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WILLIAM H. GASS

A Temple of Texts

“Each collection of essays by Gass is an event.

This gathering of 25 vital and virtuoso inquiries into the pleasures and values of literature is, as the title suggests, at once exalted and sheltering... 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 own temples of texts.”

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“He writes with spellbinding passion.

Gass is a man who loves the written word both for what it says and for how it sounds, and he shares this lifelong love affair with books as well as his insights into the nature of humankind, religion, and art.”

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“Don’t skim any of these ebullient pages.

If Gass’s first three essays don’t hook you, you probably aren’t an inveterate work freak and won’t declare this lively book a worthy companion to its author’s several prize-winning essay collections.

“In an utterly perfect introductory essay, Gass sings the praises of multiplicity, contradiction and polyphony in literature, urging readers to become, above all else, omnivorous (‘The healthy mind goes everywhere’). ‘Influence’ rambles engagingly about the title phenomenon’s central relationship to artistic creation, meanwhile tossing off witty aphorisms with imper-turbable ease. ‘Fifty Literary Pillars’ then offers concise tributes to literary and philosophical works that have influenced Gass, acknowledging consensus classics and drawing attention to comparative arcana.

“A well-fed yet ceaselessly hungry mind is hunting and gathering, here and in subsequent celebrations—of Renaissance masters Erasmus and Rabelais, unparalleled antiquarian Robert Burton, Latin America’s magical realists, Gertrude Stein’s annoyingly innovative prose experiments and Robert Coover’s abrasive political novel *The Public Burning*. Gass loves Dickens’s verbal energy, Henry James’s stentorian complexity, postmodernist intellectuals and philosophical clowns—almost as much as he scorns hypertext (‘The information highway has no destination, and the sense of travel it provides is pure illusion’). Three very different masters receive special attention: manic rhetorician Stanley Elkin, underrated satirist William Gaddis, and the great German poet Rilke.

“Don’t skim any of these ebullient pages, which offer a seductive mixture of analytical precision and colloquial chutzpah. A learned potpourri of fulminations and enthusiasms from the indefatigably stylish novelist, teacher and critic.” —*Kirkus*, a starred review

WILLIAM H. GASS—essayist, novelist, literary critic—was born in Fargo, North Dakota. He has been the recipient of two PEN Awards, three National Book Critic Circle Awards, a Lannan Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award, the Award for Fiction from the Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and fellowships from the Rockefeller and Guggenheim Foundations. He lives in St. Louis.

