

19th Century Prose

- ❑ **Departure from reason.** an emphasis on emotions, imagination and intuition - elements of humanity that can defy reason.
- ❑ **A focus on nature.**
- ❑ **An element of the supernatural.** E.g. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or [Charlotte Bronte](#)'s *Jane Eyre*, contain elements that require the reader to suspend their disbelief to accept what they're reading and go along with something that will defy logic and reason.
- ❑ **A focus on the individual.** the rights and freedoms of an individual and their ability to exert their will even against what might necessarily be logical. A lot of novels and other writings of this era have themes of rebellion in the face of oppression and characters doing things that might seem irrational because it's really what they want to do.

Though the Romantic period specialized in poetry, there also appeared a few prose-writers—Lamb, Hazlitt and De Quincey—who rank very high. There was no revolt of the prose-writers against the eighteenth century comparable to that of the poets, but a change had taken place in the prose-style also.

Whereas many eighteenth century prose-writers depended on assumptions about the suitability of various prose styles for various purposes which they shared with their relatively small but sophisticated public; writers in the Romantic period were rather more concerned with subject matter and emotional expression than with appropriate style. They wrote for an ever-increasing audience which was less homogeneous in its interest and education than that of their predecessors. There was also an indication of a growing distrust of the sharp distinction between matter and manner which was made in the eighteenth century, and of a Romantic preference for spontaneity rather than formality and contrivance. There was a decline of the ‘grand’ style and of most forms of contrived architectural prose written for what may be called public or didactic purposes. Though some Romantic poets—Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Byron—wrote excellent prose in their critical writings, letters and journals, and some of the novelists like Scott and Jane Austen were masters of prose-style, those who wrote prose for its own sake in the form of the essays and attained excellence in the art of prose-writing were Lamb, Hazlitt and De Quincey.

Discursive Prose of the Romantic Period

The Romantic emphasis on individualism is reflected in much of the prose of the period, particularly in criticism and the familiar essay. Among the most vigorous writing is that of [William Hazlitt](#), a forthright and subjective critic whose most characteristic work is seen in his collections of lectures *On the English Poets* (1818) and *On the English Comic Writers* (1819) and in *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), a series of valuable portraits of his contemporaries.

In *The [Essays of Elia](#)* (1823) and *The Last Essays of Elia* (1833), [Charles Lamb](#), an even more personal essayist, projects with apparent artlessness a carefully managed portrait of himself—charming, whimsical, witty, sentimental, and nostalgic.

[Mary Russell Mitford](#)'s *Our Village* (1832) is another example of the charm and humour of the familiar essay in this period.

[Thomas De Quincey](#) appealed to the new interest in writing about the self, producing a colourful account of his early experiences in *[Confessions of an English Opium Eater](#)* (1821, revised and enlarged in 1856). His unusual gift of evoking states of dream and nightmare is best seen in essays such as “The English Mail Coach” and “On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*”; his essay “On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts” (1827; extended in 1839 and 1854) is an important anticipation of the Victorian [Aesthetic movement](#).

CHARLES LAMB(Feb. 10, 1775--Dec. 27, 1834)

Essays of Elia is a collection of essays written by Charles Lamb; it was first published in book form in 1823, with a second volume, *Last Essays of Elia*, issued in 1833 by the publisher Edward Moxon.

The essays in the collection first began appearing in *The London Magazine* in 1820 and continued to 1825. Lamb's essays were very popular and were printed in many subsequent editions throughout the nineteenth century. The personal and conversational tone of the essays has charmed many readers; the essays "established Lamb in the title he now holds, that of the most delightful of English essayists." Lamb himself is the Elia of the collection, and his sister Mary is "Cousin Bridget." Charles first used the pseudonym Elia for an essay on the South Sea House, where he had worked decades earlier; Elia was the last name of an Italian man who worked there at the same time as Charles, and after that essay the name stuck.

Lamb wrote his essays a little over 200 years after the 1580 publication of Michel de Montaigne's *Essays*, which set the template for the essay as we know it today. As a Romantic, Lamb brought a key innovation to the somewhat new form, inserting his own personality to give the essays a conversational tone.

Lamb's essays showcase his passions and anxieties, imbuing the non-fiction form with a personal and literary dimension. For that matter, many of his essays toe the line between fiction and non-fiction, using the devices of dream or slowly revealed deceit to make readers question the veracity of what they are reading. In Lamb's essays, this move serves a dual function, both helping remind the reader of the author's humanity, and adding a dose of excitement to a type of writing which can feel stuffy and blandly philosophical.

