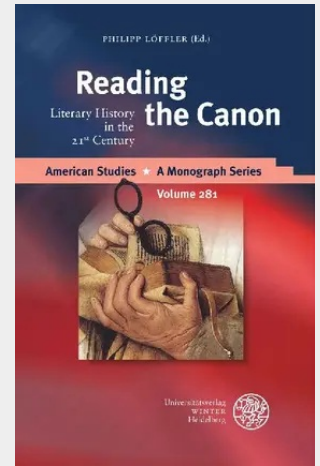


Reading the Canon

Literary History in the 21st Century

'Reading the Canon' explores the relation between the production of literary value and the problem of periodization, tracing how literary tastes, particular reader communities, and sites of literary learning shape the organization of literature in historical perspective. Rather than suggesting a political critique of the canon, this book shows that the production of literary relevance and its tacit hierarchies of value are necessary consequences of how reading and writing are organized as social practices within different fields of literary activity. 'Reading the Canon' offers a comprehensive theoretical account of the conundrums still defining contemporary debates about literary value; the book also features a series of historically-inflected author studies—from classics, such as Shakespeare and Thomas Pynchon, to less likely figures, such as John Neal and Owen Johnson—that illustrate how the idea of literary relevance has been appropriated throughout history and across a variety of national and transnational literary institutions.

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