

Seth Lerer presents an original take on tradition in the literary imagination. He asks how we can have an unironic, affective relationship to the literary past in an age marked by historical self-consciousness, critical distance, and shifts in cultural literacy. *Tradition: A Feeling for the Literary Past* ranges through a set of fiction, poetry, and criticism that makes up our inherited traditions and that also confronts the question of a literary canon and its personal and historical meaning. How are we taught to have a felt experience of literary objects? How do we make our personal anthologies of reading to shape social selves? Why should we care about what literature does both to and for us? This book affirms the value of close and nuanced reading for our understanding of both past and present. Its larger goal is to explore the ways in which the literary past makes us, and in the process, how we create canons for reading, teaching, and scholarship. The writers discussed here were all great readers. Dickens and Orwell, Rushdie and Bradbury, Dickinson and Frost, Anne Bradstreet and Gjertrud Schnackenberg, Chaucer, Dante, Virgil—they all built their literary structures on the scaffold of their bookshelves. Lerer demonstrates how reading the past generates the literary present, and imagines our literate future.