

# THE HAZLITT REVIEW

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# THE HAZLITT REVIEW

VOLUME 4

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What We Owe to William Hazlitt ANTHONY BENN	5
'The Glow of Production': Hazlitt and the Maidstone Museum Collection ELEANOR RELLE	11
Paradoxical Argument: Hazlitt's <i>Political Essays</i> of 1819 PAUL HAMILTON	33
Hazlitt and the Passions JON COOK	43
<b>Book Review</b>	
Adrian Poole (ed.), <i>Lamb, Hazlitt, Keats</i> reviewed by Robert White	59



## WHAT WE OWE TO WILLIAM HAZLITT

Hazlitt Society Annual Lecture, 2010

*Anthony Benn*

*Instead of giving a formal lecture, Tony Benn spoke briefly about Hazlitt, then went on to address a range of questions from the audience. Ian Mayes (in the Chair) and Uttara Natarajan (in the audience) occasionally interpolated, to return the discussion to Hazlitt where possible. The substantially edited extracts below give some sense of the flavour of the occasion.*

BENN: [...] what I feel as I get older – I'm about 30 years older than Hazlitt was when he died – that every generation has to fight the same battles again and again and again. There is no final victory for any idea and no final defeat for any movement and therefore my interest in Hazlitt, looking at the world through my own eyes, is what contribution his writing, his work, can have in helping us to make sense of the situation in which we find ourselves. And perhaps you will allow me to put it like that. He was an extraordinary man. His command of English was formidable. He wrote at least 30 books and many essays and articles as well as his books. And he was the son of an Irish Unitarian minister living in England, but had to leave England because his father supported the American Revolution. And that's very interesting to me for all sorts of reasons, one of which is that it reminds you that the case of American freedom was part of the argument of the period in which Hazlitt was born, and partly because I think, and I hope I'm right, that Hazlitt's sense of justice came from his father's tradition. He was training to be a minister himself but gave it up. But since all political issues really are moral questions – is it right or is it wrong? – I think that explains his attitude to so many of the issues that came up. At any rate, he was trained at the Hackney College which was in the Dissenting tradition, and he had a great hatred of tyranny. He supported the French Revolution. He supported Napoleon, and that was a very risky thing to do. He supported Napoleon because Napoleon had overthrown the French aristocracy and monarchy. But of course later when his support for Napoleon came out, we were at war with Napoleon so that didn't make him very popular [...]

In 1805 he wrote his *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, and in 1806 *Free Thoughts on Public Affairs*, and this is where he emerged as somebody with very clear principles and a very great readiness to present these as he saw them, regardless of the criticism that he attracted. He wrote for Cobbett's *Political Register*. He was very critical of Malthus for his essay on population, and that's still an issue. You meet people today who say the greatest pollution is people, and once you start treating babies as if they were pollution, you really are moving away from the idea that we're all human and equal. [...]

I looked up Hazlitt in the *Dictionary of English Quotations* and I couldn't find a single reference to anything he'd said which I thought was rather surprising. But I found three very appropriate quotes: 'The love of liberty,' said Hazlitt, 'is the love of others. The love of power is the love of ourselves.' And that is a very radical and interesting statement. Then he said, 'Man is the only animal which laughs and weeps for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are and what they ought to be.' Again this moral critique. And then he says, 'The art of life is how to enjoy a little and endure much.' And I suppose our debt to Hazlitt is that he was a great writer, he was a great radical, and what he did in all his writings introduced us not just to the politics of the period in which he lived, which was a very turbulent period, with the American and French Revolutions which began radical movements in Britain, but also introduced us to many of the famous poets and writers whom he knew. And therefore I find in reading Hazlitt I get inspiration to do what I think is right and that is I think the great debt we owe to him. Writing doesn't of itself change things but if you explain the world to people, then that gives them the confidence to decide how to change the world, and that is the test of how we react to events. Do we just observe as a pure journalist would do or do we observe and campaign for change? And that was what Hazlitt believed in and where his relevance is today, so I and you all being here today feel a great debt of gratitude to Hazlitt and hope that we may be inspired by what he wrote and our understanding of what he said, to tackle the turbulent period of history in which we live, where so many of the problems he had to deal with have come back to face us in much more dangerous circumstances.

[...]

MAYES: I think in terms of the relevance of Hazlitt to today the quotation that you gave of the love of liberty is the love of others and the love of power is the love of ourselves is fairly relevant. Who would like to ask the first question?

QUESTION: You mentioned just now that these fights are constant, that things will never change for the better. Ultimately every battle is endless. We're always fighting the same things over and over again and there's no sort of final victory. Do you definitely think that's always going to be the case? Do you think that the scale would tip into the more deterrent circumstances?

BENN: I think my view of the future is, first of all, you can't predict the future. Second, the idea that things will get better just by themselves discourages people from doing

anything about making it better. So I think the future is what we build. And when I look back on the historical figures who have inspired me, they're all people who have made an effort to improve, the Suffragettes, the Tolpuddle martyrs, the people at the time of the English Revolution, the Peasants' Revolt, who have struggled against a very, very difficult background. Their anger at what was unfair is strong and their hope that it could be changed is great. And that combination of anger and hope has provided a change which encourages me in what I do. So I think that while we still have Hazlitt and all the others like him over the years, there's a good chance that if we understand them and talk about the relevance of what they say, that would be a factor in giving people the confidence to make the change we need now.

[...]

QUESTION: [...] A few years ago we heard a lecture by Professor Duncan Wu on the bitter polemic of Hazlitt against Coleridge, in which Hazlitt accuses Coleridge of turning renegade to his earlier revolutionary principles. Hazlitt also says that for him the test of the democratical mind – the word exists – is the respect in which such a mind holds Edmund Burke. On what did Hazlitt base this remark? Does it fit in with his radicalism or is he pointing to aspects of Burke's career which are consistent with that radicalism?

BENN: Burke I find strange. He was my predecessor as a Member of Parliament for Bristol [...], but he once described the people as the swinish multitude. And if you are a Member of Parliament that is a strange way of describing your constituents, but of course at the time that Burke was a Member of Parliament only two percent of the population had the vote. And Burke by saying that did trigger off Tom Paine to write *The Rights of Man*, which was a very radical book which was burned by the public executioner and he had to take refuge in America. Undoubtedly Burke had certain qualities but I wouldn't have described him as a modern figure in any way. I think he was a creature, a complicit creature in a system that really was fundamentally unjust and unfair and undemocratic.

[...]

NATARAJAN: I just want to make a small claim on Burke's behalf. I think what Hazlitt admired about Burke was his prose style, that's primarily what he admired about Burke, and it was always a source of great regret to him that somebody who wrote as well as Burke was writing for the wrong side. And the other thing to say about that is Hazlitt himself had a certain disdain for the swinish multitude, I'm afraid. I think there was always a disparity between the way in which mobs and masses reacted and Hazlitt's sense of the way in which the people could be a democratic force. He could never bring these two things quite together. It was always a problem and so there was something in him which did sympathize with that particular view of the swinish multitude.

BENN: Well I listen to what you say and perhaps I've done Burke an injustice but it's always struck me that he was a figure of the late eighteenth century who never really came to terms with the changes that needed to be made. But if I have done him an injustice then I will go away and think about it.

MAYES: It's interesting that Hazlitt admired his prose style no matter what the vehicle was carrying. so to speak.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Burke was a fervent supporter of the American Revolution, and that's another thing he had in common with Hazlitt.

BENN: Yes, well, he was hired of course by a group of people who were interested in trade with the Americans and I think he was an agent, a political agent at that time, but he was on the right side, that is true, yes.[...]

QUESTION: Is there anyone out there today for whom Hazlitt might develop the kind of admiration he did, for, say, Napoleon?

BENN: [...] Hazlitt was bitterly criticized of course for the views he took, not only on Napoleon, but also on other issues. There aren't individuals that I could identify, but I think if you look around the world the people who are struggling to make a better world are people to whom we should give our allegiance even if it does involve getting into controversy at home. It's just a matter of judgement. I mean, if I take, for example, the question of peace in Ireland: I was threatened with expulsion from the Labour Party for meeting Gerry Adams. I can't get to see him now because he's in and out of No 10 Downing Street all the time. And I think you just have to take the flak that goes with that, and I think that Hazlitt would encourage people to do that.

QUESTION: I wonder, thinking of Hazlitt, did he have any interest at all in popular music and popular culture? Perhaps his essay on Hogarth where he praised the virtues of Hogarth and his sort of popular art against higher art [...]

BENN: I think what popular art does is to provide a focus for people's aspirations and give them confidence. And if you hear, for example, a miners' band playing a miners' hymn like Gresford, it brings them together and gives them confidence. And so to that extent it has got a role to play, but I'm not an expert on popular music, I'm afraid.

MAYES: Of course there was one piece of popular music which Hazlitt adored and that was the 'Marseillaise' and we had it played when his restored gravestone was unveiled, by a brass quartet from the Royal College of Music, I think it was.

NATARAJAN: We should point out that he did also enjoy other aspects of popular culture, for instance, boxing.

MAYES: And of course, the game against the wall, fives, with the wonderful essay about the great fives player.

QUESTION: Some people have always found, looking back through history, that although we live in a society where we've got quite a wide range of things that we can discuss there always seems to be a taboo subject or a bogey subject. For instance, in my short lifetime, if I had said I was a Pagan when I was a child, I would have been run out of town, whereas now it's completely off-limits to question somebody's choice of religion. So my question would be, is a part of the role of classic voices from the past to say the unsayable and be protected from censorship? And if so, is

that always going to be the case, that we have to rely on voices from the past to say the unsayable, or at least to join with those modern voices to sort of back them up?

BENN: Obviously if you're in a jam for something you've said you look for examples of other people who've said it in order to protect yourself from attack. And I think that's a natural thing to do and clearly the classics like Hazlitt and others can be cited today to justify a view we hold which would be very unpopular with the powers that be. So that's one of the inheritances we get from earlier generations, that they have said things which make sense to us and which we can use for our contemporary purposes. And we should respect the earlier generations for that reason if for no other.

NATARAJAN: Hazlitt said anyone who has been through the gradations of a classical education and hasn't been made a fool by it has had a very narrow escape. [...]

QUESTION: I remember when we were at the assembly for unveiling the new Hazlitt memorial down in Soho, Michael Foot drew a distinction between Hazlitt's views of Wordsworth as a turncoat and Coleridge as a turncoat. He seemed rather more sympathetic to Coleridge who seemed to have wandered off into his own little world. Do you accept that as a distinction or do you think that Coleridge's wandering off was as remiss as Wordsworth's total *volte-face*?

MAYES: You might like in your answer to generalize a bit, about this question of the legitimacy of changing your opinions if you like over a lifetime. This is a point that Paul Johnson was making last year about Hazlitt. He said it was crazy for Hazlitt to criticize others who change their opinions throughout a lifetime in the light of the events that have transpired and by implication rather strange of him to stick so rigidly to his own views throughout the same period.

BENN: It's a good question because I'm often asked if I've made mistakes and I've made a million mistakes and I don't think there's anything wrong with making mistakes, because that's how you learn. What I would be ashamed of would be if I ever thought I'd said anything I didn't believe in order to get on. But making mistakes and changing your mind if it's honestly based upon the facts seems to me quite legitimate. It doesn't alter my view of people who once held my view and now take another view. I find that hard to take but that's just a human reaction, I guess. But otherwise if people honestly say, I once thought this, I no longer think this, and this is why, you just have to listen to the new argument and decide whether you agree with it or not.

MAYES: I'd like to ask a question about the media. One of Hazlitt's principles was speaking truth to power. And as a journalist, as far as he can be called that, that's what he did. I wonder to what extent you feel the media are doing that today?

BENN: The media have a very close policy interest of their own and on the whole they're sympathetic to the establishment, if you know what I mean. And the establishment includes Rupert Murdoch, the most powerful man in the world, because he'll be there when Obama has gone, when Cameron has gone, and he's

got papers in Australia, America, here, and television in China and so on, and they do have an enormous influence. And if they want to silence somebody they turn on them with a lot of media assassins, I've had a touch of it myself which was very, very unpleasant, and they try to frighten you into silence and so I think they have a big impact on government policy. Which is another reason why, if you want to make a change, you have to break out into the media, and that's where the modern digital media make it easier to do that. [...]

