



A Canticle for Leibowitz

By Walter M. Miller
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Introduction

Winner of the 1961 Hugo Award for Best Novel and widely considered one of the most accomplished, powerful, and enduring classics of modern speculative fiction, Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is a true landmark of twentieth-century literature—a chilling and still-provocative look at a post-apocalyptic future.

Questions for Discussion

1. What actual historical period was Miller inspired by? What similarities are there between this historical setting and the imaginary post-nuclear world Miller depicts? Do you find the parallels plausible?
2. There have been many depictions of nuclear war and its aftermath, but Miller's was one of the few to meet with both critical and popular success. What are the problems involved with writing realistically but entertainingly on the topic, and how does Miller overcome them?
3. How would you characterize Miller's attitude toward religion in general, and the Catholic Church in particular? Is he celebrating it or mocking it?
4. Through the book, different characters come and go. Who or what would you say the central character really is?
5. How does Miller depict science and progress? How does his attitude toward these topics differ from those of the other authors whose work we have discussed?
6. There's a lot of irony in the book, and a considerable amount of humor. Would you say that its ultimate message is one of despair? What message might Miller have wanted his readers to take away from it.
7. It has been nearly 50 years since the publication of *A Canticle For Leibowitz*, yet it has never been out of print. How does the novel relate to the social and political climate today?

About the Author

Walter M. Miller, Jr. grew up in the American South and enlisted in the Army Air Corps a month after Pearl Harbor. He spent most of World War II as a radio operator and tail gunner, participating in more than fifty-five combat missions, among them the controversial destruction of the Benedictine abbey at Monte Casino, the oldest monastery in the Western world. Fifteen years later he wrote *A Canticle for Leibowitz*.