

Romanticists and Victorianists to pick up this study of “Britain’s Heroic Muse” – unquestionably the definitive book on nineteenth-century epic, noteworthy for its subtle analysis of the intersection of historical context and poetic form.

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*Style and the Nineteenth-Century Critic: Sincere Mannerisms* by Jason Camlot. Aldershot, Hants; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008. 194 pp. ISBN 978-0-7546-5311-0. \$99.95; £55.00.

Nineteenth-century British beliefs about written style, Jason Camlot argues, can be understood in terms of two broadly opposed positions. Style is either a set of rhetorical tools and techniques that writers use to express ideas in a way that will convince an audience, or it is an expression of individuality that neither can nor should be shaped for particular audiences. The first of these positions Camlot calls “positivist” or “pragmatic,” the second “romantic” or “post-romantic,” and he considers this binary to be essentially the same as Lionel Trilling’s more familiar distinction between (performed and strategic) “sincerity” and (transparent and heartfelt) “authenticity.” Camlot’s project in *Style and the Nineteenth-Century Critic*, an adaptation of his 1998 Stanford dissertation, is to use this opposition as the axis of a “selective cultural history of conceptions of style in writing from the beginning to the end of the nineteenth century.” He compares statements about the nature, purpose, and ethics of written style by canonical nonfiction prose writers, including Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, and Walter Pater, to statements on the same topic by non-canonical writers for the contemporary periodical press. The thesis of the book is that while mass-market periodical writers moved over the course of the nineteenth century from shared acceptance of the pragmatic/positivist sincerity position (inherited from the rhetoric-minded eighteenth century) to shared acceptance of the romantic/post-romantic authenticity position, canonical writers and critics consistently retained some version of the sincerity model.

Camlot supports his thesis through seven chapters describing and characterizing debates and essays on style from the 1820s through the 1890s. These chapters are offered as analyses of “key moments of change,” though in practice the “moments” all turn out to be decades long. The book divides