QUESTION: Hazlitt had the enormous advantage of being able to say exactly what he liked. He wasn't a member of a political party as far as I know and he wasn't an activist or a practical person. What constraints have you found in your activities as a result of your having been a member of a political party and a member of the government?

BENN: What constraints have I? You see if you are a member of a government then you are tied by the government's decisions. If I take an example very much in my mind, in 1978 major cuts were being made in public expenditure and Callaghan was Prime Minister, and in all fairness to him he allowed the Cabinet to meet almost every day to discuss what you should do. And I put in a proposal for an alternative economic strategy. Callaghan put it on the Cabinet agenda. I put in a paper, presented the argument, was defeated, and then they went on and they made the cuts which I don't think were necessary. But at the end I had been defeated. Now the question is, should I have resigned from the government? I asked my local Labour party to decide that for me. And they had a long discussion and decided I should stay in. And if you do resign from the government because you disagree with what's done and then there's a vote of confidence in the House of Commons, do you vote for the government you've resigned from? And if they lose the vote of confidence and there's an election, do you vote to get re-elected again as part of a government you've just left? So I came to the conclusion that leaving a government was only right if you thought the government was no longer the lesser of two evils. But obviously in compromise, which you have to have in big organizations, you have to accept you won't always win. Now I've left parliament, as you know, to devote more time to politics. And now that I'm not asking anyone to vote for me, it's a great relief. I can say what I like, and so long as I don't undermine the party of which I'm a member, which I wouldn't want to do, I'm absolutely free. And then people can listen and make up their minds whether they agree with me or not. It's quite a nice position to be in actually. I recommend retirement.

MAYES: Well you clearly haven't quite made it yet. Thank you very much indeed.

## ‘THE GLOW OF PRODUCTION’ Hazlitt and the Maidstone Museum Collection

*Eleanor Relle*

In 1829, the year before Hazlitt’s death, fire broke out in a house close to the lodgings in Bouverie Street where he was living with his son. Hazlitt’s chief concern in evacuating the premises was ‘to get their pictures away – the copies of Titian and the Death of Clorinda’ – and he was exasperated with William Junior for not apparently sharing his sense of urgency. The copies, which were finally rescued and removed to a coffee-house across the road until the danger was past, were among the works of art that meant so much to Hazlitt that he kept them until he died. It was his grandson William Carew Hazlitt who recorded the episode of the fire,<sup>1</sup> and it was also he who, in 1909, presented these and a number of other items of Hazlittiana to the museum in Maidstone, the essayist’s birthplace, where they were subsequently joined by a further gift and bequest from Hazlitt’s great-granddaughter, Gladys Hazlitt.

The Maidstone Museum and Bently Art Gallery thus acquired a collection of items of which some were of central importance to Hazlitt himself, not only as mementoes, but as points of reference and as symbols. In particular, ‘the copies of Titian and the Death of Clorinda’, made during Hazlitt’s period of study in the Louvre in 1802–3, were part of his sense of himself as an individual and, for a time, as an artist, and also affected his relationships with others and the way others saw him. One or two items unhappily disappeared from the collection some fifty years ago, but at the present time, when there is a project to give the remainder the benefit of conservation and improved display, it is worthwhile to explore the nature of their significance for Hazlitt and for our understanding of him.

Among the collection is a miniature of Hazlitt as a small boy, painted by his brother John, who was nine years older. This, though probably less important to Hazlitt than his own Louvre copies, may serve as an appropriate starting point to indicate the complex nature of Hazlitt’s involvement with the pictures in his possession. His reference to this miniature, in his essay ‘On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth’ – written in 1827, when the picture had presumably been with him for about forty years – brings us close to Hazlitt in the actual process of writing:

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1 Willam Carew Hazlitt, *Memoirs of William Hazlitt, with Portions of his Correspondence*, 2 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1867), II, 233.

As I was writing out this passage, my miniature-picture when a child lay on the mantle-piece, and I took it out of the case to look at it. I could perceive few traces of myself in it; but there was the same placid brow, the dimpled mouth, the same timid, inquisitive glance as ever. But its careless smile did not seem to reproach me with having become a recreant to the sentiments that were then sown in my mind, or with having written a sentence that could call up a blush in this image of ingenuous youth! (xvii, 196-7)<sup>2</sup>

At that moment of confrontation with his past self in the course of a meditation on death, while he was in Paris researching his lifelong hero Napoleon, the miniature encapsulated for Hazlitt the 'sentiments' formed in his boyhood – the principles and ideals he had developed under the influence of his father, and his own uncompromising adherence to them – and also his appreciation of John, who had in their youth been his mentor, and whom Hazlitt had remembered when he began this late essay ('No young man believes he shall ever die. It was a saying of my brother's, and a fine one'; xvii, 189), thus probably initiating the train of thought that prompted him to take the miniature from the mantelpiece. There is evidence that the kind of dialogue that occurs here between the writer and the picture occurred at least as intensely when the pictures concerned were Hazlitt's own work.

Maidstone's only real claim to W. C. Hazlitt's munificent gift was that it was William Hazlitt's place of birth, for the family left the town before William was two years old. His father, a Unitarian minister, to whom diplomacy and compromise were unknown, found the disagreements among his Maidstone congregation intolerable and decided to move on, first to Ireland and then, with the end of the War of Independence, to America. Passionately republican and pro-American in his views, and not without personal ambition, Hazlitt Senior had had great hopes of a successful ministry in the United States, of which he had formed an idealized picture, but the voyage marked the beginning of three disillusioning, disappointing and at times perilous years for himself and his family. His staunch adherence to his personal convictions served only to alienate a succession of influential people and potentially sympathetic congregations, and at the end of this period he described himself and his situation in words that his son, too, might have used later in life:

a plain-spoken, unreserved man, who does not possess much of the *sneaking* virtue, commonly called *discretion*. Some of his friends charge him with *imprudence*. His enemies call him many hard names, propagate numberless lies against him, and by *orthodox*, secret machinations, do him every possible injury in their power.<sup>3</sup>

2 All quotations from Hazlitt are taken from *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. by P. P. Howe, 21 vols (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent, 1930-4). References are by volume and page.

3 Quoted in *The Journal of Margaret Hazlitt*, ed. Ernest J. Moyne (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 1967), 14.

Returning to England, he tried without success to secure an appointment near London, but finally accepted what was available and assumed charge of a congregation near Wem, Shropshire, 'where' according to his daughter, 'it was my father's ill fate to settle and bury his talents.'<sup>4</sup> Here young William Hazlitt was educated, almost entirely by his father.

One positive development for the Hazlitts during their years in America was that John Hazlitt, though apparently self-taught, had manifested a precocious artistic talent. Not only did he begin producing family portraits, including the one of William already mentioned, but in 1785, aged eighteen, he advertised himself as a teacher of drawing alongside Boston miniature painter Joseph Dunkerley, and within months was securing commissions as a portraitist in his own right.<sup>5</sup> On the family's return to England, John remained in London under the eye of David Lewis, son of a Maidstone friend of his parents, and began his career as a professional artist with guidance from Sir Joshua Reynolds. No fewer than 73 of his works were shown at the Royal Academy between 1788 and 1819, though he never became an Academician.<sup>6</sup> The group of (mainly family) portraits now at Maidstone includes, among others, one of William aged thirteen; two of William as a young man; an austere self-portrait; a less successful portrait of his wife Mary Peirce reading (Mary, who bore him three children, afterwards abandoned the attempt to live with an increasingly drunken husband); the tough, truculent face of his father in middle age; a gaunt image of his mother, once the beautiful Grace Loftus, who lived to be ninety despite an exhausting life; and romantic portraits of his sister Margaret (Peggy), also artistically inclined and represented at Maidstone by several of her own works, who spent almost her whole life looking after her ageing parents.

Since John was now launched in London, the young William, at a formative stage of his life, had the almost undivided attention, in isolated Wem, of a dedicated but disappointed father. A letter written to John in 1788 indicates both his intellectual curiosity and his aspiration to follow in his brother's footsteps: 'I shall like to know all the Latin and Greek I can. I want to learn how to measure the stars. I shall not, I suppose, paint the worse for knowing everything else.'<sup>7</sup> His father's ambitions for him, however, lay in a different direction: he hoped to see William follow him into the ministry, and thus to attain the kind of distinction he himself had failed to achieve. The resultant academic pressure caused the boy to suffer a breakdown in 1789. But 1789 was a momentous year in other respects: already wedded to his father's republican principles, William was passionately excited by the political

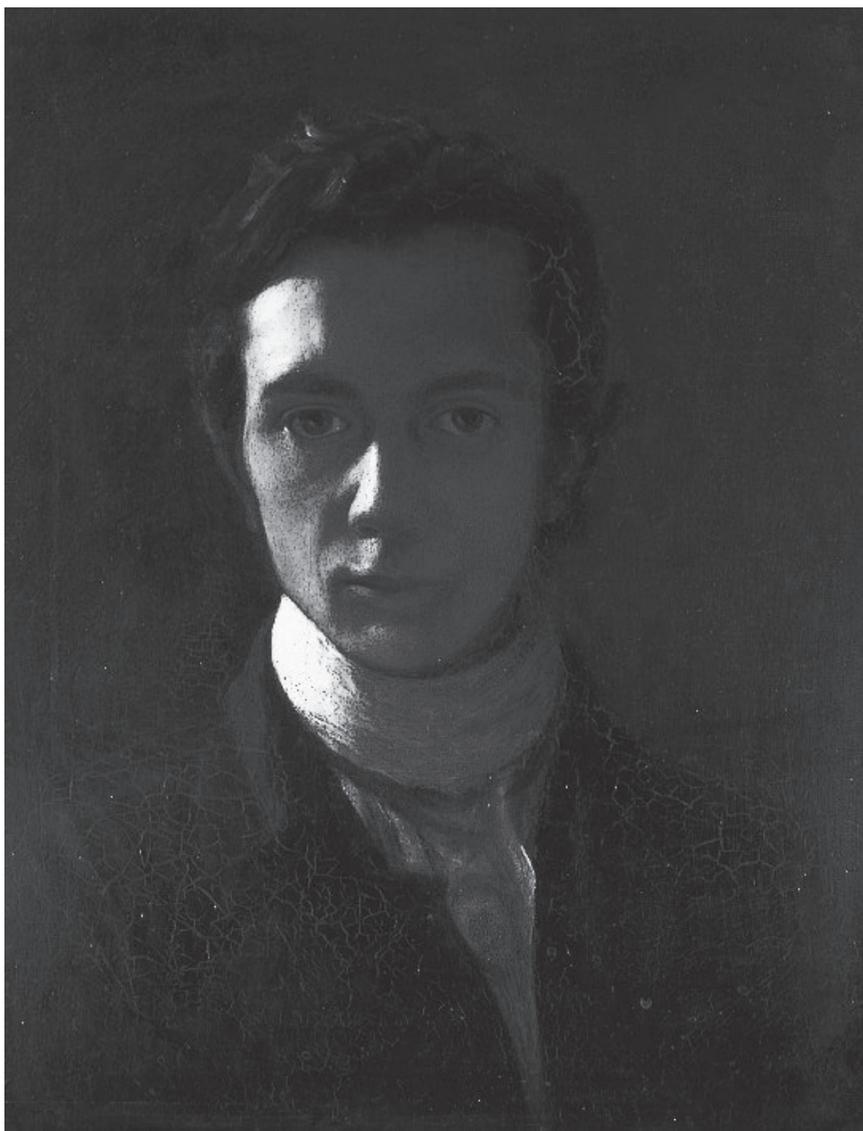
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4 Ibid, 102.

5 See Ernest J. Moyné, 'John Hazlitt, Miniaturist and Portrait Painter in America, 1783–1787', *Winterthur Portfolio* 6 (1970), 34–5.

