

Contending schools

David Papineau

ADAM KUPER and JESSICA KUPER (Editors)
The Social Science Encyclopedia
 916pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul. £29.95.
 07102 00080

It was ironic that when Sir Keith Joseph decided in 1984 to take the "science" out of the "Social Science Research Council" and rename it the "Economic and Social Research Council", the sociologists, whose scientific credentials he was aiming to diminish, were almost entirely united in favour of his terminological innovation. This was not due to any sudden mass defection to Thatcherism from within the sociological camp, but simply because the one question on which the warring sects of phenomenologists, critical theorists, symbolic interactionists, neo-Wittgensteinians, hermeneuticians, Hegelian Marxists, Foucaultian perspectivalists, ethnomethodologists and deconstructionists can all agree is that, whatever sociological theorizing is, it isn't natural science. Among sociologists only the structuralist Marxists and the number-crunching positivists have ever had any pretensions to scientific status, and neither of these groups is nowadays the force it used to be.

The "science" in Adam Kuper and Jessica Kuper's *The Social Science Encyclopedia* does not however signify any revived commitment to either of these fading minorities, so much as the lack of any suitable alternative term for the range of subjects covered, which includes, as well as sociology, such allied trades as anthropology, economics, psychology and politics. Indeed it is one of the chief virtues of the *Encyclopedia* that it succeeds, throughout this range, in giving full representation to the many contending schools of social scientific thought.

The *Encyclopedia* consists of over seven hundred entries, arranged alphabetically, on topics like Laing, *laissez-faire*, Leach, lexicostatistics, liberalism and Locke. As it happens,

economics gets somewhat more attention than sociology, which in turn slightly outscores psychology, anthropology and politics. There are also relevant entries from philosophy, history and biology, and from such specialisms as demography, linguistics and industrial relations.

Although the *Encyclopedia* itself quite properly avoids such questions as whether the social sciences are really sciences, aiming merely to reflect current orthodoxy, it is interesting to note how that orthodoxy itself varies between different subject areas. Thus where the sociologists often take pains to disavow scientific status, the economists seem to be generally free from anxieties about their scientific standing. The psychologists, on the other hand, seem desperately keen to win scientific recognition, often succumbing to the temptation to clothe everyday ideas in special jargon (as, for example, in "attribution theory", "cognitive dissonance" and "personal construct theory"). No doubt these differences reflect the fact that where sociology has a huge and as yet largely unexplored subject-matter, and economics has to some extent succeeded in charting out a limited and relatively tractable domain, psychology faces the problem that many of the things it would like to tell us about are already part of our commonsensical "folk psychology".

The principles governing the choice of the *Encyclopedia's* entries are not entirely clear. There has obviously been some division of labour, with various subject editors arranging for coverage of topics within their own disciplines. This has produced some redundancy: as well as "semantics" (philosophy) we get "semantic differential" (psychology), "semiotics" (sociology) and "transformational grammar" (linguistics); as well as "game theory" (sociology) we get "public choice" and "public goods" (politics) and "game theory, economic applications". But this overlap is not necessarily a defect. It embodies active disagreement as often as unnecessary repetition, and in general

reflects the way in which disciplinary boundaries often give rise to and preserve quite divergent approaches to common questions. Each entry is individually attributed to its author, and the reader is warned in the general introduction that contributions may well express an optional perspective rather than an authoritative consensus.

A far more serious fault is the lack of a proper referencing system. There is no index. Instead there is simply a list of the entry titles, together with cross-references appended to some of the entries. The cross-references themselves are often defective. While the entry on "self-concept" refers us to "G. H. Mead", the latter entry does not refer us back; "symbolic interactionism" refers us to "Goffman", but not conversely. There are entries on T. C. Koopmans and Jan Tinbergen, the founders of modern econometrics, and an entry on "econometrics" itself, but none of these sends us to any of the others. "Path analysis" and "regression" are simply notational variants of the same statistical technique, but neither entry mentions the alternative.

However, even a better system of cross-references would not help a reader who wanted to track down a name or notion which appeared only within other entries. If you wanted to find out who Harry Braverman was, as I did recently, you would be stuck, unless you already knew enough to find your way to "industry, sociology of". If you wanted to know what *Gemeinschaft* meant, you would first need to light on "mass society". If you wanted to get some information on Niko Tinbergen, you would, after first being misdirected to the entry on his econometrician

namesake, need to poke around until you came to "ethology".

If the difficulties of finding your way around are put to one side, there is much to applaud in the *Encyclopedia*. The entries are in general well written and informative, and pitched at the right level for likely readers. Particularly good are the longer "master entries" on whole disciplines. The only real exceptions are the statistical and mathematical entries, which tend to sacrifice intuitive explanation for mathematical abstraction, and will in general be of little help to the mathematical inexpert.

