



Talking Back to Emily Dickinson, and Other Essays

William H. Pritchard

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This collection makes the case for literary criticism as an informed, aggressive, personal, and often humorous response to writers and writing. An unrepentant academic, William Pritchard nonetheless finds himself looking vainly, in much current professional study of literature, for what he sees as criticism's central task. This involves in part, an attentiveness to the performing voice of the novelist, poetry, or essayist under discussion. To bring out this quality, the critic must exploit, with invention and intrepidity, his or her own responsive voice--must "talk back" to the work of art.

The essays, all of them about English and American writers, are arranged chronologically, beginning with Shakespeare, an Edmund Burke, and proceeding through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to end with contemporaries like Kingsley Amis, V. S. Naipaul, and Doris Lessing. Pritchard writes with equal authority about poetry and fiction; the collection also includes assessments of critics such as Matthew Arnold and Thomas Carlyle, Ford Madox Ford and R. P. Blackmur.

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