6 Duncan Wu observes that John's lack of success when he stood for election, which exacerbated his alcoholic tendencies, was partly due to the views on Academies expressed in print, albeit anonymously, by William: see *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 181.

7 Quoted in W.C. Hazlitt, *The Hazlitts: An Account of their Origin and Descent* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, Hanson & Co, 1911), 379.



William Hazlitt, *Self-Portrait* (©Maidstone Museum & Bentlif Art Gallery)

and intellectual ferments of the time, and the French Revolution was for him a personal awakening which, though doomed to disappointment, coloured and shaped his entire development.

In 1793, aged fifteen, Hazlitt was sent to study for the ministry at the Unitarian College at Hackney. His base outside college was at John's London home, where John, now married, was making his way as a painter of portraits and miniatures. Through John, William encountered the political philosopher, William Godwin, and his circle. The College, too, was intellectually stimulating: its ethos encouraged free inquiry, and so many of its prospective ministers finally arrived at a position of agnosticism that in 1796 it had to close. William was one of them; he discontinued his studies in 1795, having just turned seventeen.

This decision was a devastating blow to the father and a source of guilt to the son. The two had, temperamentally and philosophically, so much in common that Hazlitt's divergence from the path his father had marked out for him was painful for both, though his sister Peggy records that there were 'no reproaches or unkindness.'<sup>8</sup> Although he was now starting to write the philosophical work which later appeared as the *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, the profession he intended to adopt was that of artist. He travelled in search of commissions to Liverpool, where his family had contacts, and where he got to know the rich Unitarian lawyer and connoisseur, William Roscoe, whose enthusiasm for Italian art possibly influenced Hazlitt's own developing tastes. Back in London, and in John's professional milieu, he was commissioned, perhaps through John, to paint the portraits of Charlotte and James Knowles, the children of James Knowles the lexicographer. James, who continued to admire and appreciate Hazlitt for many years afterwards, reports that the sittings were enlivened by Hazlitt's attempts to demonstrate tightrope-walking,<sup>9</sup> but despite this highly individual way of dealing with child sitters, the actual portraits were reminiscent of the early Reynolds, showing a white-clad Charlotte with a dead bird – an approach to portraiture that Hazlitt was soon to abandon.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, as well as the congenial political thinkers he met through his brother, Hazlitt met the originators of the Romantic movement in English poetry. In 1798, he went to hear Coleridge preach and was introduced by him to William and Dorothy Wordsworth. He got on, for the time being, very well with Coleridge ('The only person I ever knew who answered to my idea of a man of genius'<sup>11</sup>), very well with Dorothy, and noticeably less well with Wordsworth. It was perhaps this acquaintance that generated a later commission for John, whose miniature of Coleridge was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1802. Coleridge observed, in a notebook entry conjecturally dated 1800, that according to 'Hazlitt the painter' a

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8 *Journal of Margaret Hazlitt*, 107.

9 Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 64.

10 Among the Maidstone miniatures is one by John showing his little daughter Harriet similarly posed; one wonders if the pose was John's suggestion and the dead bird a Hazlitt studio prop.

11 Hazlitt's MS of *Lectures on the English Poets*, quoted by Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 19.

picture 'never looks so well as when the Pallett was by the side of it – Association with the glow of Production'.<sup>12</sup> In fact either of the Hazlitt brothers might have said this, but the implications would have been different in each case, as William's career as a painter makes clear. John did actually finish his pictures and take his palette elsewhere, whereas for William there was always the urge, often tantalising and frustrating, to regard a picture as process rather than product. Here, conceivably, lies the reason why the pictures dearest to him, even after he relinquished his artistic ambitions – the Louvre copies which will be discussed shortly – endured countless vicissitudes without ever being framed.<sup>13</sup> 'The glow of Production,' in Coleridge's characteristic phrase, never wholly departed from them.

To the aspiring artist, the year 1798 delivered another defining, even visionary, experience. A group of Italian pictures from the collection sold by Louis Philippe II, Duke of Orleans, after the Revolution, was exhibited for sale at a gallery in Pall Mall. These works spoke to Hazlitt at the profoundest level:

A mist passed away from my sight; the scales fell off. A new sense came upon me, a new heaven and a new earth stood before me [... ] From that time, I lived in a world of pictures. Battles, sieges, speeches in parliament seemed but idle noise and fury, 'signifying nothing,' compared with those mighty works and dreadful names that spoke to me in the eternal silence of thought. This was the more remarkable, as it was but a short time before that I was not only totally ignorant of, but insensible to the beauties of art.

('On the Pleasure of Painting,' *Table-Talk*; viii, 14–15)<sup>14</sup>

The ignorance and insensibility were no doubt relative, since we must remember that Hazlitt was a practising artist, brother to a practising artist, and that he had discussed art with William Roscoe. But all these factors must have increased his appetite for art rather than satisfied it, in an age when access to paintings was far more restricted than it is now and when those interested in them had generally to rely on engravings. 'How often,' wrote Hazlitt later,

in turning over a number of choice engravings, do we tantalise ourselves by thinking, 'What a head that must be' – in wondering what colour a piece of drapery is of, green or black, – in wishing, in vain, to know the exact tone of the sky in a particular corner of the picture! [...] The disadvantage of pictures is, that they cannot be multiplied to any extent, like books or prints [...] A visit to a genuine collection is like going on a pilgrimage'

(*Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England*; x, 8)

12 For this, and the case for taking 'the painter' to be John rather than William, see Morton D. Paley, *Portraits of Coleridge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 26–7.

13 The copy of *Ippolito de Medici* remains unframed to this day. *Clorinda* has a nineteenth-century frame but also still has, attached to its top stretcher, the loops of webbing by which Hazlitt originally hung it.

14 First published in the *London Magazine*, December 1820.

One such pilgrimage, to Burghley House, Stamford, initiated a new departure for Hazlitt's painting when he discovered not only its Italian collection but 'an old head of Rembrandt' (no longer attributed to Rembrandt today). Leaving behind the style he had developed under the tutelage of his brother, who continued to work in the tradition of Reynolds, he became, as he describes it in an essay of 1828, 'so devoted to Rembrandt, that I think, if the Prince of Darkness had made me the offer in some rash mood, I should have been tempted to close with it, and should have become (in happy hour, and in downright earnest) the great master of light and shade!' ('On Personal Identity'; xvii, 274).

Inspired by the Rembrandt head, he painted, during a journey to Manchester and Liverpool in search of commissions in 1799, the portrait of an old countrywoman with her face heavily shaded by her bonnet. This picture, formerly in the Maidstone collection, was the product of 'numberless sittings' ('On the Pleasure of Painting'; viii, 8), since Hazlitt was determined to achieve a faithfulness to nature comparable to that of Rembrandt, particularly in terms of the light and shade, however long it might take: 'The wrinkles in Rembrandt were not hard lines; but broken and irregular. I saw the same appearance in Nature, and strained every nerve to give it' (viii, 9). Not only did this picture mark a decisive departure from the influence of Reynolds – and of John Hazlitt – in terms of style, but by the very fact of approaching the work in this spirit, Hazlitt was consciously challenging Reynolds's view that art should seek to give general appearances without individual details, a view he went on challenging in every connection for the rest of his life:

Beneath the shrivelled yellow parchment look of the skin, there was here and there a streak of the blood colour tinging the face; this I made a point of conveying [...] How many revisions were there! [...] How often did we try to get the old position, and wait for the return of the same light! [...] The picture was never finished, and I might have gone on with it to the present hour. I used to set it on the ground when my day's work was done, and saw revealed to me with swimming eyes the birth of new hopes, and of a new world of objects (viii, 9).

The picture also implied a political view of art akin to that which Wordsworth had just been enunciating in the *Lyrical Ballads* in relation to poetry; the subject taught him, Hazlitt said, 'to see good in everything, and to know that there is nothing vulgar in nature seen with the eyes of science or of true art' (viii, 8).<sup>15</sup>

This never-finished portrait meant so much to Hazlitt that he is known to have parted with it only once. It accompanied him to France in 1802, and when in 1807 he was the subject of a practical joke involving an announcement that he had committed suicide, he responded with a tongue-in-cheek 'petition' presenting

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15 Henry Crabb Robinson notes that Hazlitt introduced him to the *Lyrical Ballads* soon after they became acquainted in 1799; see his *Diary, Reminiscences and Correspondence*, ed. Thomas Sadler, 3 vols (London and New York: Macmillan, 1872), I, 41.

the evidence that he was still alive and listing those of his 'effects and valuables' which were 'of the greatest note'. First on the list was 'A picture of an old woman, painted in strong shadow, nearly invisible. Valued at 5 pounds.'<sup>16</sup> 'I have it by me still,' he wrote in 1820 ('On the Pleasure of Painting'; viii, 8). The following year, however, when his friend John Hunt was sentenced to imprisonment for libel after writing an article describing MPs as 'greedy adventurers',<sup>17</sup> Hazlitt deposited this picture at the Coldbath Fields Prison to keep Hunt company. Hanging over the mantelpiece in Hunt's cell, it attracted the attention of Peter George Patmore (critic, friend of Hazlitt, and father of the Victorian poet Coventry Patmore), who had accompanied Hazlitt on a visit to the prisoner. Years afterwards, Patmore described the impression the picture had made on him. Although 'the handling [...] was [...] that of a novice,' he found it 'a striking production, evincing remarkable powers of pictorial effect. [...] I have never seen the picture since, and yet it is one of those very few which dwell in my memory, as if they were actually present to the bodily sight.'<sup>18</sup> Before he returned it to Hazlitt, Hunt was visited by the artist Benjamin Robert Haydon, who exclaimed, 'Hallo! Where did you get that Rembrandt? It looks like an early performance.' When told who the painter really was, Haydon 'uttered not a single word.'<sup>19</sup>

It was probably in the hope of achieving, and indeed embodying, a reconciliation between his disappointed father, his guilty self, and his chosen profession that Hazlitt embarked on a new portrait in his Rembrandtesque manner – his father, posed in his chapel – early in 1802. This portrait, now in Maidstone, is, despite its now darkened condition, notably more tender, complex, and atmospheric in its treatment than the miniatures of Hazlitt Senior by John; it dates from later in the subject's life and aims at a 'warts and all' precision, the minister being shown 'in a green old age, with strong-marked features, and scarred with the small-pox' ('On the Pleasure of Painting'; viii, 12).

Like the portrait of the old woman, Hazlitt's portrait of his father was the fruit of prolonged and repeated sittings, for his father, furnished with a book (Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*) that suited both him and the artist, 'was willing to sit as long as I pleased [...] and besides his satisfaction in the picture, he had some pride in the artist, though he would rather I should have written a sermon than painted like Rembrandt or like Raphael' (viii, 12). In this process, some level of communication seems to have been re-established, and Hazlitt, meanwhile, felt that he was making artistic progress. He afterwards recalled 'those winter days, with the gleams of sunshine coming through the chapel-windows, and cheered by the notes of the robin-redbreast in our garden' as 'among the happiest of my life' (viii, 12–13). Once the failing light of each short day had brought his work

16 W.C. Hazlitt (ed.), *Lamb and Hazlitt: Further Letters and Records hitherto unpublished*, (London: Elkin Mathews, 1900), 73.

17 Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 298–9.

