

(Download pdf ebook) The Short Oxford History of English Literature

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Andrew Sanders

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Andrew Sanders : The Short Oxford History of English Literature before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Short Oxford History of English Literature:

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A fine example would be A Little History of Philosophy by ...By wongytthis may be a erudite account but at times rambling and it is totally unsuitable for younger readers who may be looking for a clear presentation of the major figures in the English literature..A fine example would be A Little History of Philosophy by Nigel Wharburton. Beautifully written, clear and concise. It is a great pity because of an opportunity missed. Try again 8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. From Beowulf to De Bernieres By J C E Hitchcock At over 700 pages this book is not particularly "short", but the adjective is needed to distinguish it from the multi-volume "Oxford History of English Literature". The word "English" might also need some qualification, as Scottish, Welsh and Irish writers are also included, provided that they wrote in the English language, as are some foreign-born writers. (For these purposes, Scots is regarded as an English dialect, so Dunbar, Henryson and Burns are in). This is doubtless the right approach. A "history of English literature" which omitted the likes of Walter Scott, Dylan Thomas, Oscar Wilde and Joseph Conrad in the interests of strict geographical accuracy would be a deficient one, and "The Short Oxford History of British and Irish Literature Written in English" would be an unwieldy title. The most surprising omission is perhaps Henry James, who has always struck me as being as much a naturalised Englishman as Conrad. The history of Eng. Lit. has been described as "From Beowulf to Virginia Woolf", although as Woolf has now been dead for seventy years we should perhaps now speak of "From Beowulf to Louis de Bernieres", he being the last writer to be mentioned in the text. The book starts off with an interesting discussion of the gradual

development of a "canon" of English literature and the way in which literary reputations have grown or diminished over the centuries. There then follow ten sections, each dealing with the literature of a particular period, in chronological order from Anglo-Saxon beginnings to post-1945 literature. One criticism I would have would be that in latter sections Andrew Sanders displays a bias towards "literary" fiction rather than what might be called "genre" fiction. There is very little about such genres as children's literature, crime fiction, horror, adventure, science-fiction or romance. Certainly, much of the work produced in these areas has always been ephemeral, but I would have welcomed a greater recognition of the fact that some genre writers have gone on to achieve classic status in their own right. Conan Doyle, for example, is passed over in a few lines, M R James is mentioned only once as an influence on the modern novelist Charles Palliser, Ian Fleming and Agatha Christie are both dismissed in a single sentence and Daphne du Maurier, Arthur C. Clarke and Rider Haggard not mentioned at all. Sanders pays more attention to H G Wells, but treats him mostly as the author of social-realist novels like "Kipps" rather than of pioneering science-fiction classics like "The War of the Worlds". The book does, however, also have its virtues. It is generally easy to read (something not always true of literary histories) and generally objective (ditto). There is no obvious ideological agenda and no attempt to view the entire history of English literature from a single political or aesthetic viewpoint. With the exception of genre fiction mentioned above, it is also highly inclusive. Although, generally speaking, more space is allotted to the well-known names, Sanders also makes room to mention many now-obscure figures (some of whom were far from obscure during their won times). Arnold Bennett once said that a whole library could be filled with books which "every educated person" was supposed to have read but which he personally had not. Reading Sanders's magnum opus, I was reminded of this quote and of how it applies to me even more forcibly than it did to Bennett. An even more impressive library could be filled with the works of those writers I had never heard of before picking up this volume. 9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Excellent history; could have used a bit more primary excerpts. By Sam M. Tannenbaum Not surprisingly, Sanders has crafted an excellent historical survey of the development and nuances of English lit. It's well worth reading to gain a better understanding of why and how English lit has looked at various times in history. About the only thing I would have liked to see was a little more in the way of excerpts from notables here. Sanders does include some, and I know we can't have everything we'd like in a history that has the word 'shorter' in the title; I guess that's not so much a complaint as just a lament about concise surveys in general... and now I'm off-topic. anyhow, this is superbly constructed and solidly written, and I enjoyed myself.

Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey, Andrew Sanders notes, had its start by accident. The first writer entombed there (long before it was known by today's name) was Geoffrey Chaucer--so honored not for his works, but because he had lived nearby and had distant connections to the crown. But Chaucer was lionized by future generations, especially by Edmund Spenser, who was the next poet to take his place in the Corner. Over time, more men of letters followed (including Ben Jonson, John Dryden, and Charles Dickens), as England turned this corner of the Abbey into a tribute to its writers. The growth of Poets' Corner, Sanders writes, mirrors the conscious efforts of writers to create the British literary tradition--the physical expression of the emerging canon. In *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*, Sanders conducts us on a tour through the living past behind the stone effigies of Poets' Corner--capturing the vast history of the literature of the British isles in a single, fascinating narrative. Starting with the early Anglo-Saxon period, he ranges right up to the present, with individual chapters on Old and Middle English literature, the Renaissance, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Romantics, Victorian and Edwardian Literature, Modernism, and post-war writing. Throughout, the author combines concise analyses of individual works and authors with an overarching sense of how they interacted in a single literary tradition. The dramas of Shakespeare, for example, have long since eclipsed those of his contemporaries Kyd and Marlowe; but Sanders reminds us of the "symbiotic relationship" between the Bard and his rivals, especially Marlowe. He goes on to crisply assess the interaction of Shakespeare's plays with the politics and emerging nationalism of the period. Sanders applies this sensitivity to the relationship between literature and larger social issues elsewhere as well; after providing an outstanding critical examination of Dickens's novels, he firmly sets them in the context of the "Condition of England" fiction so popular in the nineteenth century, including the works of such lesser lights as Harriet Martineau and Charles Kingsley. Sanders ranges far beyond the boundaries of England, examining the impact of Scottish writers and philosophers, the rich traditions of Irish literature, and the works of Welsh authors as well. And he brings his analysis up to the post-modern present, looking at such writers as Seamus Heaney and Angela Carter. The literature of Britain has long since become a part of the cultural heritage of the world--an inspiration to literary traditions in America and elsewhere, and a continuing source of pleasure. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature* provides a remarkably concise account of this rich past, offering food for thought and an even deeper enjoyment of the great works.

From *Library Journal* Designed to replace Emile Legouis's *A Short History of English Literature* (Oxford Univ. Pr., 1934), Sanders's work competes with one-volume histories by Pat Rogers (*The Oxford Illustrated History of English Literature*, Oxford Univ. Pr., 1987), Alastair Fowler (*A History of English Literature*, LJ 3/1/88), and Peter Quennell (*A History of English Literature*, LJ 1/1/74. o.p.). Sanders includes more information than Fowler but lacks the

advantage of the photographs, art work, and maps found in Rogers and Quennell. He skillfully introduces controversies about the development of an English literature canon and explains how writers got selected for burial in Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey, arguing that English literature has always been rife with contradiction, "both multiple and polarized, both popular and elite." His book has ten major chapters covering Old English, medieval, Renaissance, Shakespearean, 17th- and 18th-century, Romantic, Victorian, Modern, and postwar literature. Innovative essays include "Women's Writing in the Restoration" and "The New Morality," which examines the 1970s and 1980s. Recommended for academic and most public libraries. J. Thorndike, Lakeland Coll., Sheboygan, Wis. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. An excellent introduction and reference tool for sixth-formers and undergraduates. The Times Higher Education Supplement

About the Author
About the Author: Andrew Sanders teaches Modern English Literature at Birkbeck College, University of London. His books include *Charles Dickens: Resurrectionist* and *The Victorian Historical Novel*.