
Languages and literature

RR 2017/129

The Cambridge Companion to the English Short Story

Ann-Marie Einhaus

Cambridge University Press

Cambridge

2016

xxiii + 232 pp.

ISBN 978 1 107 08417 9 (hbk); ISBN 978 1 107 44601 4

(pbk); ISBN 978 1 316 02878 0 (e-book)

£54.99 \$94.99 (hbk); £18.99 \$29.99 (pbk); \$24 (e-book)

Cambridge Companions to Literature

Keywords English literature, Fiction

Review DOI [10.1108/RR-02-2017-0042](https://doi.org/10.1108/RR-02-2017-0042)

This *Companion* deals with the origins and development of the short story “written in the English language outside of north America” (p. 7). Fourteen chapters cover the Contexts, Periods and Genres of the medium. All of them are extensively footnoted. An introduction by the Editor (who contributes a chapter), a Guide to Further Reading and a Chronology complete the contents.

Part I, Contexts, covers the contemporary scene (and problems) of short story publishing, in Britain today, in Paul March Russell’s contribution. Other chapters deal with social realism, the (British) Empire in “short fiction” (the phrase is used frequently in the book) and the role of “space” in literature. In Part II, Periods, the five chapters deal with the short story developments that occurred during the Romantic and Victorian eras, and the twentieth century. Victoria Stewart’s *Mid-Twentieth-Century Stories* is informative about the medium in Britain during the Second World War. Maebh Long’s article brings the medium into the digital age. For those who wish to know which authors or stories to read, Part III Genres provides coverage of comic, detective, gothic and British science fiction (the latter chapter, by Andrew Butler, contains numerous listings of authors).

Although the volume is presented as an introductory overview of the subject, the density of the prose, at times, makes some of the chapters hard to follow. The animated and informative condemnation of pornography in

Long’s contribution, for example, is counter-balanced in the book by passages of elliptical phrases and obscure terminology, that lead to tendentious (and, at times, tedious) conclusions. Historians and sociologists might quibble with some of the evidence used, and interpretations made, but this is a survey of literary responses to the phenomenon as used in the stories. There are also errors that have slipped through the editing process. An entry for 1868 is placed after 1876 in the Chronology (p. xvi) and a sentence on p. 137 is rendered meaningless by garbled phrasing.

The work is wide-ranging in the use of source material, with websites now becoming a standard reference in citations, but, as with the internet, the danger of obsolescence, for digital media, might give the publication a “dated” feel in the near future, to the younger generation of literary scholars.

Geoffrey Hunt

Freelance Reviewer, London, UK

RR 2017/130

The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the American West

Edited by Steven Frye

Cambridge University Press

Cambridge

2016

xxx + 255 pp.

ISBN 978 1 107 09537 3 (hbk); ISBN 978 1 107 47927 2

(pbk); ISBN 978 1 316 57870 4 (e-book)

£54.99 \$89.99 (hbk); £18.99 \$29.99 (pbk); \$24 (e-book)

Cambridge Companions to Literature

Keywords Literature, United States of America

Review DOI [10.1108/RR-02-2017-0026](https://doi.org/10.1108/RR-02-2017-0026)

This book treats the word literature in the broadest terms and it deals with it in a way that relates to works both about the American West and/or from the West of America. Thus, it includes comment upon writings in the form of letters, essays, sketches, travelogues, newspaper articles, novels, poetry and drama. Even graphic novels and movies come briefly within its purview.

