



Rhetorical Investigations: Studies in Ordinary Language Criticism

Walter Jost

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In *Rhetorical Investigations* Walter Jost juxtaposes problems and questions in philosophy and literature, using rhetoric as the middle term and common ground between them. Drawing on the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Stanley Cavell, among others, Jost joins a small band of contemporary literary critics who are rethinking theory beyond the apriorism of much poststructuralism and its built-in reading against the grain. By elaborating an "ordinary language criticism" stabilized in grammatical and rhetorical possibilities of language rather than in empirical actualities, Jost shows how literary critics at all levels, from the undergraduate to the sophisticated theorist, "pose" as they read, trying out "performances" of the words as claims to self-knowledge as well as cultural critique.

In the second half of the book, Jost examines the "low modernist" poetry of Robert Frost, finding in Frost's work a "scene of instruction" through which underappreciated resources for criticism can be recovered in the traditions of rhetoric, hermeneutics, pragmatism, and ordinary language philosophy.

Rhetorical Investigations promises no convenient methods and no simple answers to questions of meaning in literature; instead, it proposes a criticism whose origins are the natural language we all speak and whose value rests on illuminating our language games in poetry, philosophy, and everyday life.

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