There is certainly a gap for a book of this kind. The obvious comparison is with the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. But that is a major work in eighteen volumes, not a handbook of this kind. And it was published in 1968, and so is inevitably now somewhat dated. Not that this new *Encyclopedia* is that up to date. Perhaps the topic most frequently looked up by casual readers will be "structuralism". But the relevant entry concentrates almost entirely on anthropology and linguistics, and though there are brief mentions of Piaget and Barthes, there is no indication that figures like Althusser, Foucault and Lacan are also conventionally included in the structuralist pantheon. And as for "post-structuralism", there is nothing at all; nor is there any mention whatsoever, so far as I could see, of either Derrida or deconstruction. But these are relative quibbles. Finding room for every latest intellectual enthusiasm would probably only have hastened the day when this new volume will itself appear dated. As it is, *The Social Science Encyclopedia* should prove useful for some years to come.

Towards total taxonomy

Andrew Rosenheim

TOM MCARTHUR
Worlds of Reference
 230pp. Cambridge University Press. £12.50.
 0521 30637 X

Tom McArthur considers reference works central to our understanding of the history of writing, printing and literature. His arguments are intriguing, if not always completely persuasive.

Orderless information is useless, and what McArthur identifies as our "taxonomic urge" can be found in all four stages of language development: the oral, pre-literate period; writing systems, first devised by the Sumerians and Egyptians; printing from the end of the fifteenth century; and electronic systems for storing and supplying information. *Worlds of Reference* proceeds through these four eras with concise summaries addressed to the general reader; those looking for detailed information on the early history of writing, for example, will do better to consult Albertine Gaur's *A History of Writing*, and much of what McArthur discusses has been treated with more authority by writers such as Walter Ong and Elizabeth Eisenstein, whom he freely cites.

It is instead the implications he draws from these historical précis that make McArthur's book so lively. Occasionally his eagerness to find a continuum of taxonomic activity seems strained, and an almost fancifully protean definition of reference works means that the author of virtually any early organized piece of writing can be subsumed into McArthur's schema as a "proto-encyclopedist". With the discussion of the impact of printing technology McArthur grows at once more imaginative and more concrete. The adoption of alphabetization as a standard ordering convention for factual material was almost as great a catalyst for the mass introduction of reference books as the invention of movable type. A split between thematically and alphabetically organized data grew up; the explosion in lexicography traced carefully by McArthur from Johnson and Webster through Funk and Chambers to the dictionary wars of this century shows how strongly a headword-driven alphabetical method of presentation has prevailed. Of those who offered thematically organized material few are remembered today, except Coleridge – better known, McArthur says without a trace

of irony, "as a poet and friend of William Wordsworth" – and Peter Mark Roget.

Yet even Roget's classic work won its immense popularity only after his son supplied an expanded alphabetical index to the "brief afterthought" the father had originally supplied to his confounding if carefully conceived categories of synonyms. Today alphabetization is so deeply ingrained in most readers that they balk at any system eschewing it. Perhaps surprisingly McArthur argues strongly for the merits of thematic schemes, revealing what must be a unique enthusiasm for the fifteenth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* with its Macropaedia, Micropaedia, and Propaedia. Here he loses sight of the critical issue of user convenience. The alphabetical dictionaries of synonyms McArthur condemns for masquerading under the name "Roget" are popular precisely because they are quicker to use than the original two-step version.

Ease and speed of use, together a large part of the original promise of computers, have been oddly slow to materialize in the new technology. Computers have helped to compile dictionaries since the 1960s, and most works of reference now exist in machine-readable form. But the widespread use of reference works in electronic form – given scant attention by McArthur – has been retarded by the cumbersome media through which they have been supplied. The telecommunications links McArthur optimistically espouses have in fact been the chief obstacles to dissemination of electronic reference material. Who wants to pay the cost of a modern, subscription-free telephone (and wait five minutes when the remote main frame machine is "down") merely to check a dictionary definition?

Only the very recent explosion in micro-computer use has changed this, as considerable processing power and storage capacity have become available on a personal computer. The new use of compact discs for storing digitized information, moreover, suggests that a micro-computer user will soon need to devote no greater a proportion of his electronic library to reference works than he already does on his bookshelves. Finally, as McArthur briefly notes, advances in expert systems and natural language processing should spur the creation of vast electronic data bases of reference material, accessible in ways both alphabetical and thematic, thus effectively dissolving the organizational divide that has dogged the world of reference for so long.

