the literary canon was hotly debated. If what had

constituted 'great' literature for previous generations had been partly determined by a brand (or brands) of unconscious prejudice, there was a compulsion to extend the canon beyond the narrow confines of 'English Literature', and to allow the 'canon' to be open-ended, in a constant process of reformulation, a development which, most notably, allowed for the canonization (in a less monolithic sense) of many women writers, and many non-British and non-American authors working in English around the world. This latter development was hugely significant in redrawing the map of literary studies: it is reflected in the title of this volume, with its wide remit to cover 'Literature in English'.

Yet if the canon came under scrutiny, so too did the category of 'literature'. Under the influence of cultural studies, especially, the distinctions between 'High' and 'Low' art or culture were challenged. If the way the canon had previously been constructed concealed the inherent biases of the canon-builders, did not those same biases determine their very idea of literary art? The nagging worry had to do not just with the unworldliness of English dons. For a generation still remembering the impact of fascism in Europe, the anti-literature argument struck a chord: if the Nazis could appreciate 'High' art whilst prosecuting their programme of genocide, what did that say about the 'civilizing' propensities of art? Literary expression, previously seen as having a beneficial 'ennobling' or 'improving' effect, became untrustworthy. It was bad enough that the construction of the canon might have been an elitist and exclusive process; but if literature could not generate a moral or ethical perspective on the world – if murderers and tyrants could appreciate its aesthetic effects, yet remain unaltered in their outlook, what *value* could be assigned to this cultural phenomenon?

Such a critique of 'literature' as category – though, admittedly, it is presented here in a grossly truncated form – was markedly utilitarian. For it ushered in an enthusiasm for valuing books on the basis of what they could be made to show in an ideological sense. For a generation of critics suspicious of the unconscious *bad faith* of a liberal critical tradition, there was an urgency to reformulate the canon with an eye to the *good faith* of the chosen books, vis-à-vis questions of class, gender and ethnicity, and to subject the classics to closer critical scrutiny. After the ground-breaking theoretical work had been done, however, a phase of imitation – and, sometimes, simplification – ensued. The breath of fresh air became a whirlwind, sometimes seeming to sweep all in its path into the vortex, without always making particularly fine discriminations; and what began to disappear from view was a sense of the 'literary'.

There is no doubt that the broad re-shaping of English studies that was achieved in the last quarter of the twentieth century

helped to open up international writing in English for the general reader in many countries. It was a development that also demonstrated how any construction of the 'literary' could be contested. Yet discriminating non-academic readers have always known when they are confronted with a special form of writing, a mode of expression that elicits peculiar and sometimes intense aesthetic responses, and to which the term 'literature' must be applied: however imperfect the term, it is justified by its connotative weight and its continuing ability to mark out a form of writing that is distinct from other modes of written expression. Informed readers seek out such writing – indeed, the quality of 'literariness' governs their choice of reading, as the chief criterion of selection, over and above a consideration of topic, theme or ideological orientation. Such readers also know that their own intellectual efforts are an integral part of the experience, and that their understanding of a book may be quite individual, differing significantly from that of other readers and critics.

It is interesting that literary theory is now coming to a view that chimes with the concerns of the discriminating general reader that I have described. An idea that is gathering force is the idea that a work of literature is *singular*, and that it has the capacity to enlarge or enrich the cultural realm in which we experience it. The source of this capacity is a special use of language and form; but the responsive efforts of a reader are required to unleash it. Critics now seem less confident of claiming direct political efficacy, or a certain function for a work; indeed, one aspect of the unique nature of a literary work may be its resistance to being put to blunt, instrumental uses, without being travestied in some way. The reader's participation in the creation of meaning is especially noteworthy where works from earlier periods are being read or re-read: the process is a kind of exchange in which different contexts may be brought to bear upon each other in a complex historical dialogue.

Literary culture, of course, *does* bear upon politics and history; but on its own terms, and it is that recognition that now seems to unite academic and non-academic readers overtly. There is, however, one area in which contemporary thinking about writing, and how it should be appreciated and valued, seems to be utterly at odds with traditional intellectual ideas about the 'sanctity' of literature: this is the relationship between literature and commerce. For Matthew Arnold in the nineteenth century, as for F. R. Leavis in the twentieth century, literature represented a kind of healing force in the face of the worst effects of industrialization. According to this view, readers could turn to literature as a way of opposing the grubbiness of industry and commerce; and, by becoming cultured citizens through their encounter with great literature, they

might become civilizing agents in a society that was sometimes mean and cruel.

