

***The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (3rd ed.), volume 4: 1800-1900, edited by Joanne Shattock. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.**

For the best part of thirty years the *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (NCBEL) has served as the most authoritative guide to its field. Published in four volumes between 1969 and 1974, it replaced the original *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* which had appeared in 1940 with a supplement in 1957. NCBEL achieved a quasi-canonical status, exemplified in its use by Chadwyck-Healey as the basis for choosing authors to include in major electronic publications like the *English Poetry* database. A lot has happened in English literary studies in the last thirty years, however, and the third edition—which returns to the original title—now makes a very welcome appearance.

This is the first volume to appear, covering the Romantic and Victorian periods, under the editorship of Joanne Shattock of the University of Leicester. Its scale is almost fifty per cent greater than its predecessor, amounting to more than 1500 pages of text in double columns, from about 170 contributors. Part of the increase is due to the enormous amount of new scholarship in the last thirty years on writers included in the previous edition. Charles Dickens, for example, has grown from 72 columns to 92. But there has also been a substantial increase in new entries and topics. New sections have been added on political science and on household books, domestic manuals and conduct books. The scope of the section on philosophy has been expanded to include science. The number of poets has increased fourfold and writers of non-fictional prose have been given full individual entries for the first time. A large proportion of the new entries are for women writers.

The main arrangement, as in previous editions, is by genre. Each genre is then subdivided into broad chronological periods, with writers assigned to them according to their date of birth. The previous distinction between major and minor authors has been abandoned, and all authors for a period appear in alphabetical order. The table of contents provides a neat summary of authors by genre and period, but does not give a column reference for each author. Authors who wrote in more than one genre are usually cross-referenced at the appropriate point. All these authors are also listed in the index at the end of the volume. The other sections of the book deal with specific subjects and topics, including book production and distribution, travel, children's books, household books, and so on. These sections are usually sub-divided into more specific subject areas, within which works are listed chronologically. A few of the subjects are listed in the index, but the authors of the works in these sections are not normally listed in the index—with the notable exception of the children's writers.

Significant authors are covered in considerable detail. While the main emphasis is on a full listing of individual works, arranged by date of first publication, there is also information about major manuscript collections, bibliographies and contemporary reviews and translations. Secondary materials about the author are treated more selectively than in previous editions. While a full account of textual and bibliographical criticism is given, together with a select list of authoritative biographies, only the

significant pre-1920 criticism is listed, because of the ready availability of electronic bibliographies which now cover the period since 1920.

No attempt has been made to standardise the entries for individual authors. In practice this tends to mean that "minor" authors are given little more than a listing of works, without the accompanying critical materials and additional information. This is also the norm in the "children's books" section. A few "major" children's authors such as E. Nesbit and G.A. Henty are also given full entries under "the novel," with appropriate cross-references. But in many cases the entry in the children's section is merely followed by a note that the author also published adult works. At least one writer, William Clark Russell, appears in both the "children's" and "novel" sections under slightly different names and without a cross-reference.

Potential users of this new edition also need to be aware of the chronological and geographical parameters which determine the extent of its coverage, especially where these differ from the *NCBEL*. For a start the definition of which authors are considered "nineteenth-century" has been changed. The *NCBEL* covered authors who were "in some sense established after 1800 and before 1900." This included John Buchan (1875-1940)—under children's literature only—as well as J.M. Synge (1871-1909). The third edition uses two somewhat different criteria for inclusion: authors born after 1759 and before 1866; and authors whose "most important works" were published in the nineteenth century. This means that Yeats (b. 1865) and G.B. Shaw (b. 1856)—as well as Buchan and Synge—are considered twentieth-century authors and no longer appear in this volume.

While this is clear enough for major writers—though some confusion may be felt by those familiar with the *NCBEL*—it makes things rather awkward for minor writers, at least until the appearance of volume five of the third edition. To take two minor writers with Australian connections, will Carlton Dawe (1865-1935) appear in the next volume? And will Guy Boothby (1867-1905)—even though most of his work appeared before 1901? Are they missing from volume four because they are in volume five, or will they not be appearing in either volume? Neither appeared in *NCBEL*.

From an Australian point of view another very important parameter is the geographical one: how is "English" defined? The third edition uses a similar definition to that given in the *NCBEL*—"authors native to or mainly resident in the British Isles"—with the slight variation that the word "mainly" has been dropped. In fact the Australian content of the new edition has been significantly increased, though it is hard to judge whether this is the result of the different definition or not. Such "Australian" authors as Rolf Boldrewood, Ada Cambridge and Rosa Praed now make an appearance, and Ethel Turner is also present—though only in the children's literature list with a note "Also published adult novels." On the other hand, Catherine Helen Spence (born in Scotland and emigrated to Australia at the age of fourteen) does not appear, and neither do Marcus Clarke (born in London), Louis Becke (born in Australia but lived in Britain for some years), or Ernest Favenc (born in Surrey and came to Australia aged nineteen). The definition of "English" also gives rise to similar uncertainties in the section devoted to travel books about Australia. This has changed little since *NCBEL*, with the addition of only four titles. It still does not include Sir George Grey (born in London and later

lived in Australia and New Zealand) or Ernest Giles (born in Bristol and came to Australia at the age of fifteen). Here, too, it is not clear whether they have been excluded by the definition of "English" or for some other reason.

Surprisingly, perhaps, the third edition does not spell out its intended scope and contains no indication of whether it is intended to be comprehensive. The *NCBEL*, in contrast, aimed "to represent the whole of English studies" and "to aim at completeness." In fact while the third edition contains far more authors than its predecessor, its coverage is still far from comprehensive in some areas, notably early crime fiction and the precursors of fantasy and science fiction. A few examples can be drawn from other bibliographies of these genres.¹ Hume Nisbet (1849-1921) appears in the children's literature list as the author of ten children's novels—but his other works are dismissed with the note "Author of other books and novels on travel and adventure and verse." Fergus Hume (1859-1932) is treated very strangely—he appears in the children's list as the author of a collection of fairy stories, but there is no reference to his numerous crime novels (about 140 in all, including *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*). The early detective story writer "Waters" (William Russell) does not appear at all. Another prolific novelist, Joyce Emmerson Muddock, has one children's book listed, with the note "Also wrote romantic novels"; there is no mention of his more than fifty detective stories under the pseudonym "Dick Donovan."

There are also some surprising absences of minor but relatively successful writers. Among these are George Grossmith (1847-1912), author of the perennial favourite *The Diary of a Nobody*, and Kenelm Digby (1800-1880)—author of a much-reprinted conduct manual for gentlemen, *The Broadstone of Honour*, as well as a novel. If, as these omissions suggest, the new edition of the *CBEL* is not intended to be comprehensive, then some indication of the criteria for inclusion and exclusion would have been helpful. There can be no doubt that the new *CBEL* is an excellent guide to the more significant authors, though its treatment of minor writers is rather less sure. It also provides a very useful and reliable starting-point for subjects like philosophy, religion, education and science. Within the compass of a single volume its coverage is remarkably wide-ranging. It will serve as an indispensable research tool for many years to come.

Toby Burrows

¹ John Loder, *Australian Crime Fiction: A Bibliography, 1857-1993* (Port Melbourne: Thorpe, 1994); Russell Blackford, Van Ikin, and Sean McMullen, *Strange Constellations: A History of Australian Science Fiction* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999); Eric Osborne, *Victorian Detective Fiction* (London: The Bodley Head, 1966); Robert Leo Wolff, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction: A Bibliographical Guide* (New York: Garland, 1981).