18 P.G. Patmore, *My Friends and Acquaintance*, 3 vols (London: Saunders & Otley, 1854), III, 102–4.

19 W.C. Hazlitt, *The Hazlitt Memoirs: Four Generations of a Literary Family*, 2 vols (London and New York: Redway, 1897), I, 236.

to a close, Hazlitt records that a kind of extended, wordless conversation went on between the artist and the portrait: 'I used regularly to set my work in the chair to look at it through the long evenings; and many a time did I return to take leave of it before I could go to bed at night' (viii, 13). The work provided him with a surrogate for the father he had grieved and a symbolic proximity to him, while at the same time symbolizing the artist he hoped to become:

When I gave the effect I intended to any part of the picture for which I had prepared my colours, [...] I thought my fortune made; or rather it was already more than made, in my fancying that I might one day be able to say with Correggio, "*I also am a painter!*"' (viii, 13)

'With a throbbing heart' (viii, 13) he sent it to the Royal Academy, where it appeared in that year's exhibition.<sup>20</sup>

By the time Hazlitt wrote this account in 1820, his father had recently died and his youthful dreams of achieving stature as an artist seemed to him 'an idle thought, a boy's conceit' (viii, 13). What remained, however, was the power of the picture to mark a significant moment in his personal development and to remain symbolic of it afterwards. This also applies particularly to two further items now at Maidstone, which date from the time Hazlitt spent in Paris from October to February 1802–3.<sup>21</sup>

After the Treaty of Amiens in the spring of 1802, it again became possible for Englishmen to travel to France, and one of Hazlitt's Liverpool patrons, the industrialist Joseph Railton, who wished to have his parlour<sup>22</sup> hung with copies of masterpieces from the Louvre, commissioned him to go to Paris and make the required copies for a fee of £105. John Hazlitt had painted a miniature of Railton's attractive daughter some years previously,<sup>23</sup> and there is some suggestion that William Hazlitt was in love with her and imagined that a successful mission to the Louvre might lead on to success in other directions.<sup>24</sup> Before beginning his journey, Hazlitt borrowed a catalogue and studied it with eager anticipation – 'The pictures, the names of the painters, seemed to relish in the mouth' ('On the Pleasure of Painting'; viii, 15). His head full of details from this catalogue, he went

20 Hazlitt's (uncertain) dating of this picture to the year (1805) of Austerlitz (viii, 13) is probably due to confusion with 'another afterwards' which has not survived.

21 Maidstone originally had three copies from the Louvre, but that of the *Man with a Glove* has disappeared.

22 'Parlour' is the word Hazlitt uses in a letter to his father, but the term is probably jocular, since the copies Hazlitt made were by no means parlour pieces in either subject or scale, and Railton presumably had a room of corresponding proportions. Exactly how many copies Railton ordered is unclear: ten according to Peggy, but, when writing to his father, Hazlitt refers to 'the five I am to do for Railton'. Wu implicitly identifies the ten items on the list Hazlitt prepared for Denon with those he painted for Railton (*William Hazlitt*, 456–7, n. 46), but the position is more complicated than that.

23 Also in Maidstone.

24 A.C. Grayling, *The Quarrel of the Age: The Life and Times of William Hazlitt* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000), 73; cf. W.C. Hazlitt, *Memoirs of William Hazlitt*, I, 104–5.

to see the Academician James Northcote, over thirty years his senior, whose gossip and anecdotes he was to enjoy throughout his life. On this particular occasion, as Hazlitt reported to his father:

I promised Northcote to copy Titian's portrait of Ippolito de Medici for him. He had a print of it lying on the floor one morning when I called on him, and was saying that it was one of the finest pictures in the whole world; on which I told him that it was now at the Louvre, and that if he would give me leave, I would copy it for him as well as I could. He said I should delight him if I would, and was clearly excessively pleased.<sup>25</sup>

Railton seems to have given Hazlitt a fairly free hand in choosing the actual pictures to be copied for him. Hazlitt made additional copies for himself 'as models to keep by me',<sup>26</sup> of which two, as well as his self-portrait of the same date, are in the Maidstone collection. His letters to his father from Paris also survived, having evidently been appreciated and carefully preserved.

The Louvre to which Hazlitt was travelling was a shrine not only to his artistic aspirations but also to his political ideals. Here dwelt Napoleon, who remained for Hazlitt throughout his life (for nothing Napoleon did made him revise his views) the personification of the Revolution on which he had centred his hopes for the future of humanity, and around Napoleon were assembled the greatest achievements of European art, swept into Paris in the wake of his conquests. To Hazlitt, even much later in his life, the appropriation of these works appeared, not an act of pillage, but a cultural advance for the benefit of mankind:

These works, instead of being taken from their respective countries, were given to the world, and to the mind and heart of man, from whence they sprung [...] All that it had entered into his mind to conceive [...] was here perfected and accomplished, was acknowledged for the fair and good, honoured with the epithet divine, spoke an intelligible language, thundered over Europe, and received the bended knee of the universe.

(*The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte* [1828]; xiii, 212).

Art that had been called into existence by the aristocratic and ecclesiastical patronage of the past and confined to a correspondingly exclusive audience was now on general exhibition in a gallery which had been open to the public since 1793.

On arriving at the Louvre for the first time, Hazlitt discovered that a well-placed tip would let him through from the French gallery to the 'paradise' of the foreign masters, and was soon 'march[ing] delighted through a quarter of a mile of the proudest efforts of the mind of man' ('On the Pleasure of Painting'; viii, 15). On passing an easel standing with its back to him, he looked around and

25 Letter to his father, 16 October 1802; W.C. Hazlitt, *The Hazlitts*, 412.

26 Letter to his father, 20 October 1802; *ibid*, 413.

found himself confronted by *Ippolito de Medici*. As he describes it in his *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy* (1826), ‘as I turned and saw it with the boar-spear in its hand, and its keen glance bent upon me, it seemed “a thing of life,” with supernatural force and grandeur’ (x, 225). Having arranged his permit to copy, he spent over three months working in the Louvre almost daily until closing time, although, as he wrote to his father, the cleaners on Fridays and the crowds of visitors at weekends restricted what he could do on the spot. Accordingly, he decided to ‘occupy the vacant days of the week in making duplicates of the copies which I do here, and in doing a picture of myself, in the same view as that of Hippolito de Medici, by Titian, which I intend to begin upon tomorrow.’<sup>27</sup>

At this point, we can see Hazlitt the portraitist seized by a passion for Titian which brought his Rembrandt period to an end and dominated his work until he abandoned art as a career. Even more than Rembrandt, Titian was the antithesis of Reynolds. Late in his life, in 1826, Hazlitt described the effect on him of the ‘intense personal character’ of Titian’s portraits:

Whenever you turn to look at Titian’s portraits, they appear to be looking at you; there seems to be some question pending between you, as though an intimate friend or inveterate foe were in the room with you; they exert a kind of fascinating power; and there is the exact resemblance of individual nature which is always new and always interesting, because you cannot carry away a mental abstraction of it, and you must recur to the object to revive it in its full force and integrity. I would as soon have Raphael’s pictures hanging up in a Collection, that I might pay an occasional visit to them: Titian’s are the only ones that I should wish to have hanging in the same room with me for company!

(‘On a Portrait of an English Lady, by Vandyke’, *The Plain Speaker*, xii, 286).

By the time Hazlitt wrote this account of Titian’s distinctive quality, he had for about twenty-three years had the company of two copies from Titian that he himself had painted while in Paris. It appears that altogether he produced three copies of *Ippolito de Medici* – one for Railton, one for Northcote, and one for himself – the last of which survives in Maidstone. Also in Maidstone is the self-portrait referred to in the letter to his father quoted above, a surprisingly vulnerable-looking face, with the touch of shyness that was noticed by many of those who knew him. The ‘view’ of the face may have been borrowed from Titian, but the face itself has nothing of the ‘Well, what do you think of me?’ quality Hazlitt observed in portraits by Titian. He also copied, more than once, two further Titian portraits, the *Man with a Glove*<sup>28</sup> and the one then known as *Titian’s*

27 Letter to his father, 20 October 1802; *ibid*, 413.

28 Catherine Macdonald Maclean’s disentangling of which works Hazlitt finally copied is persuasive – see *Born Under Saturn* (London: Collins, 1943), 164–9. In particular, she observes that Hazlitt’s use of titles for *Man in Black* and *Man With a Glove* is not consistent, and that he apparently never copied *Man in Black* (catalogue no. 1210),

*Mistress*.<sup>29</sup> His original plan of copying some works of Van Dyck was dropped, apparently because Titian had been such an overwhelming experience that the urge to copy Van Dyck evaporated. However, although nothing could supersede Titian, further projects and further favourites emerged during Hazlitt's weeks in the Louvre, and his judgements in his letters foreshadow the art critic he became:

The finest picture in the collection is the *Transfiguration*, by Raphael. This is without any exception the finest picture I ever saw; I mean the human part of it, because the figure of Christ, and the angels, or whatever they are, that are flying to meet him in the air, are to the last degree contemptible. The picture of the *Taking Down from the Cross*, by Rubens, which I have heard John describe, is here. It is a very fine one.<sup>30</sup>

That these judgments and enthusiasms were shared with his father suggests that the latter was now at least sufficiently reconciled with his son's artistic aspirations to be receptive. Hazlitt produced a large (4 feet 8 inches by 10 feet 8 inches) copy showing three figures from the *Transfiguration*, as well as another which remained with him at least until after his marriage in 1808. One *Transfiguration* copy, probably identical with the latter, was, according to Peggy Hazlitt, passed on to Northcote.<sup>31</sup>

In November Hazlitt was writing home full of excitement about a picture he had lately seen for the first time and had started to copy at once: 'It is to my mind the sweetest picture in the place.'<sup>32</sup> Assuming, no doubt correctly, that a minor seventeenth-century artist's rendering of an episode from *Gerusalemme Liberata* would not strike an immediate chord of recognition with his father, Hazlitt translated the catalogue entry for him in its entirety:

852, by Ludovic Lana, born at Modena, in 1597; died in 1646. *The Death of Clorinda*. – Clorinda, having been mortally wounded in battle by Tancred, is seen lying at the foot of a tree, her bosom bare, discovering the place where she was wounded. On the point of expiring she desires to receive the baptismal sacrament; and while Tancred administers it to her with the water he has brought in his helmet from a neighbouring spring, she holds out her hand to him, in token of forgiveness, and breathes her last.<sup>33</sup>

Hazlitt made a slightly reduced copy of this picture for Railton – 'My canvas is not so large as the other, but includes both the figures, which are of the size of

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although at one point he intended to do so, and later admired it more than *Man With a Glove* (catalogue no. 942) – *ibid*, 591, n. 118.

29 Hazlitt mentions *Titian's Mistress* among the copies he was painting for Railton, and he kept a 'rough sketch' of it for himself at least until 1820 ('On the Pleasure of Painting'; viii, 18).

30 Letter to his father, 20 October 1802; W.C. Hazlitt, *The Hazlitts*, 414.

31 *Journal of Margaret Hazlitt*, 108.

32 Letter to his father, 14 November 1802; W.C. Hazlitt, *The Hazlitts*, 415.

33 *Ibid*, 414–5.

life' – which he thought 'very good'; it took him fifteen mornings (a 'morning' meant the six hours from ten to four) and he predicted that it 'will certainly make as great a figure in Railton's parlour as the original does in the Louvre'.<sup>34</sup> He had also, however, set aside some time to make copies and sketches for himself, among which was a smaller *Clorinda*, which he kept and which is now in Maidstone.<sup>35</sup> Another spare-time copy was inspired, perhaps subconsciously, by his father: 'After I had done my picture yesterday, I took a small canvas, which I had in the place, and began a sketch of a head in one of the large historical pictures [...] In a couple of hours, I made a very fair copy, which I intend to let remain as it is. It is a side face, a good deal like yours, which was one reason of my doing it so rapidly.'<sup>36</sup>

A list of copies made by Hazlitt, in his own handwriting and signed and sealed by Dominique-Vivant Denon, the first Directeur du Louvre, is reproduced in Duncan Wu's *William Hazlitt*.<sup>37</sup> This list mentions, among other items, just 'two sketches' from the *Ippolito de Medici*, a single *Clorinda*, and a 'sketch' of three figures, plus another head, from Raphael's *Transfiguration*. Presumably Hazlitt felt no need to list the additional copies, especially as most of the work on these had been done outside the precincts of the Louvre.

