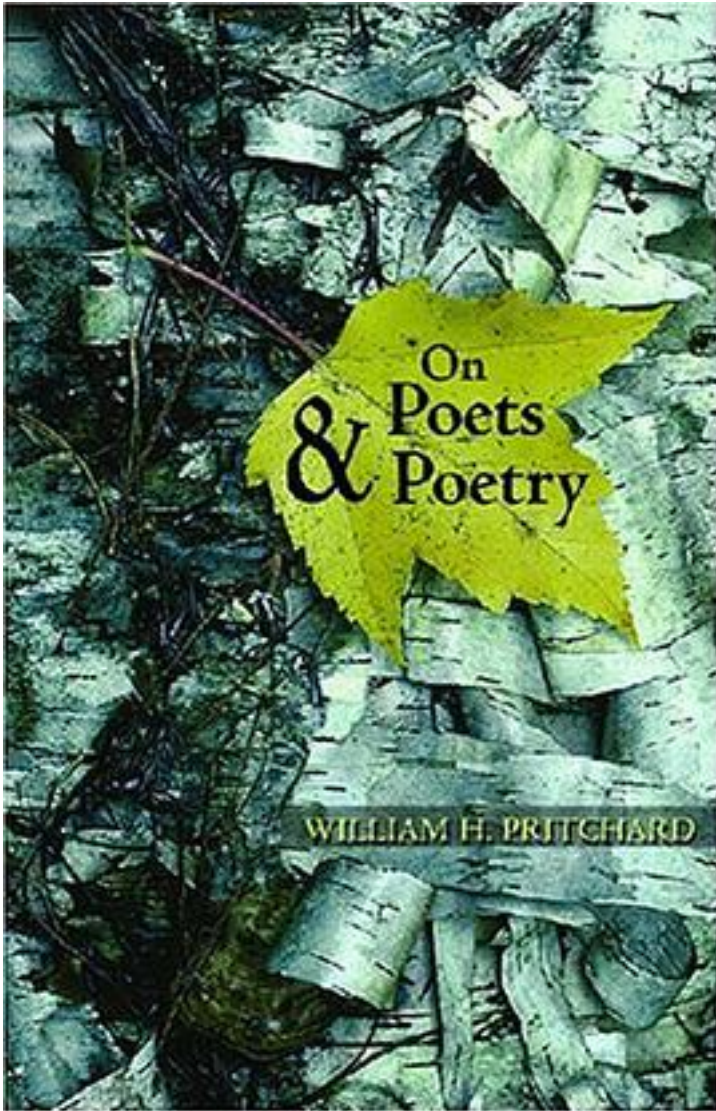


On Poets and Poetry



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著者:William H. Pritchard

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William Pritchard's collection of essays and reviews on poets and poetry ranges from Dryden and Milton through the major American and British poets of the last century. One of them, Philip Larkin, answered an interviewer's question about what he had learned from his study of other poets by snapping back, "Oh, for Christ's sake, one doesn't study poets. You read them, and think: That's marvelous; how is it done?" Although Pritchard has been talking with students about poets for more than fifty years, his practice in writing has Larkin's question in mind: how to describe convincingly the way it's done, the "marvelous" creations of Tennyson, Hardy, Yeats, Robert Lowell, or Larkin himself. Pritchard's aim throughout is to address not only academics but the larger, intelligent audience of non-specialist readers who look to poetry for the surprise that is central to all imaginative literature. Hugh Kenner, one of three twentieth-century critics of poetry treated in this book, once wrote that "the chief requisite for criticism is not analytic skill but a trained sensibility." William Pritchard's sensibility has been trained in the practice of attending to a poet's style and voice--of what Robert Frost once called "ear-reading." His endeavor is not to discover hidden, buried treasures (what the poem "really means") but to engage with instances of measured language as they reveal themselves, in both the "timing" of individual poems and the historical time in which poets and poetry live.

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