



Sincerity's Shadow : Self-Consciousness in British Romantic and Mid-Twentieth-Century American Poetry

Deborah Forbes

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In a work of surprising range and authority, Deborah Forbes refocuses critical discussion of both Romantic and modern poetry. *Sincerity's Shadow* is a versatile conceptual toolkit for reading poetry.

Ever since Wordsworth redefined poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," poets in English have sought to represent a "sincere" self-consciousness through their work. Forbes's generative insight is that this project can only succeed by staging its own failures. Self-representation never achieves final sincerity, but rather produces an array of "sincerity effects" that give form to poetry's exploration of self. In essays comparing poets as seemingly different in context and temperament as Wordsworth and Adrienne Rich, Lord Byron and Anne Sexton, John Keats and Elizabeth Bishop, Forbes reveals unexpected convergences of poetic strategy. A lively and convincing dialectic is sustained through detailed readings of individual poems. By preserving the possible claims of sincerity longer than postmodern criticism has tended to, while understanding sincerity in the strictest sense possible, Forbes establishes a new vantage on the purposes of poetry.

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