This document, dated '12 Pluviôse an 11' (i.e. 1 February 1803), signalled the end of Hazlitt's stay in Paris, an experience that remained part of him artistically and emotionally. Once back in England, he painted a number of portraits in Titianesque style, including pictures of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Initially impressed, Coleridge wrote to Southey: 'Young Hazlitt has taken masterly portraits of me and Wordsworth, very much in the manner of Titian's portraits.'<sup>38</sup> However, either Hazlitt spoiled the portraits by reworking or the sitters became disenchanted with them. Hazlitt had already confessed to an English visitor in the Louvre that 'rapid sketching was what I did better than anything else; and that, after the first hour or two, I generally made my pictures worse and worse'<sup>39</sup> and now, as a portraitist, he sometimes found himself 'doing away with what likeness there is'<sup>40</sup> the longer he went on working. Wordsworth thought the picture of Coleridge 'dolorous and funereal',<sup>41</sup> and destroyed the one of himself. Far more successful was a portrait of Charles Lamb dressed as a Venetian senator, now in the National Portrait Gallery. It was apparently through his friendship with Lamb, which began shortly after his return to England, that Hazlitt met his first wife Sarah Stoddart, a friend of Lamb's sister Mary.

34 Letter to his father, 10 December 1802; *ibid.*, 417.

35 The original picture, which is today attributed to Sisto Badalocchio (c.1581–c.1547), measures 142 × 161 cm and is now in its original home, the Galleria Estense in Modena.

36 W.C. Hazlitt, *The Hazlitts*, 417.

37 Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 84.

38 Quoted in Paley, *Portraits of Coleridge*, 29.

39 Letter to his father, 10 December 1802; W.C. Hazlitt, *The Hazlitts*, 418.

40 Letter of Henry Crabb Robinson to Catherine Clarkson, 13 December 1811, quoted in Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 138.

41 Letter from Wordsworth to Sir George Beaumont, 3 June 1805, quoted in *ibid.*, 99.

By the time his son William was born in 1811, Hazlitt's chronic need of money, and his sense that he was not, after all, developing as an artist, had him lecturing and writing rather than trying to make a living from painting. Yet his past hopes of an artistic career continued to haunt him. In a curious replay of family history they surfaced in his subsequent ambitions for the boy: 'I should wish you to be a good painter, if such a thing could be hoped. I have failed in this myself, and should wish you to be able to do what I have not – to paint like Claude or Rembrandt or Guido or Vandyke, if it were possible' ('On the Conduct of Life'; xvii, 99). Once again, the father's hopes remained unfulfilled and so, in effect, did those of the son; William Junior wanted to train as a singer, but his father's 'horror and aversion'<sup>42</sup> put a stop to that scheme before it began. It is noteworthy, however, that Hazlitt's ambition for his son was what his ambition for himself had been 'if it were possible': a career of major artistic achievement. It had proved not to be possible for Hazlitt. Competence and success on his brother's scale might just have been attainable, but could never have satisfied him, although his advice to his son does include a genial glance at the fulfilled old age of his friend Northcote, who was certainly no Rembrandt. It is with some justice that W. C. Hazlitt wrote of his grandfather and great-uncle: 'John Hazlitt rapidly attained the height of his fame and the limit of his faculty. His miniatures, by which it is fairest to estimate him, were admirable in mechanical execution, in colour, and in drapery; but it was a widely different sort and degree of success to which his brother aspired and despaired of ever reaching [...] He knew at once too much and too little.'<sup>43</sup> To which one might add Hazlitt's own view of what was implied by success in the fashionable art world: 'A fashionable Artist and a fashionable hairdresser have the same common principles of theory and practice; the one fits his customers to appear with *éclat* in a ball-room, the other in the Great Room of the Royal Academy' ('The Catalogue Raisonné of the British Institution'; xviii, 107). The ambitions he pursued during and after his visit to Paris left him with no wish to become the artistic counterpart of a fashionable hairdresser.

The Louvre itself also haunted Hazlitt. It had proved for him, in characteristic Romantic fashion, a place of present rapture and future recollection – recollection made more poignant for him by the defeat of Napoleon and the disappointment of his political hopes for Europe. Just as Wordsworth sustained himself by revisiting the Wye Valley in memory ('Yet O how oft,/Thou sylvan Wye, thou wanderer through the woods,/How often has my spirit turned to thee!<sup>44</sup>), so Hazlitt, even after the Napoleonic glory had departed and the spoils of war been repatriated in 1815, went on revisiting the Louvre in his mind's eye: 'How often, thou tenantless mansion of godlike magnificence – how often has my heart since gone on a pilgrimage to thee!' ('On the Pleasure of Painting'; viii, 16).

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42 Letter from Charles Lamb to Sarah Hazlitt; see W.C. Hazlitt (ed.), *Mary and Charles Lamb; Poems, Letters, and Remains, Now First Collected, with Reminiscences and Notes* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1874), 269.

43 W.C. Hazlitt, *The Hazlitt Memoirs*, I, 88–9.

44 'Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey' (1798), ll 56–8.

As for the copies Hazlitt made in the Louvre, some of those he kept for himself, including the two that survive at Maidstone, remained almost personal friends, their unframed state, as already suggested, implying that they had never quite lost their status as work in progress and as professional points of reference. Peggy Hazlitt notes in her *Journal* the 'beautiful copies' of *The Death of Clorinda*, *The Transfiguration* and *Ippolito de Medici* which were the only products of her brother's work in the Louvre that she remembered having seen, and these were evidently visible wherever Hazlitt happened to be living.

Although the *Transfiguration* was finally given to Northcote, it was well remembered by Hazlitt's first wife Sarah. After Hazlitt's remarriage in 1824, she followed her ex-husband and his second wife Isabella to Paris (where Hazlitt was starting work on his *Life of Napoleon*), hoping to get some financial support from him, in which she was unsuccessful. While there, however, she also made a point of visiting the Louvre in the hope of seeing Raphael's original *Transfiguration*. As it had been returned to the Vatican, this quest too proved disappointing. She wrote to Peggy, with whom she had remained on affectionate terms:

I am very near the Louvre, and have been there once, but I mean to visit it often if I can [...] I was very sorry to find that the *Transfiguration*, *Tancred* and *Clorinda*, and most of those that William copied were gone; it was quite a disappointment to me; it will be some time before I can find out where half those that remain, according to the catalogue, are hung.<sup>45</sup>

It is surprising that Sarah felt any inclination to see the original *Death of Clorinda*, by then back in Modena, for Hazlitt's copy of this had come to symbolize, certainly for him and very probably for her, the infatuation with Sarah Walker that had led to her divorcing him, collusively, under Scottish law two years previously. Just before the divorce proceedings, Hazlitt had indiscreetly published in the *New Monthly Magazine* (February, 1822) his essay 'On Great and Little Things' (afterwards published in *Table Talk*), containing several passages about his frustrated search for true love and its recent promise of success in the person of Sarah Walker:

And thus I waste my life in one long sigh; nor ever (till too late) beheld a gentle face turned gently upon mine! ... But no! not too late, if that face, pure, modest, downcast, tender, with angel sweetness, not only gladdens the prospect of the future, but sheds its radiance on the past, smiling in tears. A purple light hovers round my head. The air of love is in the room. As I look at my long-neglected copy of the *Death of Clorinda*, golden gleams play

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45 Letter from Sarah Hazlitt to Peggy Hazlitt, 21 July 1824 – *Liber Amoris or the New Pygmalion by William Hazlitt, with additional Matter now printed for the first time from the Original Manuscripts, with an Introduction by Richard Le Gallienne* (privately printed, 1894), 340. Sarah took a quite informed interest in painting, and even discussed pictures with Hazlitt during the divorce proceedings in Scotland; see *ibid.*, 322.

upon the canvas, as they used when I painted it. The flowers of Hope and Joy springing up in my mind, recall the time when they first bloomed there. The years that are fled knock at the door and enter. I am in the Louvre once more. The sun of Austerlitz has not set. It still shines here – in my heart; and he, the son of glory, is not dead, nor ever shall, to me. I am as when my life began. (viii, 237–8)<sup>46</sup>

While Hazlitt was writing this, his copy of *The Death of Clorinda* clearly provided the focal point for a fantasy not just about Sarah Walker, but about the recovery of the lost youth (and bachelorhood) and the lost hopes, personal and political, of twenty years before, in other words, it provided a focal point for Hazlitt's mid-life crisis, which had been aggravated by the death of Napoleon in 1821. Sarah Walker very possibly never read this essay, but Sarah Hazlitt, who had coped with her husband rather unenthusiastically for fourteen years, did read it, and remonstrated when in Scotland helping to set up the divorce: 'I told him he had done a most injudicious thing in publishing what he did in the Magazine about Sarah Walker, particularly at this time, and that he might be sure it would be made use of against him, and that everybody in London had thought it a most improper thing.'<sup>47</sup>

His personal copy of *The Death of Clorinda* appears to have remained in Hazlitt's possession for his entire life. The *Ippolito de Medici*, however, together with the now vanished *Man with a Glove*, had a more eventful career. In the summer of 1819, the painter Benjamin Robert Haydon, who had been a friend of Hazlitt's since they were introduced by Northcote in 1812 – although each had reservations about the other – received the following note:

Dear Haydon,

Esau sold his birthright. My copies in the Louvre and the recollections associated with them are all I have left that I care about. You shall have them, if you feel inclined, for a forty pound bill at a twelvemonth's date. Would you call tomorrow morning before twelve?

W. H.<sup>48</sup>

Hazlitt was in a financial crisis: he was being pursued for a debt of £50 and there was a distinct possibility that he might find himself in prison. Haydon, who did not particularly admire the copies, declined the offer, and Hazlitt succeeded in warding off the bailiffs with help from elsewhere. Later in the year, however, another emergency arose. Hazlitt's London landlord, who was none other than Jeremy Bentham, was now threatening to send in the bailiffs on Christmas Day. This time Haydon agreed to take the pictures and gave Hazlitt a promissory note

46 Hazlitt tries, not very successfully, to distance himself from this passage by referring to it, in a footnote, as 'a specimen of the mock heroic style' (viii, 238).

47 Sarah Hazlitt, *Journal of My Trip to Scotland*, in *Liber Amoris* (1894), 330.

48 Reproduced in A.C. Grayling, *The Quarrel of the Age*, 243.



William Hazlitt, *Ippolito de Medici*, copy of a Titian (©Maidstone Museum & Bently Art Gallery)

for £50, which afterwards caused some difficulties for Haydon.<sup>49</sup> In 1823, Haydon himself was imprisoned for debt, and his possessions, including Hazlitt's pictures, were sold by his creditors. The pictures were bought by P. G. Patmore. Patmore, who had known Hazlitt since 1817, had, as we have seen, been impressed by his early portrait of the old countrywoman. He had long been familiar with the sight of the 'two noble copies' from Titian, and had formed a perceptive estimate of their importance to Hazlitt :

They used to hang in or stand about his rooms, without frames, and covered with dirt [...] Not that he underrated, or took a slight interest in them. On the contrary, he made no scruple of declaring them to be the best copies of Titian that he had ever seen; and they were the only things to which I ever knew him attach any value, or feel the least desire to retain a property in [...] But these he cherished with a personal fondness that seemed to give them in his eyes all the character of living objects, they seemed necessary to his very existence, and to preserve, as it were, that personal identity with his early life, in the absence of which he would scarcely have felt that he continued to live at all.<sup>50</sup>

Space was found for the copies at Patmore's house in Fulham, and when he visited Patmore, Hazlitt would 'stand and gaze on them [...] almost with tears in his eyes,' having apparently come primarily to see his pictures rather than his friend. Patmore would have liked to give them back to Hazlitt, but was afraid of seeming to undervalue what Hazlitt himself had so greatly prized. One day Hazlitt asked hesitantly, 'I say, Patmore, do you care about these pictures?' – and, after some awkward exchanges between the two friends, hinted that if Patmore were willing to part with them, he could find a purchaser who would offer 'a good sum.' Patmore replied that he would not wish to sell the pictures – 'but you may have them if you like.' Hazlitt, sustaining the fiction that he was negotiating with a buyer in mind, suggested that he might give Patmore ten pounds in the hope of getting fifty afterwards – 'but I've got no money' – and went on to propose paying later, with an IOU. Trying not to smile, for Hazlitt never had any money and was always sensitive about his financial embarrassments, Patmore agreed. 'But may I take them with me now?' asked Hazlitt anxiously – and never parted with the pictures again. He did, in fact, pay Patmore the ten pounds, but when Haydon, who had given fifty pounds for the pictures four years previously, learned of the price at which they had been recovered, he misunderstood and resented what Hazlitt had done.<sup>51</sup>

Once he had them back, Hazlitt displayed the copies by the same method, or absence of method, as before. 'It is now twenty years since I made those copies,' he

49 Hazlitt may be referring to this episode when he writes of the 'loose draughts and fragments' he had brought back from the Louvre but had had to 'part with, like drops of life-blood, for "hard money"' ('On the Pleasure of Painting'; viii, 17), or perhaps to other smaller items which had met a similar fate.