There has always been a commercial dimension to the production of literature, of course – writers want to eat, too; but that relationship between literature and commerce has now reached a complex phase. This is highlighted by the literary prize, and the importance it has assumed in helping to establish value. The Booker Prize is a revealing example of this trend, since it has achieved a central role in determining literary taste in Britain. The commercial dimension is quite explicit, most especially for the winner who receives a substantial sum of prize money (currently £50,000), and, more importantly, the kind of publicity and increased sales that are likely to guarantee a career in writing. Short-listed authors also enjoy a boosting of their sales, and a raising of their profile. This is a happy consequence of organizing the prize so as to create the maximum amount of tension and media interest, with the name of the winner withheld until the evening of the award ceremony. (This was not the case for the first few years of the prize.) The Booker Prize also seeks to validate serious literary fiction by bestowing a cash prize to the writer of the ‘best’ qualifying novel in a particular year. Where, for Arnold and for Leavis literature was validated by its propensity to oppose commerce, in the era of the literary prize the ‘best’ examples are sometimes affirmed as such through the market place.

The Booker prize, it should be acknowledged, has been a huge success, measured in terms of raising interest in literary fiction. There is no doubt that it has played a significant role in revitalizing the book industry in Britain since the 1980s. (The prize was first awarded in 1969.) It has also stimulated debate about writing in a cultural climate often perceived to be hostile to intellectual debate. Admittedly, it is the public spat between judges that often grabs the headlines, but the headlines have often introduced debates of substance about the novel. And, although there is always media gossip about the judging procedure – and invariably complaints about the winner in some quarters – the judges have done a good job over the years in making their choices. If one extracts the names that have recurred on Booker short-lists, one ends up with a roll-call of significant figures, including winners of the prize such as: Margaret Atwood, Peter Carey, J. M. Coetzee, William Golding, Nadine Gordimer, Ian McEwan, Iris Murdoch, V. S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie. These are all writers who have received equal attention from academic and non-academic readers, judging by book sales, and by the production of academic monographs.

From a global perspective, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it seems that the reading and writing of imaginative

literature are activities that are probably now more widespread – and more informed – than they have ever been. Technology makes the business of writing and publishing relatively simple, using electronic text that anyone with access to a personal computer can produce. The success of the book trade in the developed world – in Britain it enjoyed a spectacular recovery in the last quarter of the twentieth century and beyond – has ensured that there is a place for serious literature amongst the shelves of mass-market paperbacks. This does not mean that, in general, writers share in the wealth that books (or plays, still) can produce. If the literary prize has introduced a beneficent channel for the influence of commerce, market forces have not always been so benign. The beneficiaries of the big prizes are very few, of course, and it is notoriously difficult to make a living as a writer – only a very few authors manage to earn enough solely from their writing. Reflecting broader trends, bookshops are also better at selling novels than they are at selling drama or poetry, a response to a public demand with very particular economic and cultural explanations. In recent times, the ill-health of live drama has very much to do with the success of film and television, for example; and the pre-eminence of narrative fiction may be explained by the needs of readers, desirous of a sustained and solitary literary experience, as an alternative stimulus in a society replete with visual messages. It is true that good writing has often also been successful writing; but that is not always the case.

Whilst responding to its cultural milieu, a Guide such as this must carve out its own intellectual space, in order to make finer, and more enduring judgements about literary value than those that might be suggested by cultural whims, or by the ephemeral enthusiasms of the book trade. Yet the continuing development of a market for literature, and the increasing availability of affordable paperback editions, must be seen as benign trends, since they have ensured the survival of the ‘classics’ in the canon of English Literature, whilst facilitating important critical interrogations of those ‘classics’. A healthy book trade also facilitates extension of the canon to embrace literature in English from across the globe. An increasingly literate and well-educated population, and the process of re-conceptualizing ‘English Literature’ as a subject for study, in schools and universities, have helped to transform understanding of what literature is, and who it is for, since the 1980s. Registering the impact of this new intellectual mood, *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English* was first published in 1988, under the editorship of Ian Ousby, who also edited the second edition of 1993. Today, given the diversity and richness of literature written in English, internationally, there is even a case to revise and reinstate

the term 'English Literature': it could mean only 'Literature in English' now, it is sometimes argued, with a global inflection rather than a narrow, national one.

