



First We Read, Then We Write: Emerson on the Creative Process

Robert D. Richardson

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Writing was the central passion of Emerson's life. While his thoughts on the craft are well developed in "The Poet," "The American Scholar," *Nature*, "Goethe," and "Persian Poetry," less well known are the many pages in his private journals devoted to the relationship between writing and reading. Here, for the first time, is the Concord Sage's energetic, exuberant, and unconventional advice on the idea of writing, focused and distilled by the preeminent Emerson biographer at work today.

Emerson advised that "the way to write is to throw your body at the mark when your arrows are spent." *First We Read, Then We Write* contains numerous such surprises—from "every word we speak is million-faced" to "talent alone cannot make a writer"—but it is no mere collection of aphorisms and exhortations. Instead, in Robert Richardson's hands, the biographical and historical context in which Emerson worked becomes clear. Emerson's advice grew from his personal experience; in practically every moment of his adult life he was either preparing to write, trying to write, or writing. Richardson shows us an Emerson who is no granite bust but instead is a fully fleshed, creative person disarmingly willing to confront his own failures. Emerson urges his readers to try anything—strategies, tricks, makeshifts—speaking not only of the nuts and bolts of writing but also of the grain and sinew of his determination. Whether a writer by trade or a novice, every reader will find something to treasure in this volume. Fearlessly wrestling with "the birthing stage of art," Emerson's counsel on being a reader and writer will be read and reread for years to come.

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