



Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing (The Empson Lectures)

By Margaret Atwood

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What is the role of the Writer? Prophet? High Priest of Art? Court Jester? Or witness to the real world? Looking back on her own childhood and writing career, Margaret Atwood examines the metaphors which writers of fiction and poetry have used to explain--or excuse!--their activities, looking at what costumes they have assumed, what roles they have chosen to play. In her final chapter she takes up the challenge of the title: if a writer is to be seen as "gifted", who is doing the giving and what are the terms of the gift? Atwood's wide reference to other writers, living and dead, is balanced by anecdotes from her own experiences, both in Canada and elsewhere. The lightness of her touch is offset by a seriousness about the purpose and the pleasures of writing, and by a deep familiarity with the myths and traditions of western literature. Margaret Atwood was born in 1939 in Ottawa and grew up in northern Quebec, Ontario, and Toronto. She received her undergraduate degree from Victoria College at the University of Toronto and her master's degree from Radcliffe College. Throughout her thirty years of writing, Atwood has received numerous awards and honorary degrees. Her newest novel, *The Blind Assassin*, won the 2000 Booker Prize for Fiction. She is the author of more than twenty-five volumes of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction and is perhaps best known for her novels, which include *Alias Grace* (1996), *The Robber Bride* (1994), *Cat's Eye* (1988), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1983), *Surfacing* (1972) and *The Edible Woman* (1970). Acclaimed for her talent for portraying both personal lives and worldly problems of universal concern, Atwood's work has been published in more than thirty-five languages, including Japanese, Turkish, Finnish, Korean, Icelandic, and Estonian.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

After having been through the "wash-and-spin cycle" a few times, Margaret Atwood realized that her "own experience in the suds may be relevant to others." Thus was born *Negotiating with the Dead*, six essays about what it means to be a writer, particularly a female writer. Each essay explores one aspect of writerly contemplation: art vs. commerce; the ideal reader; the separation between the part of a person that writes and the part that lives; and, as the title suggests, the constant presence of those who came before (both writers and other ancestors). Atwood relates her own experiences as a female poet (to be taken seriously, it would have helped to commit suicide) and as a bestselling novelist (whether your books are good or bad, sell well or don't, people will look down at you for it). These are intriguing meditations, with references to works by Virgil, Isak Dinesen, Robertson Davies, and countless others (Atwood's own dead, no doubt). --*Jane Steinberg*

From Library Journal

This book grew out of the series of Empson lectures that prize-winning novelist Atwood gave at the University of Cambridge in 2000. In it, she addresses a number of fundamental questions: not how to write but the basic position of the writer, why a writer writes, "and for whom? And what is this writing anyway?" Wearing her learning lightly, Atwood allows her wit to shine on almost every page. She probes her life and work along with those of many other writers and brings in myths, fairy tales, movies whatever feeds her themes. Following an initial autobiographical chapter, Atwood addresses major issues: the duplicity evidently inherent in writing; the problems of art vs. money; the problems of art vs. social relevance; the nature of the triangular relationship of writer, reader, and book; and, in the final title chapter, the provocative idea that "all writing of the narrative kind, and perhaps all writing, is motivated, deep down, by a fear of and a fascination with mortality by a desire to make the risky trip to the Underworld, and to bring something or someone back from the dead." Atwood is not looking to provide answers or solutions but to explore the parameters of some interesting questions. The result is engaging food for thought for all who care about writers and writing. Recommended for academic and large public libraries. Mary Paumier Jones, Westminster P.L., CO
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Review

"Atwood deserves respect for her willingness to engage a wide readership in discussing the social meaning of literature, and she has undoubtedly created an accessible volume that will enable interested readers to follow up on the magnificent sources she has brought together." Janice Fiamengo, Canadian Literature

"[Atwood] has an uncanny knack for writing books that anticipate the popular preoccupations of her public." Dowagiac, MI News

"...erudite and witty, down to earth while literary, insightful, and practical...As in her fiction, her brilliant thinking and sense of humour make this a joy to read...*Negotiating with the Dead* is Margaret Atwood at her best." Canadian Woman Studies

"Because it is so richly textured, so intellectually complex, and so subtly structured, *Negotiating with the Dead* is a work that deserves a second reading and even a third. With this critical work, in which she identifies so clearly all the risks of her call but yet expresses her faith in its work, she has proven her mastery

of another genre." Magill's Literary Annual

"[Atwood] teases, probes, tickles, punches and enlightens." Globe & Mail

"Atwood's style glistens with sharp details and sly wit. The range of reference is deliciously eclectic." Quill and Quire

"This is fine reading for all of us who believe that literature really matters." The American Review of Canadian Studies

"...the conversational tone, the personal anecdotes, and the brilliant references to myth and literature make this critical work by Margaret Atwood almost as fascinating as one of her novels." Magill Book Reviews

"A bracing performance." Susan Balee, Women's Review of Books

"The prominent woman of letters reworks a series of lectures into a cavalcade of intellectual insights." Wisconsin State Journal

Users Review

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Have you spare time for just a day? What do you do when you have considerably more or little spare time? Yeah, you can choose the suitable activity with regard to spend your time. Any person spent their spare time to take a wander, shopping, or went to the actual Mall. How about open or even read a book called Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing (The Empson Lectures)? Maybe it is for being best activity for you. You understand beside you can spend your time using your favorite's book, you can wiser than before. Do you agree with its opinion or you have additional opinion?

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