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Harold Bloom

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The Western Canon

APPENDIX A-D



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can make me feel like I am unread. However, every time I study anything written by Harold Bloom I discover an entire new list of authors and works with which I was unfamiliar. I really enjoy studying Mr. Bloom's works. It can take me, literally, years, to fully study all the subject matter Mr. Bloom writes about in a book such as this. And he uses a lot of metaphors that I do not fully comprehend. However, I always learn a lot, even if I do not understand every point being made. Also, I don't always enjoy or appreciate all of the authors and works Mr. Bloom discusses. An example in this book is Mr. Bloom extolling the virtues of "Finnegans Wake" by James Joyce, a book that I consider to be barely readable, but Mr. Bloom considers a work of genius. On the other end of the spectrum, Mr. Bloom is extremely critical of Edgar Allan Poe, a lot of whose work I enjoy. That aside I always learn a great deal. I consider this work and another by Mr. Bloom, "How to Read and Why" as the equivalent of approx. 6 college credits in literature if these books along with all of the authors and works discussed within are fully studied.

The Western Canon Harold Bloom Appendix AD The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages is a 1994 book by Harold Bloom on Western literature. It is his best-known book alongside *The Anxiety of Influence*, and was a surprise bestseller upon its release in the United States. The book argues against what Bloom calls the "School of Resentment", in which he includes feminist literary criticism, Marxist literary criticism, Lacanians, New Historicism, Deconstructionists, and semioticians. The book also contained four appendices that listed works that at the time he considered canonical, stretching from earliest scriptures to Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*. Bloom would later disown the list, saying that it was written at his editor's insistence and distracted from the book's intention. Norman Fruman wrote that "The Western Canon is a heroically brave, formidably learned and often unbearably sad response to the present state of the humanities".

.com 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 sOne 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.