



## Canons and Contexts

By Paul Lauter

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This collection of essays places issues central to literary study, particularly the question of the canon, in the context of institutional practices in American colleges and universities. Lauter addresses such crucial concerns as what students should read and study, how standards of "quality" are defined and changed, the limits of theoretical discourse, and the ways race, gender, and class shape not only teaching, curricula, and research priorities, but collegiate personnel actions as well. The book examines critically the variety of recent proposals for "reforming" higher education, and it calls into question many practices, like employing large numbers of part-timers, now popular with college managers. Offering concrete examples of a "comparative" method for teaching literary texts, and specific instances about "integrating" curricula, *Canons and Contexts* proposes realistic ideas for creating varied, spirited, and democratic classrooms and colleges.

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#### Review

"Excellent...An important, provocative book that...adds much to the heated discussion of the canon."--*American Literature*

"The essays in this volume challenge the traditional canon from a feminist and multicultural perspective; they also discuss the politics of higher education...as the context in which the canon debate is being played out. In addition... the book is a brilliant work of critical theory, one that eschews theoretical jargon in order to interrogate the discourses of texts and of criticism."--*The Women's Review of Books*

"The debate between theory and action is as old as the idea of reform....I do not question the real value of the work Lauter has done in the profession and in his writings, collected here, over the past twenty years. Lauter himself proposes a 'functional' approach to the study of literature, and, from one perspective, his work can most usefully be understood through its function in the profession and through its role in creating change."--Peter Carafiol, *Association of Departments of English Journal*

"Lauter has consistently been among the first to focus attention on the political issues that concern literature professors now. Over and over again his book reminds us, powerfully and with a wealth of knowledge and insight, that 'what is involved in literary history is survival.'"--Jane Tompkins, *Duke University*

"If you want to see what it means to bring remarkable interpretive sophistication and exemplary moral conscience to the historically grounded study of American literature, read these essays. In fact, read them more than once."--Michael Cowan, University of California, Santa Cruz

#### From the Back Cover

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#### About the Author

Paul Lauter is at Trinity College.

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