50 P. G. Patmore, *My Friends and Acquaintance*, III, 105–6.

51 Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 515, n. 108.

wrote in 1826, 'and I hope to keep them while I live. It seems to me no longer ago than yesterday' ('On a Portrait of an English Lady by Vandyke', *The Plain Speaker*; xii, 292). A vivid late glimpse of Hazlitt exhibiting his work is provided by Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke, who called on him together shortly after their marriage in 1828:

It was our good fortune also to see a magnificent copy that Hazlitt made of Titian's portrait of Ippolito dei Medici, when we called upon him at his lodgings one evening. The painting, mere stretched canvas without frame, was standing on an old-fashioned couch in one corner of the room leaning against the wall, and we remained opposite to it for some time, while Hazlitt stood by holding the candle high up so as to throw the light well on to the picture, descanting enthusiastically on the merits of the original. The beam from the candle falling on his own finely intellectual head, with its iron-grey hair, its potential forehead, its massive mouth and chin, and eyes full of earnest fire, formed a glorious picture in itself, and remains a luminous vision for ever upon our memory.<sup>52</sup>

The following year the copies were, as we have seen, threatened by fire but rescued under protest by William Hazlitt Junior, who appears to have had less grasp of their importance to his father than Patmore had, and was undoubtedly annoyed that while the drama was proceeding, Hazlitt himself 'did nothing but act the bystander with great success.'<sup>53</sup> After his father's death in 1830, however, it was he who inherited the pictures, and it is due to his care of them that they survived to reach Maidstone.

It seems that to some extent painting, and the hope of artistic achievement that accompanied it, gave Hazlitt a sense of himself that enabled him, in his earlier life, to exorcise his underlying unease that he had failed to become what his father had wanted him to be. One might expect that his achievements as philosopher, writer, and critic would, in turn, have exorcised the haunting presence of the artist he had once wished and hoped to become, but in fact that exorcism remained incomplete long after his hopes were abandoned. With typically painful honesty, he describes in 1826 the one subsequent attempt he made to copy a Titian portrait in the Louvre for a friend in England.<sup>54</sup> (In view of Patmore's rescue, and subsequent return, of the Titian copies, it is possible that the friend was Patmore, and that Hazlitt had now volunteered to provide him with a new copy of his own.<sup>55</sup>) The emotional 'excess' that attended the project was agonizing:

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52 Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke, *Recollections of Writers* (London: Sampson Low, 1878), 60.

53 W.C. Hazlitt, *Memoirs of William Hazlitt*, II, 233.

54 He was revisiting *Man With a Glove*, as he mentions having successfully copied the picture before, although he refers to 'a man in black' (see above, note 28).

55 It is suggestive, though not of course conclusive, that it is to Patmore that he reports 'I have made a rough copy of the Titian' in the course of a brief letter (7 August 1826) requesting help with a cash flow problem and mentioning the 'rows and squabbles' that were now disrupting his relationship with Isabella (xiii, 354n).

I failed, and floundered on for some days, as might be expected. I must say the effect on me was painful and excessive. My sky was suddenly overcast. Everything seemed of the colour of the paints I used [...] I had no sense or feeling left, but of the unforeseen want of power, and of the tormenting struggle to do what I could not. I was ashamed ever to have written or spoken on art: it seemed a piece of vanity and affectation in me to do so – all whose reasonings and refinements on the subject ended in an execrable daub.

(‘On Means and Ends’; xvii, 219)

The misery he was experiencing blotted from his mind even the past associations of the Louvre and Paris – ‘my hopes when young, my regrets since’ (xvii, 219) – and his only relief was the thought that there was ‘some distinction’ in ‘the excess of pain I felt’ and that ‘no French artist [...] would regret not copying a Titian so much as I did, nor so far shew the same value for it’ (xvii, 219). The frustration was the more tormenting because ‘I had copied this very picture very well formerly’; yet, he tried to remind himself, in those days he had not yet found his voice as a writer:

When I copied this picture before, I had no other resource, no other language. My tongue then stuck to the roof of my mouth; now it is unlocked, and I have done what I then despaired of doing in another way. Ought I not then to be grateful and contented? [...] Well, then, *Let bygones be bygones* (as the Scotch proverb has it); give up the attempt, and think no more of Titian, or of the portrait of a man in black in the Louvre (xvii, 219-20).

Yet his literary achievement still left him powerless to put behind him his past aspirations or his present frustrations as a painter. For the time being it proved impossible either to abandon the copy or to make a success of it. Although he recognized the merits of his own writings about Titian, the paralysis he was at the moment experiencing was actually intensified, not alleviated, by the fact that he had written well in praise of the artist he was trying to copy:

For me, who had nearly exhausted the subject on paper, that I should take it into my head to paint a libel of what I had composed so many and such fine panegyrics upon, it was a fatality, a judgment upon me for my vapouring and conceit [...] Yet the picture would look the same as ever. I could hardly bear to think so [...] I must turn my thoughts from it, or they would lead to madness! (xvii, 220).

In this instance, he did finally move on, but, significantly, only by first continuing to paint, and, afterwards, but not until afterwards, by describing the whole revealing experience in words:

The copy went on better afterwards, and the affair ended less tragically than I apprehended. I did not cut a hole in the canvas, or commit any

other extravagance: it is now hanging up very quietly facing me, and I have considerable satisfaction in occasionally looking at it, as I write this paragraph (xvii, 220).

After what he had just been through, and in view of the kind of dialogues that took place between himself and his pictures, it is with evident relief that Hazlitt notes that this picture is hanging – and facing him – ‘very quietly’. Whichever participle ‘very quietly’ is taken to modify (and it might modify both), the expression bears witness to the emotional turbulence which for Hazlitt surrounded the act of painting, and which never entirely departed from the never entirely finished product. Although the fate of this particular copy is unknown, those now in the Maidstone collection survive as a testimony to an aspect of Hazlitt that never ceased to have a bearing on his life and work. It would be interesting to know whether any of his other Louvre copies remain, perhaps unrecognized, elsewhere.<sup>56</sup>

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56 No signature is discernible on either of the Louvre copies at Maidstone, although *Ippolito de Medici* has been re-backed and is thus impossible to examine completely.



## PARADOXICAL ARGUMENT

### Hazlitt's *Political Essays* of 1819

*Paul Hamilton*

Hazlitt's *Political Essays* were published in that Romantic 'hot spot', 1819. Yet, as James Chandler notes in his fine study, *England in 1819*, the collection shows 'no sign of being tempted by the notion of a spirit of the age'.<sup>1</sup> Instead we find *ad hoc* polemics and strategic attacks befitting Hazlitt's alliance with his radical publisher, William Hone, and his admiration of the book's dedicatee, John Hunt, rather than a symptomatic portrait gallery; and when we are given illustrations of the times these turn out to be 'Illustrations of the Times newspaper'. The literary bravura of various pieces is either worked up from earlier material or found in passages we now tend to read as sketches for finished work to come. In other words, this writing is mostly occasional journalism, but journalism, I would contend, of the kind required for Hazlitt's actual purpose in this book to be achieved. And that end I take to be a battle for 'the good old cause' against superstitions, prejudices, traditions, laws, usages which are 'enshrined in the very idioms of language'.<sup>2</sup> Hazlitt's own writing becomes the spirit of opposition, of necessity various and miscellaneous in its confrontation with its enemy – a reactionary shape-shifter, one whose inconsistencies have to be smoked out and matched at every turn with the vigour of Hazlitt's prose opposition.

Hazlitt's version of the 'cause' is the struggle of the governed for the right to elect their government at all levels, a polemical interpretation of the fall of the Stuarts in English history, but now with a sharply modern and European relevance. Allied to this political fundamental is Hazlitt's *philosophical* 'good old cause': the natural disinterestedness of the human mind, an insight he repeatedly claims as his own, but whose truth he thinks only the hypocrite can deny. Its philosophical proof Hazlitt likewise established within the English philosophical tradition, but now it

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1 James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 181. This essay shows how much I have learned from Roy Park's foundational study of Hazlitt's critique of abstraction, as well as discussions of Hazlitt, in print and sometimes in conversation, by John Kinnaird, David Bromwich, Kevin Gilmartin, John Whale, Uttara Natarajan, Duncan Wu, and Tom Paulin.

2 William Hazlitt, *Political Essays with Sketches of Public Characters* (London: William Hone, 1819), xvii. Hereafter, references given in text.

also has symptomatic European corroborations. The first, political, point seems not to ask for very much. But Hazlitt was writing during the ongoing 'concert' of Europe which had begun with the Congress of Vienna, where the hereditary monarchical principle against which the good old cause defined itself seemed to have been shamefully revived in order to drive all decisions about the shape post-Napoleonic Europe should take. For Hazlitt, this was 'to consign a whole continent to the most odious and despicable slavery in the world' (154). The second, philosophical, point, although it arose as an abstruse theoretical move in an uncompromisingly abstract philosophical discussion in the early *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805), was now turning out, in Hazlitt's analysis, to underwrite, like a genetic code, all decent opposition to the spirit of his times. Its importance is shown by its unsystematic appearance behind almost all his arguments.

The naming of his key principle as 'natural disinterestedness' was perhaps not Hazlitt's most effective formulation. Better might have been a title making clear the reciprocity of my own interests and the interests of others as a consequence of the imaginative activity common to both. This equation of interests, because of the powering of sympathy and selfishness from the same imaginative source, was so constitutional as eventually to seem to Hazlitt to amount to common sense. It provokes his continual detection of paradox in those who would not admit to the commonplace he believed he had, with some philosophical sophistication, established. Culpable blindness to the living *gusto* linking individual inflection with general enjoyment showed up in the coldness of politicians like Pitt and theorists like Malthus, people incapable of focusing the interests of individual and society through each other. Either as 'divine right men' and subscribers to 'Legitimacy', Hazlitt's opponents denied the constitutional obligation of the one to represent the interest of the many because of a common interest. Or, in the shape of execrators of Napoleon as a tyrant, the same 'exclusive' patriots paradoxically deplored the absence of that identical, necessary constitutional principle in action in his case. Theirs was the politics of paradox matching the poetry of paradox Hazlitt had criticized in contemporaries like Wordsworth.

The Preface to *Political Essays* puts Hazlitt's position clearly. He settles for the precedent of 1688, recalling that 'this was once a free, a proud, and happy country, when under a constitutional monarchy and a Whig king, it had just broken the chains of tyranny that were being prepared for it' (x). (And he here uses the idiom of the Whig view of history advisedly in the light of his critique of abstract Reform.) Now, in reaction to the French Revolution and war against the new state it established under Napoleon, we feel, writes Hazlitt, 'like wretches in a slave-ship' (xvii). At the period of the settlements imposed by the Congress of Vienna, Britain seems intent on forcing on the rest of Europe the hereditary monarchy which it had replaced in its own case with something much more like a Miltonic magistracy – 'when the monarch still felt what he owed to himself and the people, and in the opposite claims which were set up to it, saw the real tenure on which he held his crown' (xi). This real tenure of Kings and Magistrates defines itself against 'the cant of legitimacy'. At a time of Restoration Milton, too, wrote about slavery, and in *Samson Agonistes* he opposed that kind of social death with an

individualism which would bear witness to an inalienable liberty. When Hazlitt writes about contemporary maltreatment of 'the People', he combines images of Milton's and Samson's blindness in a complex description of how the ideological indoctrination of Legitimacy blindfolds them in a slavery contrasting with Milton's heroic transformation in the Prologue to Book Three of *Paradise Lost* of his own blindness into divine illumination. Here ideological indoctrination has replaced Miltonic inspiration.

