



Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?

By Harold Bloom

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In one of his most inspiring books yet, Harold Bloom, our preeminent literary critic, takes the reader from the Bible through the twentieth century, searching for the ways literature can inform lives. Through comparisons of the Book of Job and Ecclesiastes, Plato and Homer, Johnson and Goethe, Cervantes and Shakespeare, Montaigne and Bacon, Emerson and Nietzsche, Freud and Proust, and finally discussions of the Gospel of Thomas and St. Augustine, Bloom distills the various—and even contrary—forms of wisdom that have shaped our thinking.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Emulating one of his favorite critics, Dr. Samuel Johnson, Bloom returns once more to sift through the Western canon, this time to discern and describe those writers whose brand of wisdom he holds in highest esteem. Beginning with Job and Ecclesiastes, and ranging from Plato, Homer, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Montaigne, Francis Bacon, Johnson and Goethe to Emerson, Nietzsche, Freud and Proust, Bloom writes gracefully about each as he evaluates by comparison and teases out indicators of their subtle interrelationships. Into this highbrow brew he interjects a personal note, describing how he is writing in the aftermath of life-threatening illness and with a renewed sense of the preciousness of literature's great lessons. At the heart of Bloom's project is the ancient quarrel between "poetry" and "philosophy." In Bloom's opinion, we ought not have to choose between Homer and Plato; we can have both, as long as we recognize that poetry is superior. Bloom considers Cervantes and Shakespeare the masters of wisdom in modern literature, "equals of Ecclesiastes, and the Book of Job, of Homer and Plato." He justifies his tastes with close readings of King Lear and Macbeth that find a Shakespearean variety of nihilism, a form of wisdom Bloom identifies as central to the poetic tradition. In his intricate discussion of each great writer, Bloom offers the rich perceptions of a scholar drawing on the whole of a long and thoughtful career.

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From Booklist

Passionate and prolific literary critic Bloom grows more munificent in sharing his erudition and appreciation, discoveries, and opinions with each book. Here he confides that this exegesis of what he calls wisdom literature "rises out of personal need" in the wake of a nearly fatal illness. Bloom declares that he now has "only three criteria" for literature: "aesthetic splendor, intellectual power, and wisdom." Thus armed, he elaborates on each quality in close readings of his favorite wisdom writings. Bloom begins with Job, "one of the world's great poems, though complex and ambivalent," and "his personal favorite" book in the Bible, Ecclesiastes. Trailing piquant asides on the state of American society, Bloom moves on to Plato, Cervantes and Shakespeare, the wise essayists Montaigne and Francis Bacon, his hero Samuel Johnson and the "endless wonder" Goethe, Emerson and Nietzsche, Freud and Proust, and the Gospel of Thomas and St. Augustine. Bloom's immersion in and gratitude for these diverse and inexhaustible works will inspire readers to be on the lookout for wisdom in every work that speaks to them. *Donna Seaman*

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Review

...at his best, [Bloom] elevates critical writing to the level of literature itself. -- *The New York Times Book Review*, October 10, 2004

Bloom's...gratitude for these...works will inspire readers to be on the lookout for wisdom in every work that speaks to them. -- *Booklist*, October 1, 2004

Bloom...has launched another masterly work... -- *Library Journal*, October 1, 2004

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Patricia Oyler:

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