



The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages

By Harold Bloom

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Literary critic Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon* is more than a required reading list-it is a vision. Infused with a love of learning, compelling in its arguments for a unifying written culture, it argues brilliantly against the politicization of literature and presents a guide to the great works of the western literary tradition and essential writers of the ages. *The Western Canon* was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Discussed and debated, revered and reviled, Bloom's tome reinvigorates and re-examines Western Literature, arguing against the politicization of reading. His erudite passion will encourage you to hurry and finish his book so you can pick up Shakespeare, Austen and Dickens once again to rediscover their original magic. In addition, his appendix listing of the "future" canon - the books today that will be timeless tomorrow - is sure to be the template for future debate.

From [Booklist](#)

A review of 200 or 300 words cannot do justice to a book like this: it is the summation of a great critic's most fundamental beliefs--something like a dying Bernstein's last performance of Mahler's ninth, though in this case a lot less sad. In fact, this book of essays represents Bloom at his most celebratory, and there's a wonderful, vigorous energy about it. Why, one wonders, reading it, do we bother reading anybody *but* Shakespeare, Dante, or Chaucer? The argument for Shakespeare is particularly compelling. Bloom believes that Shakespeare *is* the canon: that he defines for the Western world the standards by which we judge all literature. And more: he defines for us what we are ourselves, what we understand of human nature. This argument, offered with Bloom's customary flare for the controversial, is akin to the remark that all philosophy is a footnote to Plato, and like it, is probably in large measure true. Thus, modern psychology doesn't add very much to what people could have already learned from reading Shakespeare because Shakespeare defines the limits of what we know: we can't get beyond or outside him. Certainly, experience teaches that Bloom is right; indeed, the evolution of human consciousness seems to have taken one of its periodic jolts forward about the time of Shakespeare, and he above all seems to have captured the entire scope of what was new. As Bloom points out, Shakespeare is universally adored, in all languages, and perhaps it is for this reason. The essays on Dante and Chaucer are almost equally powerful, though in a sense less awesome. And the brief remarks about the powerful movements of resentment trying to push apart these great pillars of the Western canon, though perspicacious, are melancholy and incidental. Get this book for the great essays on Shakespeare. For lovers of literature, probably nothing more powerful or in an odd way more religious will be written this year. *Stuart Whitwell*

From Kirkus Reviews

One of our biggest critical gun fires a characteristically Olympian broadside into the canon debate, no quarter spared for the politically correct. In measures carefully calculated to raise the hackles of would-be canon revisers Bloom (*The Book of J*, 1990, etc.) assails "the current disease of moral smugness that is destroying literary study in the name of socio-economic justice." He loftily derides the notion that literature either has a social mission or can profitably be discussed in its own social and historical context. For Bloom, literary interest is always a question of artistic merit, which rests on the degree of "literary individuality and poetic autonomy" a text achieves. Bloom disclaims any ideology, but his preferred model of literary study--a solitary one--is as unexceptionally conservative as the qualities by which he determines merit. So too is the reading list that emerges from his account of the endless contest between "strong poets" and their even stronger precursors (the agonistic principle of "anxiety of influence" familiar from Bloom's earlier criticism), the strongest being Shakespeare, whom Bloom adores with unqualified Bardolatry. Doubtless, much of the debate *The Western Canon* is intended to provoke will rage around the Cultural Literacystyle "ideal canon" Bloom sets forth in an appendix (no Behn, Gaskell, or Alice Walker--a favorite target of Bloom's ire--though it does include poet Rita Dove, Toni Morrison, Chinua Achebe, and other geographically and culturally far-ranging writers). Bloom's vast learning and elegant prose don't always save

him from tired tirades against the imagined evils of feminist or materialist criticism, nor from repetitiousness: One of the problems of Bloom's approach is that all great writing can end up sounding rather too similar. But even those who disagree fundamentally with Bloom will find him an engaging antagonist. An unashamed spur to contention, and all the better for it: an elegant and erudite provocation. -- *Copyright ©1994, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Roxanne Jimenez:

Information is provisions for anyone to get better life, information nowadays can get by anyone from everywhere. The information can be a information or any news even a huge concern. What people must be consider any time those information which is within the former life are difficult to be find than now is taking seriously which one works to believe or which one the resource are convinced. If you find the unstable resource then you obtain it as your main information you will have huge disadvantage for you. All those possibilities will not happen within you if you take *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* as the daily resource information.

Alice Edwards:

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Awilda Kell:

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