



Bitter Scrolls: Sexist Poison in the Canon

Peter Heinegg

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Bitter Scrolls is a broad survey of our "sacred texts," both Holy Writ (Hebrew Bible, New Testament, Qur'an) and secular masterpieces, from the Epic of Gilgamesh to the work of William Butler Yeats and D.H. Lawrence, whose canonical status often exempts them from the sort of hardnosed, commonsense criticism that we uniformly apply to contemporary literature and art. A frank look at this literature reveals a stunning combination of bias and blindness toward women. Acknowledging this would, in any case, be painful and depressing; but confronting it in some of our greatest minds-Homer, Aeschylus, Virgil, Boccaccio, Rabelais, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Wordsworth, and so on-must inevitably give rise to profound, if no longer unusual, culture shock. With few exceptions, we can no more remake the canon than we can redesign our family tree, but we need to come to terms with the toxic contents of our art.



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