The astute reader will have detected a possible contradiction in the preceding paragraphs, a tension between a democratic principle and a discriminatory one. On the one hand, the *Guide* is conceived as inclusive, in terms of its willingness to extend the canon, and to embrace new traditions. On the other hand, the principle of selection must be exclusive to some degree, in identifying those writers with significant achievements to their names. The contradiction is apparent rather than real, of course: discriminations must be made, exclusions must be applied, if 'Literature in English' is to be understood as a special cultural phenomenon, with its own, peculiar manifestations of excellence. At the same time, one must wonder if a time will come when this topic will simply become too vast for a single volume to encompass. As English expands and develops as a global language, with corresponding new manifestations of literature; and, at the same time, as scholarly work on writers from earlier periods generates new discoveries for our attention, a time may well come when a multi-volume *Guide* is needed.

For now, however, a legitimate claim can be made for the comprehensiveness of *The Cambridge Guide* in this current edition. For the general reader, it remains, I trust, a 'browsable' work of reference; for the student of literature in English it is an invaluable learning tool. Its coverage extends from the classics of English Literature to the literature of the whole English-speaking world, and from Old English to contemporary writing. There are entries on writers from Britain and Ireland, Canada, India, Africa, South Africa, New Zealand and the South Pacific, Australia and the USA. There are also title-entries for many prominent poems, novels, literary journals and plays. It includes entries on: literary movements and genres; literary and rhetorical terms; critical concepts and schools; and literary prizes.

Building on the scrupulous work of previous editions, the *Guide* has been revised and expanded. As editor I have enjoyed the advice of a team of international experts in assessing the coverage of the previous edition. Each contributor was selected on the basis of his or her knowledge of writers in one geographical region, sometimes with a specific remit to advise on fiction, drama or poetry. A particular focus for the new edition has been the coverage of contemporary writers. The new edition updates the entries for those living authors who were included in the previous edition, but also adds many more contemporary authors who have come to prominence since the 1990s. There are entries for more than 280 writers who were not included in the last edition, and most of these are contemporary

figures. Many more than this were considered, however, and our most taxing task, and certainly the most difficult part of the editorial process, has been determining which authors to exclude. The decisions about inclusion and exclusion were not lightly or easily made, and were often the result of an extended dialogue between editor and contributor (sometimes also drawing on the advice of additional experts). Our aim has been to identify those writers who enjoy a substantial reputation, and who we might expect still to be seen as significant in the future. Applying this principle – in the general process of reassessing the coverage – has led to the occasional omission of a writer, included in the previous edition, but whose star has waned dramatically. However, in this, as in other respects, the editorial instinct has inclined towards the inclusive rather than the exclusive impulse.

A brief indication of the contemporary coverage may be gleaned from the following short, selected list, drawn from the 280 additions, including entries from Africa: Ken Saro-Wiwa and Abdulrazak Gurnah; from South Africa: Achmat Dangor and Zakes Mda; from Australia: Richard Flanagan, Kate Jennings, John Kinsella and Sally Morgan; from Canada: Carol Shields and Thomas King; from the Caribbean: Pauline Melville and David Dabydeen; from India: Amit Chaudhuri and Bharati Mukherjee; from Ireland: Patrick McCabe, Robert McLiam Wilson and Frank McGuinness; from New Zealand and the South Pacific: Elizabeth Knox, Sia Figiel, Emily Perkins and Robert Sullivan; from Scotland: A. L. Kennedy, Janice Galloway and Alan Warner; from the UK: Sarah Kane, Helen Dunmore, Hilary Mantel, J. K. Rowling, Sarah Waters and Courttina Newland; and from the US: Alice Notley, Suzan-Lori Parks, E. Anne Proulx, Paul Auster and Octavia Butler.

