

The Cambridge Anthology Of English Prose. Record four, Austen to Brontë : 1816 - 1853

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THE CAMBRIDGE ANTHOLOGY OF ENGLISH PROSE

Record Four : AUSTEN TO BRONTE

1816 - 1853

The styles and rhythms of English can vary fully as much in prose as in poetry. This Anthology is meant to enchant the listener with the best of English prose, and to illustrate the ways in which each great writer has bent the language to his will. The recordings were made at Cambridge by members of the University under the direction of George Rylands, Fellow of King's College. The records were made from tapes supplied by the British Council.

JANE AUSTEN, 1816, EMMA

Jane Austen's genius lay in her concentration in the small world which she understood best. Her people and the relationships between them are seen with a clear eye for foibles, vanity, selfishness and selflessness, and with an ironic detachment rarely found in domestic novels. In *Emma*, the heroine is a rather smug young woman who tries her hand at match-making between Harriet Smith and Mr. Elton, only to propel Mr. Elton—who has really had his eye on Emma—into the arms of a highly desirable young lady named Miss Hawkins. The consequent emotional reactions are cogently described in this excerpt.

WALTER SCOTT, 1818, THE HEART OF MID-LOTHIAN

As a story-teller, Scott was superb. Those who, like Stendhal, admired him initially for other reasons soon realized that only his narrative power was significant. For the most part, his characters are wooden and his politics obtrusive; but in his comic scenes, and in the swiftness of his pace and acuteness of his observation, he reveals himself a master. The lynching of Captain Porteous by a rioting mob at Tolbooth prison, known as the "Heart of Mid-Lothian," was an actual event, which Scott combined with the story of Effie Deans and her sister Jeannie.

WILLIAM HAZLITT, 1823, THE PLAIN SPEAKER

We are reaching now the heart of the romantic age, with its cult of the emotion and the individual. The baring of soul rather than of intellect was dogma for poets like Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and Keats, and for those who, like Hazlitt, moved in their circle. If we prize that feeling of intimate acquaintance which only the best biographers are able to give us, we must enjoy this glimpse of the friendship between Wordsworth and Coleridge.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, 1817, BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA

In the nature of things, Coleridge's literary criticism was bound to be autobiographical and subjective in parts. But the young poet's voracious reading enabled him to evaluate carefully the criteria of literature, and he delved into the sources of creative effort more deeply than any of his predecessors had done. The excerpt included here describes the beginning of the brilliant partnership which was to revolutionize poetry in the nineteenth century.

JOHN KEATS, 1818, LETTER TO RICHARD WOODHOUSE

Had he lived longer, Keats might also have written great essays. His ideas on the nature of poetry had already been formulated and were embedded in intimate letters to his family and friends. No poet has left behind a comparable series of letters to illuminate his poems.

CHARLES LAMB, 1823, ESSAYS OF ELIA

Lamb was the first writer in English to use the intimate method of Montaigne in the writing of essays. Despite the tragic circumstances of his life, he deliberately assumed the genial personality of Elia, and

used every device of style to shore up the illusion. In writing about the theatre, which he loved, Lamb's descriptive technique enabled him to develop a scene as though it were being played before him at that very moment.

THOMAS DE QUINCEY, 1822, CONFESSIONS OF AN ENGLISH OPIUM-EATER

De Quincey's analysis of the effect of artificial stimulation on the processes of a writer's mind may be compared with Aldous Huxley's experiments with mescaline. The *Confessions* describe in poetic prose a world distorted by laudanum, but far from being the one effusion of a sick mind, they were part of an output which included a novel and a finely drawn account of the Lake Poets.

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR, 1824-9, IMAGINARY CONVERSATIONS

Landor's *Imaginary Conversations* range through all periods from the classical to his own time, and are written in perhaps the most highly wrought prose of his period. In this conversation between Southey and Porson, a Cambridge Professor of Greek, notorious for his conversational powers, many of the literary opinions are Landor's own.

THOMAS CARLYLE, 1837, THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Although Carlyle cannot pretend to objectivity, his account of the Revolution has a power beyond any other history of the period. Every phase of events takes on an immediacy which makes the reader a participant, thanks to Carlyle's ability to think himself into the period and the minds of his characters.

LORD MACAULAY, 1834, CRITICAL AND HISTORICAL ESSAYS

Carlyle and Macaulay had two traits in common: narrow partisanship and rare ability to recreate an epoch. Macaulay focused upon the history of England, and in this passage set down a condemnation of Charles II which is as brilliant as it is unjust. Unlike Carlyle and most other writers of the time, his prose style made use of short periods and sentences, almost to the point of abruptness.

EMILY BRONTE, 1847, WUTHERING HEIGHTS

Wuthering Heights is a book hard to criticise and impossible to forget. Emily Bronte was the most powerful novelist in a family of writers and a considerable if uneven poet. She saw human beings in an almost cosmic relationship with the universe and bound together by affinities beyond normal affection or passion. Such an affinity is brilliantly portrayed in this description by Cathy of her love for Heathcliff.

CHARLOTTE BRONTE, 1853, VILLETTE

Charlotte Bronte conveys better than any other author the hostility of everyday creatures, and even of rooms and objects, towards the lost and lonely people of the world. M. Emanuel, the testy Brussels schoolmaster loved by Lucy Snowe, was probably an idealized portrait of the Brussels school principal whom Charlotte Bronte is thought to have loved.

Other recordings available in The Cambridge Anthology of English Prose are:

Record One: Malory to Donne	RG 103
Record Two: Burton to Johnson	RG 104
Record Three: Defoe to Burke	RG 105
Record Five: Dickens to Butler	RG 107

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