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[Gillie, Christopher. Longman companion to English literature]

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Conversation provides a 'text' that can now be analyzed by various individual research workers and research teams all over the world and in this way be subjected to an overall description. A challenge worth taking up.

Jan Firbas

Christopher Gillie, *Longman Companion to English Literature*, London: Longman, 1978, 889 pp.

The Companion is meant primarily, though not exclusively, for students whose mother tongue is not English and who take courses in English literature at non-English universities outside Great Britain. It is concerned with English, or rather British, literature only, not including information about American or Commonwealth literature, but paying considerable attention to foreign influences. The space of time covered is that from 1066 down to the present day.

The book consists of two parts, the first containing three essays devoted in succession to English history, society and thought, and four essays dealing in their turn with the development of English narrative literature, drama, poetry and critical thought. The second part is constituted by a reference section with alphabetically arranged entries. A wide range of subjects related to English literature is covered: English writers, synopses of their works, English philosophers, foreign writers and philosophers who have exerted some influence on English literature, characters from English and world literature, literary movements, technical terms employed by literary theory, various items of background information, historical, political, social, philosophical, educational, etc., etc. A comparatively dense network of cross-references within the Companion greatly heightens its usefulness. The value of the reference work is then further enhanced by the author's successful endeavour to deal with the historical, social and political issues in an unbiased and well-balanced way.

The lucid presentation of the material and the wealth of background information will appeal to a wider readership than one composed merely of students of literature. Being closely related to the outer history of the English language, the information offered by the Companion cannot fail to attract the interest of the linguist. (The author of the present note himself is not a literary historian, but a linguist.)

Seen from a linguist's point of view, it is perhaps a pity that the entry dealing with the English language and the entry dealing with Anglo-Saxon (Old English) literature have not been expanded into essays and transferred to the first section of the Companion. (The entry concerning the English language correctly emphasizes and characterizes the changes that in the course of historical development have taken place in the English stock of words, but does not pay attention to the vital changes that have affected the grammatical structure.) The author is certainly right in maintaining that in important respects Anglo-Saxon literature is distinct from the literature of the later periods and can be regarded as a separate field of study (cf. p. 387), but it used an older form of English as its vehicle, a strong enough argument for giving it full treatment in a companion to English literature. An author, however, has always the legitimate right to limit the scope of his interest and cannot be criticized for it.

Another linguistic note may be added concerning the phonetic transcriptions accompanying some entry titles the pronunciation of which may cause difficulty. This helpful practice could have been extended to cover other titles, such as *Heracles*, *Holmes*, *Hop-o'-my-thumb*, *Igdrasil*, *Inchbald*, *Jacobin*.

To sum up. *The Longman Companion to English Literature* is a highly serviceable book of reference, admirably suited for foreign students of English. Moreover, it is a very attractive publication owing to its general lay-out and the copious illustrations. It will be acclaimed not only by those who specialize in English literature, but even by those who are interested in the English language and English culture in general.

Jan Firbas