Since most of the chapters are historical studies, the meaning of the term “west” also has a range of meanings. Within the geography and history of the North American continent, the term has represented the beyond, the frontier, the wilderness and the edge, the boundary of civilisation as the European diaspora moved across the landscape, mainly in an east to west direction but also, on occasion, from north to south and even, to a lesser extent, like a backwash, from west to east. The literature of



Reference Reviews

Volume 31 · Number 5 · 2017 · pp. 18–22

© Emerald Publishing Limited · ISSN 0950-4125

the west has sometimes been concerned to record the first-hand experiences of migrants; on other occasions, it has related imaginary tales of what and who they met in their travels as they lived out their lives as gunfighters, cowboys or homemakers. Therefore, among the themes that the book deals with are the topography and relationships with the environment of the American west, with its existing communities and with competing migrant groups. The literature deals with the physical world of discovery, of oil, gold and the evolution of settlements into towns but also with a conceptual world relating to concerns like authenticity, democracy, expansionism, family structures, politics or the stewardship of the land, ecological conservation and environmental justice. The cover illustration of the book brings the physical and the ideational together in an image called *The Destroyer* by Arthur Wesley Dow, a painting of the Colorado River within the Grand Canyon.

The collection comprises the Editor's introduction and 16 chapters, the product of scholars in higher education institutions based in the USA and Europe. Chapters deal with the writings of early Spanish explorers, the role of women in the moving frontier, the city as the "New Wild West", California as symbolic of both the pull of the West and the closure of the frontier and Native American writings about reservation life and relationships with the land. Other ethnic communities represented include the Chicana/o, African American and Asian American and their experiences of aspects of the west. Particular writers dealt with in more detail include Mark Twain, Elinor Pruitt Stewart, Helena María Viramontes, Gloria Anzaldúr, Raymond Chandler, John Steinbeck, Leslie Silko, Wallace Stegner and Cormac McCarthy, the latter being an interest of several of the contributors. The chapter on The Western and Film discusses the work of John Ford and Clint Eastwood, among others. Each chapter is reasonably well endowed with footnotes and works cited, some published as recently as 2015. There is a bibliography of further reading covering general texts, ethnic community writings and environmentalist literature.

An interesting element of the book is the 13-page chronology dating from 500 CE to 2012 and listing relevant publications with their dates and a selection of West- and US-related historical events. Inclusion in the list does not ensure any further discussion in the text. The book's index is of names and publication titles only and does not include the chronology. It might have been more useful if it had also included at least some of the subjects covered.

The book is well designed and edited as one would expect from this publisher. The chapters

progress broadly from the historical and general to the contemporary and specific. The paperback price is not excessive. The contributions to this collection will be of value to university students of American literature and the literature of the West in particular. The popularity of the fiction of the American west has been in decline in recent years and the emphasis here is on literature as high culture, so although there is some discussion of early journalism, little will be found on the contribution of dime novels, the pulps, comics, the myriad TV westerns of the 50s and 60s or even writers like Louis L'Amour, Charles Portis or Annie Proulx. However, this companion guide does seek to guide us into new lines of inquiry and is none the worse for that.

Maurice Wakeham

Freelance Reviewer, Billericay, UK

RR 2017/131

Fowler's Concise Dictionary of Modern English Usage (3rd edition)

Edited by Jeremy Butterfield

Oxford University Press

Oxford

2016

[vi] + 646 pp.

ISBN 978 0 19 966631 7

£11.99 \$18.95

Oxford Quick Reference

Also available online as part of *Oxford Reference*

Keywords Dictionaries, English language

Review DOI [10.1108/RR-04-2017-0095](https://doi.org/10.1108/RR-04-2017-0095)

Val Hamilton recently reviewed the 4th edition of the full Monty – oops, Fowler – in these columns (*RR* 2016/050), and this is the, well, concise version. It is an update of the work by Robert Allen published in 2008 as the *Pocket Fowler's Modern English Usage*, itself a cut-down of the biggie. You would, however, need a big pocket for this edition.

Kingsley Amis once said that works of this kind consist not of description, but prescription: not English as she is spoke, but as she should be spoke – or, rather, written – and that those most in need of them aren't listening – implying, rightly in my view, that some people don't need them. He had a point.

The main difference between this edition and the full one, it seems, is that Butterfield's witty personal comments have been largely eliminated. The vast majority of entries are sensible and unremarkable and require no further comment. In this review, I shall therefore concentrate on some specific points, working through the entries sequentially.