

Preface

IN PUTTING TOGETHER THIS COLLECTION of prose, written over a period of twenty years, I thought I had no choice but to adopt the method of the Roman Historian Ninius, who in compiling his *History of Roman Britain* “made a heap of all that I found.” Surprisingly, in the small heap made from these mostly occasional essays, I discovered a record of my most important literary influences, those writers who not only helped me to develop a literary temperament but who also helped to socialize and humanize me. Literary influence differs from the influence of family and place, which are largely involuntary and often unconscious, and as such it is the story of a writer’s deliberate attempt to find and make something like a literary home. These essays outline part of my attempt to make such a place in the world of writing. They also acknowledge the luck, fortune, and grace that mysteriously preside over the process that has brought me closer to the thing I most wanted to become, a writer and poet. Not so surprisingly, I discovered that these essays, especially the shorter ones, are an expression of certain preoccupations I have had over the years with the language of poetry and its various traditions, and they reflect the materials I have used as a teacher of literature and writing. It is my hope that these preoccupations intersect in interesting and perhaps provocative ways with the history of my influences as it stands so far.

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