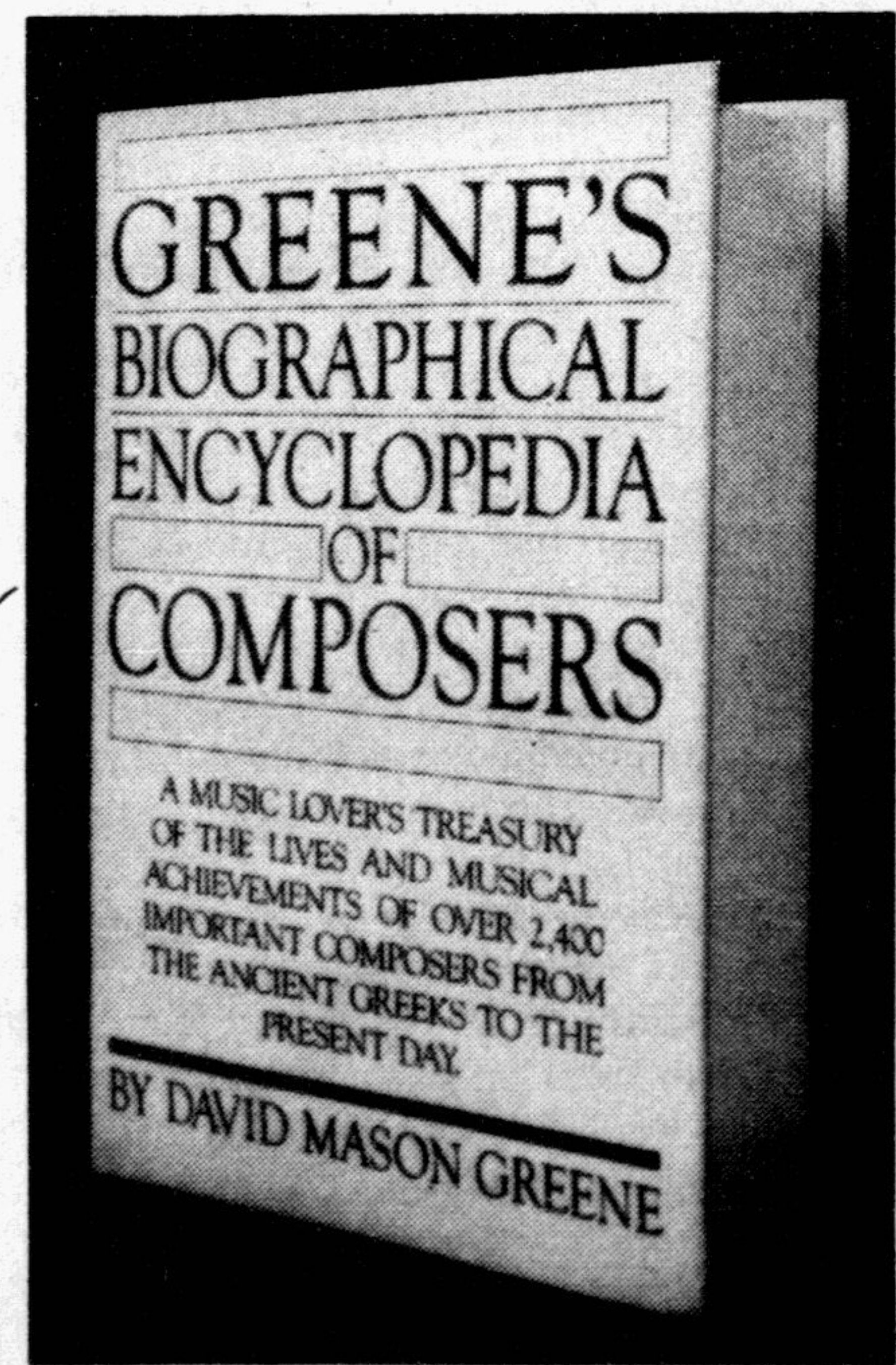
Collins Reference Books

Greene's Biographical Encyclopedia of Composers

by David Mason Greene

Written with humour, style and the vast knowledge of a leading music scholar, this fascinating encyclopedia presents a wealth of facts, historical detail and anecdotes that illuminate each composer's contribution to the world of music.

ISBN 0 00 434363 8 1408 pages 238x133 mm hardback 1986 £30



Collins Concise Spanish Dictionary

Collins Concise Italian Dictionary

Two new titles in the bi-lingual range pioneered by the highly successful Collins-Robert French Dictionary. Coverage of current Spanish (including Latin American forms) and Italian is clear, concise and comprehensive and includes thousands of illustrative phrases and examples.

Collins Concise Spanish Dictionary
 ISBN 0 00 433434 5 1024 pages 210x133 mm hardback 1985 £7.95

Collins Concise Italian Dictionary
 ISBN 0 00 433443 4 1024 pages 210x133 mm hardback 1985 £8.95

Collins Concise Dictionary of Quotations

A freshly compiled and edited collection of over 8000 quotations arranged alphabetically by author, ranging from Thucydides to Thatcher, from Dante to Bob Dylan.

ISBN 0 00 434369 7 187x112 mm hardback 1983, reprinted 1986 £5.95

H L Mencken's Dictionary of Quotations

H L Mencken's original and wide-ranging selection of over 32,000 quotations. Full information is given on sources and history and quotations are arranged thematically for ease of reference.

ISBN 0 00 434569 X 1357 pages 243x170 mm hardback 1982, reprinted 1984 £19.95

French Paintings and Drawings

A fine record of one of Britain's best collections of French paintings housed in the main art gallery at Kelvingrove, Glasgow.

ISBN 0 00 435649 7
 160 pages 88 colour illustrations 122 black and white 263x196 mm hardback 1985 £9.95

Collins

Papineau, David. "Contending schools." The Times Literary Supplement, no. 4336, 9 May 1986, p. 492. The Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive, link.gale.com/apps/doc/EX1200449675/TLSH?u=tlisacc&sid=bookmark-TLSH. Accessed 23 Sept. 2023.