Grant that [the people] are slow of apprehension – that they do not see till they feel. Is that a reason that they are not to feel then, neither? Would you blindfold them with the double bandages of bigotry, or quench their understandings with 'the dim suffusion', 'the drop serene', of Legitimacy, that 'they may roll in vain and find no dawn' of liberty, no ray of hope? (330)

Milton was a poet, certainly, but he was also something everyone can be – 'an honest man' – who tempers his Reformist idealism to the practicalities of politics – 'he was Cromwell's secretary' (157). And Hazlitt's devotion to Napoleon in this context also appears to seek Miltonic legitimacy where he insists on Napoleon's merit and humanity in contrast with the hereditary, unmerited entitlement and power he humbled: 'He, one man, did this' (xiv). And, echoing Milton's likely mortalism, this 'greater man' became the historical representative of 'the abstract right of the human race to be free'. No hereditary principle was established: 'there was an end of it with the individual' (xvi). This Christ-like Napoleon, Hazlitt concedes, is 'the God of my idolatry', but precisely because he wasn't a God or hereditary monarch. This is the Miltonic plot of his *Political Essays*, and he proceeds to apportion the blame for losing this plot equally amongst the political parties of his time, be they Reformers, Tories, or Whigs.

Hazlitt's enthusiasm for Napoleon will always be controversial. His idea that the war against France from 1793 onwards was not against a nation but against a political principle is more plausible. This does require us to see Napoleon as the 'child' of the Revolution and the representative of a kind of government it established, one 'with whose existence', Hazlitt writes, 'not with its power or its conduct [...] we were at war' (67). This struggle is 'Mr. Burke's regicide war', a war to extirpate an illegitimate government, not to get it to change its policies so as to do what you want it to do. But Burke is the most formidable of the shape-shifters among Hazlitt's opponents, and Hazlitt sees it as his task to detect beneath the rhetoric of the later Burke the repressed principles of the great Parliamentarian's earlier support for the American rebels and the settlement of 1688. It is as if Napoleon stands for the 'Glorious Revolution' which the earlier regicide of 1649, however deplorable, made possible. Once the regicide war had declared the existence of the new France 'incompatible with that of the surrounding states', then Napoleon was of necessity transformed into the warlord for whose menaced country 'the struggle necessarily became convulsive, and the re-action terrible' (68). Hazlitt thought that Britain was in effect trying to re-write a bit of her own history on to France, but backwards. In this historical reversal the more

constitutional monarchy of 1689 was replaced with an abject Restoration which had been achieved as a consequence of guilt over the violent establishment of the preceding republic under Cromwell. Britain had gone to war against the principle on which the legitimacy of her own politics was based: ‘the internal right of any people to choose its own form of government’ (67).<sup>3</sup> Writing in April 1814 as the Congress of Vienna started work, and before it was thrown into suspended animation by Napoleon’s ‘hundred days,’ Hazlitt frames the contemporary political question as not about the concert of Europe and a new world order, but ‘the balance of power between kings and people; a question, compared with which the balance of power in Europe is petty and insignificant’ (67). Like William Cobbett, he also thinks the whole project is bad economics – it creates a debt which again is not distributed in a representative manner and so highlights political inequities in general: ‘the price of restoring the Pope, the Inquisition, the Bourbons, and the doctrine of Divine Right, is half of our nine hundred millions of debt. That is the amount of the government bill of costs presented to John Bull’ (108). And Hazlitt’s target is not just the disproportionate charge on the poor imposed by the war but, as Cobbett also objected, the distortion wrought on the labour market: ‘the difference between the expense of a war or a peace establishment is just the difference between a state of productive or unproductive labour’ (109). It is in this context that his remarks about poetry have to be understood, a context which reflects the general economy of labour within a nation and the functionality or dysfunctionality inflicted on it by ideological commitment.

When attacking Southey’s Laureateship or Wordsworth as an illustration of ‘*The Times*’, Hazlitt detects, therefore, a comparable dysfunction in poetry which leads him to equate ‘levelling’ in poetry with ‘legitimacy’ in politics. In the former apostasy, the sympathy with power characteristic of great poetry, in which all classes of reader can delight, is perversely curtailed by the supposedly greater power of the (Wordsworthian) poet’s originality. In the second, all political distinction is levelled by subscription to ‘the mediocrity of royalty’ (158), a hereditary principle opposing meritocracy in politics. The levelling poet’s break with poetical heritage and tradition shows that he hates all poetry but his own, setting himself up as a kind of poetic monarch. Legitimacy in politics shows the same person abdicating his political responsibilities, sacrificing his right to choose and cashier his governors in favour of the ‘divine right’ of kings to rule – a levelling of thinking citizens to loyal subjects. Jacobinism taken out of its political sphere becomes a kind of absolute egotism, contemptuous of all individual differences. Hereditary monarchy by definition opposes the elected authority underpinning modern politics. Paradox is the key to both arguments.

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3 ‘The doctrine of “divine right” [...] That detestable doctrine, which in England first tottered and fell headless to the ground with the martyred Charles; which we kicked out with his son James, and kicked twice back with two Pretenders, to make room for “Brunswick’s fated line”, a line of our own chusing, and for that reason worth all of Mr Southey’s lines put together; that detestable doctrine, which the French, in 1793, ousted from their soil [...] was borne into it once more on English shoulders, and thrust down their throats with English bayonets [...]’ (92).

While Wordsworth is Hazlitt's usual poetic target, his quarrel goes back to Burke. Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* pose as political discourse but are actually a literary dispute with Rousseau whose genuine originality Burke could not abide. His polemic was driven not by political principle but by 'the morbid, sickly, effeminate, little, selfish, irritable, dirty, spirit of authorship' (161). His desire for literary admiration contrasts with Rousseau's democratic theories and his literary hazarding of his own personality for the enjoyment of his readers in his *Confessions*. In Hazlitt's famous comparison of Wordsworth and Rousseau, the former tried to level real distinctions by persuading that the commonplace was interesting, and the latter interested you in the lowly *pervenche* by interesting you in his narrative invention of himself. The first is egotism, the second, an invitation to share extraordinary imaginative processes. Burke's notorious talk of a 'cabal' crucial to the generation of the French Revolution was nothing other than 'literary jealousy' and a desire for that admiration guaranteeing an income.

The power served by both levelling poet and political legitimist is no respecter of persons. Hazlitt's argument goes on to show power triumphing over any pretensions to harness it to one's own interests. Yet in a perception anticipating Foucault, he realizes that power remains the only discourse in which our humanity and individuality can express itself. Hazlitt draws on orientalist stereotypes, 'jaggernaut' and 'the state of the Eastern world,' but only in order to remove the difference from the West and describe a universal condition of subservience to power (162). He does, however, distinguish between different kinds and different degrees of knowingness about 'the excess of individual power that strikes and gains over [man's] imagination' (165). Our distinctively human imagination may be in thrall to power, but there is a difference between a blind subservience to, or idolatry of, political absolutism and what Hazlitt claims Wordsworth hates – Rubens, Rembrandt, Titian, Vandyke, the Apollo Belvedere, the Venus de Medici, and, Hazlitt of course cannot resist adding to his list, Buonaparte. Bad power comes from 'the want of something to admire, without knowing who or why' (166).

Every powerful quotation Hazlitt launches on his readers is surely meant to express and educate us in the opposite of this culpable ignorance. Quotations, unlike 'nicknames,' are inscribed with an invitation freely to judge of their literary power. And Hazlitt's exemplary Jacobin, charged with hope for the people and hatred of tyrants, matches power with a similar displacement of passion from idolatry to 'liberty' (168). Southey, the sometime 'Ultra-Jacobin,' spills out of politics and falls into 'second-hand paradoxes,' and now, an 'Ultra-royalist,' is condemned to the mediocrity of 'second-hand commonplaces' (191). For Hazlitt, apostasy is the ultimate in lack of this necessary knowingness, or consciousness of self, and so the paradigm of enslavement to power. And in his formative philosophical *Essay*, the crucial idea is that self-knowledge is achieved not through privileged access but by the same means, the same powerful imaginative projection, as that by which we sympathize with the interests of others. Sympathy alone never achieved anything, Hazlitt pointed out in his 'Character of Chatham'; Hume thought reason was never a motive to action, and Hazlitt thought sympathy or sociability on its own achieved nothing but was only effectively motivated 'by power, by passion,

by will' (360). Hazlitt's attack on Southey for hypocritically disowning the past self which wrote *Wat Tyler* is thus two-pronged: an excoriation both of Southey's culpable ignorance of his constitutional complicity in common humanity, and an indictment of the inconsistency and contradiction through which he manifests his lack of self-knowledge. Bad paradox must be fought with good paradox. Hazlitt's pursuit of this symmetry is unrelenting. If Coleridge, in advance of producing his *Lay-Sermon*, is going to puff it in an Advertisement, Hazlitt will not be taken in: he will publish a review of the *Lay-Sermon* in advance of its appearance too (118n.).

The same argument lies behind Hazlitt's five final essays objecting to Malthus's theory which furnish the book's culminating polemic. Scientific as Malthus appears to be, he cannot avoid normative assumptions which Hazlitt finds offensive to his own philosophical grounding. The modern philosophy of which Hazlitt disapproves is of the perfectibility type popularized by Condorcet in France and Godwin in Britain. While Hazlitt likes the radical politics supported by the progressive convictions of these two thinkers, he is sceptical of the mathematical and mechanical calculations he thinks they are obliged to apply to human behaviour to justify their optimism. Malthus, on the other hand, is pessimistic: since scarcity of resources increase with population, the perfection of human existence is a straightforwardly contradictory notion. Only the vice and misery naturally depleting the population from the bottom up can ensure our continued viability. Or not quite, for when Malthus was taxed with the condoning of vice and misery his arguments seemed to offer, he insisted that he had not ruled out 'moral restraint'. Moral restraint, however, seemed to be something to be enjoined on the poor rather than on the well-to-do. And why not, since the prosperous classes clearly could afford their large families, while the improvident fornicator who then married and had more children in addition to the original bastards only compounded his crime (430)? Technical philosophical differences aside, Hazlitt's objection is based on his assumption that we cannot, in honesty, imagine our own future interests in detachment from those of others; and the kind of violence which our policing of sex would impose on the poor would in some important respect also be self-imposed. Hegel, in that section of his 1806 *Phenomenology* which was to gain most currency, the master and slave episode, would say the same thing. Mastery is limited by its success; its authority diminishes with the lack of freedom and equality reflected back to it by those who recognize it.

This contradiction is quite as straightforward as Malthus's crucial statistical trap. Again, the price to pay for Malthus's remedies would be that dehumanizing loss of 'character' deplored above. Hazlitt puts it more picturesquely, imagining the virtuous and self-congratulatory withholding of charity in face of a (Wordsworthian?) procession of appalling suffering, a kind of edifying ritual, yearly series of '*Auto da fes*' of the undeserving poor (431). Black comedy notwithstanding, his point is that Malthus's apparently scientific analysis, to have any foundation at all, depends on fixed social inequalities and an overall theocracy. *À la lanterne* would be the fate of Parson Malthus and his kind, predicts Hazlitt, were he properly rumbled by the *sans culottes* he would so insouciantly regulate. The 'clerical character', Hazlitt says elsewhere in *Political Essays*, is in any case a 'sort of theatrical assumption of

character'; if the parson 'makes one false step it may be fatal to him' (292). The 'people', on the other hand, are the underwriters of the authority of all political establishments, 'public opinion', and have always been overlooked at one's peril. For Hazlitt, the same people Malthus would fix in distinct classes and fates are our 'collective sense', for 'all the greatest poets, sages, heroes, are ours originally, and by right'. Instead of thinking in terms of class, Hazlitt's collective is based on the solidarity of individual and society engineered by his philosophy, a kind of intellectual and emotional suffrage whose unbelievers are always found out as 'moral atheists', a cultural democracy whose practicability his allusive and almost obsessively recursive literary style constantly tries to demonstrate.