- The Impact of the French Revolution
- William Hazlitt- “Lamb had succeeded as a writer not by confirming to the SPIRIT OF THE AGE but by opposition to it.
- “Lamb the antiquarian and Lamb the reflective exploiter of nostalgia had somehow turned his back on the issues of the day, preferring the byways of the past to the highways of the present.”
- The essays of Elia cultivated a form and style admired by Lamb in 17th and 18th century mentors- Bacon, Brown, Walton, Fuller, Addison and Steele. He plays with archaisms and a familiar archness, but he super-adds his own delight in whimsy, reminiscence and digression.

"A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig"

A comical essay which includes many nuggets of fiction, "A Dissertation" is Elia's attempt to imagine the provenance of people eating roast pork, a dish that he loves. He talks about an imaginary ancient boy who burns down his family's shack but eats the pig that died in the fire and loves it. The essay veers into a discussion of Elia's love of sharing food with other people, before ending with a moral conundrum of how animals that are to be eaten should be slaughtered.

"The South-Sea House"

Elia describes the bank where he used to work, the South Sea House, which was the site of a famous financial speculation hoax. He recounts his various co-workers as well as the owners of the bank, but eventually reveals that his account may be as much of a hoax as the scam that the bank infamously ran.

- In 1807 Lamb and his sister published [*Tales from Shakespear*](#), a retelling of the plays for children, and in 1809 they published *Mrs. Leicester's School*, a collection of stories supposedly told by pupils of a school in [Hertfordshire](#). In 1808 Charles published a children's version of the *Odyssey*, called *The Adventures of Ulysses*.

THOMAS DE QUINCEY(1785-1859)

- Explorer of the mind(Unlike lamb who taked about societal problems and of things of utilitarian value)
- SOCIETY -----MIND

THE CONFESSIONS OF AN ENGLISH OPIUM EATER(1821)

- In order to understand the workings and deep recess of the mind
- In the art of writing the author is talking to oneself(and his/her own mind)
- This act is at the level of the body(reality) as a human being with a mind which in turn takes centrality away from the divine forces.(Matter-centric)

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE LAKES AND THE LAKE POETS(1834-39)

- Marks the period of his intimacy with Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey.
- Combines fulsomely admiring reminiscence with often seditious, malicious or negative inferences about the less than sublime private shortcomings of the individual concerned.

WILLIAM HAZLITT(10 April 1778 – 18 September 1830)

Hazlitt's childhood was spent in Ireland and North America, where his father, a Unitarian preacher, supported the American rebels. The family returned to England when William was nine, settling in Shropshire.

Having some difficulty in expressing himself either in conversation or in writing, he turned to painting and in 1802 traveled to Paris to work in the Louvre.

in 1805 he turned to metaphysics and the study of philosophy that had attracted him earlier, publishing his first book, *On the Principles of Human Action*.

From 1811, he began a course of lectures in philosophy in London and began reporting for the *Morning Chronicle*, quickly establishing himself as critic, journalist, and essayist. His collected dramatic criticism appeared as *A View of the English Stage* in 1818. He also contributed to a number of journals, among them Leigh Hunt's *Examiner*; this association led to the publication of *The Round Table*, 2 vol. (1817), 52 essays of which 40 were by Hazlitt. Also in 1817, Hazlitt published his *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, which met with immediate approval in most quarters.

He fell in love with the daughter of his London landlord, but the affair ended disastrously, and Hazlitt described his suffering in the strange *Liber Amoris; or, The New Pygmalion* (1823). *Table Talk* (1821) and *The Plain Speaker* (1826).

Others were afterward edited by his son, William, as *Sketches and Essays* (1829), *Literary Remains* (1836), and *Winterslow* (1850) and by his biographer, P.P. Howe, as *New Writings* (1925–27). Hazlitt's other works during this period of [prolific](#) output included *Sketches of the Principal Picture Galleries in England* (1824), with its celebrated [essay](#) on the Dulwich gallery.

Part of his second marriage was spent abroad, an experience recorded in *Notes of a Journey in France and Italy* (1826). In France he began an ambitious but not very successful *Life of Napoleon*, 4 vol. (1828–30), and in 1825 he published some of his most effective writing in *The Spirit of the Age*. His last book, *Conversations of James Northcote* (1830), recorded his long friendship with that eccentric painter.

On The Fear Of Death

Here, in this essay, Hazlitt talks about the uncertainty of life and fear of death. In this mortal world, everything is going to be an end for sure. Hazlitt says that if someone lives his life with the fear of death, then he cannot enjoy his life.

The writer thought that our ancestors were braver than the modern people in the nineteenth century. They fought wars and lived their life without any fear of loss or death. Modern society makes people more fearful.

Hazlitt suggests the only way to get out of the fear of death is one should always remember that everything is mortal in the world. We should not have fear of anything; instead, we should live and enjoy each and every moment.