



## A Temple of Texts

By William H. Gass

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From one of the most admired essayists and novelists at work today: a new collection of essays—his first since *Tests of Time*, winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for Criticism.

These twenty-five essays speak to the nature and value of writing and to the books that result from a deep commitment to the word. Here is Gass on Rilke and Gertrude Stein; on friends such as Stanley Elkin, Robert Coover, and William Gaddis; and on a company of “healthy dissidents,” among them Rabelais, Elias Canetti, John Hawkes, and Gabriel García Márquez.

In the title essay, Gass offers an annotated list of the fifty books that have most influenced his thinking and his work and writes about his first reaction to reading each. Among the books: Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (“A lightning bolt,” Gass writes. “Philosophy was not dead after all. Philosophical ambitions were not extinguished. Philosophical beauty had not fled prose.”) . . . Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist* (“A man after my own heart. He is capable of the simplest lyrical stroke, as bold and direct as a line by Matisse, but he can be complex in a manner that could cast Nabokov in the shade . . . Shakespeare may have been smarter, but he did not know as much.”) . . . Gustave Flaubert’s letters (“Here I learned—and learned—and learned.”) And after reading Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur*, Gass writes “I began to eat books like an alien worm.”

In the concluding essay, “Evil,” Gass enlarges upon the themes of artistic quality and cultural values that are central to the books he has considered, many of which seek to reveal the worst in people while admiring what they do best. As Gass writes, “The true alchemists do not change lead into gold, they change the world into words.”

*A Temple of Texts* is Gass at his most alchemical.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Gass loves words. His prose is extravagant, lush, sometimes overly florid (as when he talks of Flann O'Brien's death on "the first Fools' Day of April, 1966"), and in this new collection, his words have a tendency to get in the way of his subject matter. Which is a shame, because Gass, a novelist and award-winning critic, writes about books and authors often ignored by mainstream readers: Rabelais, Robert Burton, Elias Canetti. Then again, Gass doesn't write for the mainstream. He is the strangest of academic amalgams: a self-professed lover of the avant-garde as represented by Gertrude Stein, Flann O'Brien and Robert Coover, while at the same time he extols the virtues of what he calls "the classics." His definition of classic is, to be sure, expansive, but he applies an old-fashioned standard to all literature, declaring the need for those classics as the basis for a varied literary diet. Despite the occasional gem, such as a touching, if rambling, tribute to William Gaddis, the essays often devolve into little more than a brief synopsis of plot. This volume is appropriately titled, because Gass approaches his subjects reverently, but as in a temple, the service depends as much on the ritual of devotion as on innovation in thought. (*Feb. 20*)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

It's unfortunate that the term *critic* often connotes negativity and sniping. What novelist and professor of philosophy William Gass practices in his critical essays is more in the line of learned appreciation or ecstatic advocacy. Though many of these pieces first appeared in other books as forwards, afterwards, and introductions, reviewers feel that *A Temple of Texts* may be his most cohesive collection yet. Gass's allusions and elaborate metaphors don't make for skimming. But for those willing to dig in, the author fulfills his mission "to provide suggestions of where best to start, what to expect, how to look or read or listen; and to give reasons why the work should be treated with seriousness and respect."

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From [Booklist](#)

\*Starred Review\* Each collection of essays by Gass is an event, and this gathering of 25 vital and virtuoso inquiries into the pleasures and value of literature is, as the title suggests, at once exalted and sheltering. In *Tests of Time* (2002), winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award, Gass focused on the state of the writer in our war-torn world. Here he celebrates the book. Gass cannily explicates texts sacred in the realms of religion and literature, building a "temple of texts" out of "Fifty Literary Pillars," a provocative array of writers that includes Samuel Beckett, who "writes equally well in two languages: Nitty and Gritty." (For Gass, wit always accompanies wonderment.) A more serene and syntactically gifted critic than his fellow literary giant, Harold Bloom, Gass offers exquisite and clarion readings of Erasmus, Gertrude Stein, Stanley Elkin, and many underappreciated writers. Unmatched in the intensity of his comprehension and the elegance of his analysis, Gass constructs erudite and spirited essays that readers will add to their temples of texts, especially "Influence," a brilliant riff on shades of meaning, and "A Defense of the Book," incisive testimony to the ongoing significance of books and libraries. *Donna Seaman*

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Nowadays reading books become more than want or need but also turn into a life style. This reading routine give you lot of advantages. The benefits you got of course the knowledge the rest of the information inside the book that improve your knowledge and information. The details you get based on what kind of book you read, if you want drive more knowledge just go with schooling books but if you want experience happy read one having theme for entertaining like comic or novel. The A Temple of Texts is kind of reserve which is giving the reader unforeseen experience.

**Jennifer Lorenzo:**

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**Kenneth Kan:**

Playing with family in a very park, coming to see the water world or hanging out with buddies is thing that usually you may have done when you have spare time, then why you don't try factor that really opposite from that. One activity that make you not feeling tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you are ride on and with addition associated with. Even you love A Temple of Texts, it is possible to enjoy both. It is excellent combination right, you still wish to miss it? What kind of hangout type is it? Oh seriously its mind hangout men. What? Still don't have it, oh come on its named reading friends.

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