The additions and changes that have been made are designed to embrace the wide readership of this kind of reference work: the browser; the reading-group member; the literary journalist; the practising writer; the student of literature, the academic, and so on. The work is non-specialist, but it does include much information that students will find useful, over and above the coverage of literary history. The treatment of literary and critical terms, for example, has been extended and supplemented to include many that have become common currency in academic discussion since the previous edition was published. Terms such as 'dialogic', 'intertextuality' and 'metafiction' are now included to supplement the existing coverage of more traditional terms like 'metre', 'irony' and 'wit'. There are entries for new and emerging critical schools or approaches, such as 'cognitive poetics', 'queer theory' and 'ethical criticism', alongside the more established ones, such as 'deconstruction' and 'New Criticism'.

In seeking to embrace the various demands of revising this *Guide* – balancing the democratic and the discriminatory pulls, attending to the interests of academic and non-academic readers – I hope we have managed to produce an edition which fits its times, and which, most especially, is faithful to this conviction: that an expanding tradition of imaginative literature in English continues to help fashion modern identity. This *Guide*, perhaps, might be the reader's starting point in the endeavour to understand how this occurs.

Dominic Head

Editor's note

This edition has been revised and expanded with the central aim of previous editions in mind: to provide a handy reference guide to the literature in English produced by all the various English-speaking cultures throughout the world. It embraces literature from Africa, Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, India, New Zealand, the South Pacific and the USA, as well as from Ireland and the United Kingdom. Contemporary writing is a particular focus in this new edition, which contains many entries for writers who are still living and publishing, including some whose major work has probably yet to appear. A key aspect of the editorial process has been the selection of writers for inclusion. In negotiation with an international team of experts, many hundreds of suggestions for inclusion were finally pared down to some 280 new additions, most of which are for living writers. It is testament to the extraordinary richness of literature in English worldwide that this careful and stringent process of selection should yield such a high return. And it is testament to the contributors that this revised edition can legitimately lay claim – in addition to its thorough historical range – to a comprehensive coverage of the best contemporary writing in English.

Writers in foreign languages are considered in the context of the genres or movements which they originated or influenced; but they are not given separate consideration except in the case of Anglo-Saxon (Old English) literature, here treated as part of the 'English tradition', and major examples of British medieval literature written in Latin, Anglo-Norman and the Gaelic languages, which influenced or flourished beside literature in English.

The entries fall into the following categories

Writers. This includes not just poets, novelists and playwrights but also those 'non-literary' authors who were an important influence on the literary culture of their age, including: theologians, philosophers, economists, naturalists, scientists, essayists, critics and historians.

Individual plays, poems, novels and other works. Generous coverage is accorded to titles by established major authors, but there are also title entries for other authors, especially where they

are known for one title in particular (e.g. *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy), or where a title may have overshadowed the writer's own name (e.g. *Cold Comfort Farm* by Stella Gibbons).

Literary groups or schools. Examples include the Lake Poets, the Beats, the Movement and the Black Mountain school.

Wider literary movements, such as neoclassicism, Romanticism, modernism and postmodernism.

Critical schools or movements, such as the New Criticism, structuralism, poststructuralism, deconstruction and ethical criticism.

Literary genres, such as comedy and tragedy, fable, farce and melodrama.

Poetic forms and sub-genres of drama and fiction, such as acrostic, the elegy, the revenge tragedy and the Gothic novel.

Critical terms, such as metaphor, symbol, dialogism, intertextuality and unreliable narrator.

Rhetorical terms, such as anaphora, bathos, chiasmus, synecdoche and zeugma.

Theatres from the Globe onwards and **theatre companies** from the King's Men to the Federal Theatre Project and the Sistren Theatre Collective.

Literary magazines from *The Quarterly Review* and *Punch* to *The New Masses* and *Staffrider*.

Some of the wider or less obvious topics which receive entries include

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------|
| Arthurian literature | dialogic/dialogism |
| Baconian heresy | dub poetry |
| Bible in English, The | dumb show |
| bluestocking | English dictionaries |
| Booker Prize | English language |
| boys' companies | estates satire |
| canon | ethical criticism |
| children's literature | expressionism |
| Cockney School, The | feminist criticism |
| cognitive poetics | genre fiction |
| Condition of England novel | intertextuality |
| conduct books | irony |
| copyright | libraries |
| courtesy book | Marxist criticism |
| courtly love | metre |
| Cruelty, Theatre of | New historicism |
| deconstruction | pantomime |
| detective fiction | postcolonial studies |