



Representative Men: Seven Lectures

Ralph Waldo Emerson

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"At first reading, *Representative Men* seems the most alien of Emerson's books. First published in 1850 (having taken form over the five preceding years as a series of lectures intended as 'winter evening entertainments'), it was inspired by the romantic belief that there exists a 'general mind' that expresses itself with special intensity through certain individual lives. It was an appreciation of genius as a quality distributed to the few for the benefit of the many. When, according to Longfellow, Emerson began to speak on these themes in Boston in 1845, the Odeon theater was jammed with 'old men and young, bald heads and flowing transcendental locks, matrons and maidens, misanthropists and lovers.' The crowds were rapt and grateful, as were their counterparts two years later in England where the lecture series continued...

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