CONTENTS

Preface xi

Acknowledgments xv

A Note on Texts xvii

Essaying to Be: On Reading (and Writing) Essays 1

The Advent of Personality and the Beginning of the Essay: Montaigne and Bacon 18

"The Passionate Discourse of an Amateur": John Dryden's Prose and Poetic Essays 34

With Wit Enough to Manage Judgment: Alexander Pope's An Essay on Criticism 47

It's Not an Essay: Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" and the Immodesty of Satire 55

Turning Inside Out: Samuel Johnson's "The Solitude of the Country" 62

An Allegory of Essaying? Process and Product in William Hazlitt's "On Going a Journey" 74

The Risk of Not Being: Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Illusions" 82

Forging in the Smithy of the Mind: Henry David Thoreau's "Walking" and the Problematic of Transcendence 93

Estranging the Familiar: Alice Meynell's "Solitudes" 103

"By Indirections Find Directions Out": Hilaire Belloc's "The Mowing of a Field" 110

Essaying and the Strain of Incarnational Thinking: G. K. Chesterton's "A Piece of Chalk" 121

Homage to the Common Reader: Or How Should One Read Virginia Woolf's "The Death of the Moth"? 128

The Turning of the Essay: T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" 140

A Site to Behold: Richard Selzer's "A Worm from My Notebook" 159

The Discarnate Word: Scott Russell Sanders's "Silence" 167

"Love Came to Us Incarnate": Annie Dillard's "God in the Doorway" 177

"A Free Intelligence": George Orwell, the Essay, and "Reflections on Gandhi" 181

Where "Trifles Rule Like Tyrants": Cynthia Ozick's "The Seam of the Snail" 190

Essaying and Pen Passion: Anne Fadiman as Common Reader in "Eternal Ink" 196

Acts of Simplifying: Sense and Sentences in Sam Pickering's "Composing a Life" 202

Caged Lions and Sustained Sibilants: E. B. White as "Recording Secretary" in "The Ring of Time" 210

Her Oyster Knife Sharpened: Control of Tone in Zora Neale Hurston's "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" 220

The Basic Ingredient: Candor and Compassion in Nancy Mairs's "On Being a Cripple" 227

The Work of the Sympathetic Imagination: James Baldwin's "Notes of a Native Son" 237

"On a Line Between Two Sturdy Poles": Edward Hoagland's "What I Think, What I Am" 252

A Note on Writing the Essay: The Issue of Process versus Product (with an essay by Cara McConnell) 260

Works Cited 273