In this, by another shift of shapes, he believes he is supported by Burke, whom he sketches in two separate essays. Burke's patriotism is admirable because of his sense of common heritage: 'he appealed to his country, and the enlightened judgement of mankind' (369). No exclusive patriotism but an easy ownership of the individual achievements of his nation distinguishes Burke. Burke is not a leveller, Jacobinical or monarchical, but was early 'weaned from that low and narrow jealousy which never willingly or heartily admits of any superiority in others'. Unlike Paine, Hazlitt, most of the time anyway, does not think Burke 'a merely florid writer' (370);<sup>4</sup> also, unlike Burke's major opponent, he values his support of 'the mixed form of government', a latitude which he sees embodied in Burke's method of reasoning itself. Hazlitt's republicanism, like that of the Jena Romantics, maintains that imaginative and political dexterity of accommodation are bound up with each other. Burke therefore merits a Miltonic compliment; his eloquence invites the (un-ironic) quotations from *Comus* on 'how charming is divine philosophy' (372). Of course, while Hazlitt follows in his own way Burke's resumption of a common heritage in his style of writing 'the book of the people' as Yeats called it, he continues to deplore the political application given it by the later Burke. But he refuses to allow himself to be forced by his opposition to Burke into that levelling typical of Jacobinical poetics or Monarchical politics. The 'character' he gives Burke, unlike the one he gives to Southey, preserves him from that. But in a way Hazlitt's severest criticism is that literary generosity is *all* Burke stands for: a composite style reminding us of our cultural and linguistic resources rather than words tellingly applied to contemporary problems. His words are 'most like things'; 'the fieriness of his zeal was in exact proportion to the levity of his understanding'; 'so that he described it in a way that no one else could', was enough, but Burke's rhetorical achievements only add to our common stock at the expense of his political philosophy as he applied it to the French Revolution (266-7).

Burke was also the great champion of party politics. Here he falls down when measured against his own principles. Hazlitt tries to live up to them in the sense that he has no time for Reform when that cause stands aloof from practicalities and scorns strategic and effective compromise, as Hazlitt thought Francis Place

4 But see my discussion above of Hazlitt's view that Burke's dispute with Rousseau is in the spirit of authorship, as well as Hazlitt's dismissals of Burke such as this: 'Tom Moore [...] is a man of wit and fancy, but he does not [...] strew the flowers of fancy, like the Jesuit Burke, over the carcase of corruption [...]' (344).

did when dividing the radical vote so as to ensure the defeat of John Cam Hobhouse at the 1819 Westminster by-election (xxiii). That kind of radicalism, Hazlitt argues, is more like Dissent translated into politics without taking account of the difference between ethical rectitude and political judgement. A belief in 'progressive perfectibility' is the characteristic of the Reformer, along with a doctrinaire republicanism that cannot tolerate the idea of a mixed constitution. He has none of the party-spirit needed to prevail in parliamentary politics because 'the first principle of his mind is the supremacy of conscience, and the independent right of private judgement' (xxi). This militant purity describes the 'priggishness' which John Kinnaird detected in the young Hazlitt.<sup>5</sup> Hazlitt gets over it by seeing, perhaps, how such Dissenting abstraction actually parodies the position on which his own thought is still founded. Or it returns that position to an earlier form on which his secular pragmatism had advanced, just as Legitimacy reverses Whig progressiveness and mires it in Hanoverian dynasticism. Abstraction of this kind makes a religion out of Hazlitt's 'commonplace' that individual interest is truly the individual's when it also plausibly legislates for all. This is the (unconscious) Kantian turn in major Dissenting texts such as Richard Price's *Review of the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals* (1758), or in the rationalism of Godwin's *Enquiry concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Modern Morals and Manners* (1793), where anarchy works because of this guarantee that a private judgement truly in the individual's interest will be universalizable. Hazlitt's suspicion of an abstract rationalism or total reliance on 'speculative reason' (xxviii) of this sort is evident in his belief that 'party' is required to bring together free-thinking people who otherwise could not agree about anything. Again like Hegel, he deprecates the 'formless intellectualism' Hegel saw in a Kantian ethic of duty for duty's sake independent of the content and circumstances of judgement.<sup>6</sup>

Hazlitt's criticism would have been unfair to Godwin, who, increasingly secular, argues that reason works through communication, debate, and a resulting consensus, a practice of rational negotiation, not speculation. Hazlitt even quotes from Godwin's most successful practical intervention in political debate, his *Cursory Strictures* (1794), which many argued helped to save the lives of the London Corresponding Society members arraigned for high treason. But Hazlitt nevertheless sees ineffectual Reform as stuck in the anterior template of Dissenting thinking. These thinkers display fastidiousness about facing up to secular power with a mundane power of their own, a moral nicety about actual political means which is self-defeating. Party organization is the way to mobilize power which otherwise remains fixed, maddening its monarchical possessor because its naturally altruistic outlets are blocked. When the power of liberty is absolutely opposed to any exercise of state power, it excludes itself from political effectiveness. Hazlitt attacks a concept of liberty so refined that it is fatally contaminated or

5 See John Kinnaird on 'the abstraction-loving prig' in *William Hazlitt: Critic of Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 32, and, generally, Chapter 1, 'Puritan Fathers, Unitarian Sons'.

6 See *Hegel's Introduction to Aesthetics*, translated by T. M. Knox with an Interpretative Essay by Charles Karelis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 61.

compromised by the political involvement that might actually give it a chance of being put into practice in some form. Monarchy makes for megalomaniacs, but the indeterminate liberty of Reform, thinks Hazlitt, is its mirror image, practised by those incapable of unabashed gusto or a selfish delight in the interests of others.

The principle of tyranny is in fact identified with a man's pride and the servility of others in the highest degree; the principle of liberty abstracts him from himself, and has to contend in its feeble course with all his own passions, interests, and those of the world and of his own party; the cavils of Reformers, the threats of Tories, and the sneers of Whigs (Preface, xxx).

Hazlitt's criticism of the actual political parties is in keeping with this attack on libertarian self-abstraction. Tories are straightforward legitimists, incapable of principle at all. Whigs don't live up to the standards set by the settlement of 1688 which Hazlitt praised at the start of *Political Essays*. In Hazlitt's position paper, the Preface to *Political Essays*, they no longer furnish a political opposition; they and the Tories are 'man and wife' (xxxi). A Whig is a 'Trimmer', in the sense of accommodating himself entirely to the wishes of the ruling party which happens to be Tory. The moderation of Halifax, 'the great Trimmer', the assumption must be, is of no use at a time when the effectiveness of party spirit is sorely needed to provide effective opposition. Such political realism helps explain Hazlitt's sustained critique of patriotism throughout *Political Essays*. In a way, patriotism began the so-called 'Revolution Controversy' in the form of Richard Price's sermon commemorating 1688 at the Old Jewry published as 'A Discourse on the Love of Our Country' (1789). His cosmopolitan stance was attacked by Burke as out of touch with the local loyalties and national traditions which kept a nation together, at peace with itself. Price's stance is in keeping with that constitutional nationalism celebrated by Wordsworth in his political sonnets, and is clearly recycled to some extent in Hazlitt's attacks on the 'exclusive patriotism' typified by 'Vetus' in his letters to *The Times*. But Hazlitt is not happy with a patriotism that remains too constitutional. In an 1814 critique of the hopes raised by the imminent Congress of Vienna, he is sarcastic about 'the romantic admirers of patriot kings', implicitly comparing Bolingbroke's ultra-constitutionalism (*The Idea of a Patriot King*, 1738) with present-day realities, actual candidates for the title of patriot king – the Prince Regent (who imprisoned the dedicatee of his book) and Alexander, Czar of Russia, instigator of the Holy Alliance. 'Modern Apostates', thinks Hazlitt, 'patriots in 1793 and royalists in 1816', are supported in their betrayals by implausibly patriotic kings: they become 'converts to the cause of kings, only because kings were converts (unaccountable converts) to the cause of the people' (142–3). The patriot king in Hazlitt's time is styled thus in order to for it to be possible to construct Napoleon as a tyrant by contrast. That achieved, Napoleon's meritocratic imperium can be dismissed and the old hereditary order restored. Pure patriotism, in other words, like Reform, was an empty function until satisfied by a particular protagonist, policy, or party. Its abstract transcendence of party interest was a disingenuous tactic, one actually used to discredit the compromises always needed to secure any political change for

the better. Then patriotism indeed tended to become the last refuge of a scoundrel unless it filled in an abstract benevolence with a personal interest; and, as we have seen, when Burke did this, then Hazlitt admired him. In that case, 'the principle itself on which he rests his argument (whatever we may think of the application) is of the utmost weight and moment' (370). The particular context of Hazlitt's approbation is again Burke's happiness with 'the mixed form of government': in other words, that compromise, whose pedigree stretched from Polybius to James Harrington, which, in contrast to the 'levelling' of Paine, endeavoured to secure maximum political representation across the board, confident in the knowledge that the convergence of particular and general interests would overcome the claims of class-differences.

In conclusion, *Political Essays* can be seen to justify its own journalistic form in related ways. Its occasional character and the formative eagerness with which it addresses issues of the day, do not allow it to attempt the summative historical portraiture through which Hazlitt more famously distils *The Spirit of the Age*. But while that work remains Hazlitt's masterpiece, it is founded on the need to resolve the historical paradox of an abstract progress which has become detached from the power of bias and gusto it needs to employ if it is to prevail. The analogous, unspoken historical determinant in *Political Essays* seems to be the assumption that resistant political radicalism in Hazlitt's place and time must come from a Dissenting confidence in private judgement's convergence with general interests. This conviction, though, has to be relieved of its theological underpinning; its abstract rectitude has to be secularized by a concentration on the paradoxical ways in which selfish passions and interests, if sincerely felt and genuinely formative of a self, unite the individual and her society. Hazlitt's interest in this kind of thesis connects him with thinkers from the continent whose future he thought was being decided at the Congress of Vienna by the literally retrograde (in terms of British history) policies of Castlereagh and the rest. This principle is not a belief in the *laissez-faire*, enlightened self-interest of the Enlightenment economists but a modern argument for the importance of a 'sympathy with power' as a pre-requisite for changing existing structures of power, an argument for the necessity of party allegiance and organization in order to secure reform, and the need for the constitutionalism dear to a patriotism founded on the Glorious Revolution of 1688 to employ the individual strengths of different levels of society, from 'the people' to Napoleon, to defeat Legitimacy and the hereditary principle. Consequently, Hazlitt defends and attacks paradox. He attacks apparent public interest or patriotism when it masks its selfish interests; he defends the extrapolation of personal distinction to become a common resource; he excoriates the levelling mediocrity ensuing from the hereditary principle and admires the individual gusto that calls on all our sympathies. He demonstrates the consistency of his paradoxes through the miscellany of their application. When his paradoxes are difficult to accept, as in the egregious case of his devotion to Napoleon, then he relies on his own powerful rhetoric to get us on side. But then the plausibility of such a tactic, in defiance perhaps of bare reason or sympathy, is just what he is arguing for in *Political Essays*.

# HAZLITT AND THE PASSIONS

*Jon Cook*

[...] the greatest strength of genius is shown in describing the strongest passions: for the power of imagination, in works of invention, must be in proportion to the force of the natural impressions which are the subject of them.

(‘Lear’, *Characters of Shakespear’s Plays*; iv, 271)<sup>1</sup>

The passions intercept and warp the natural progress of life. They paralyse all of it that is not devoted to their tyranny and caprice. [...] We form violent antipathies, and indulge exclusive preferences. We make up our minds to some one thing, and if we cannot have that, will have nothing.

(‘On The Past and Future’, *Table-Talk*; viii, 29)

## I

The words, ‘passion’ or ‘passions’, and the ideas they summon were commonplaces in the intellectual culture of Hazlitt’s time.<sup>2</sup> It was taken for granted that ‘passion’ or the ‘passions’ were basic features of human experience and motivation, just as it was taken for granted that the question of their regulation was central for ethics and politics. They had been the subject of prolonged description, analysis, anxiety and celebration, starting in Classical philosophy and Christian theology and continuing well after Hazlitt’s death. The discussion of the passions persisted through major transitions in religious belief and intellectual orientation. Philosophers like Hume, writing after the creation of modern science in the seventeenth century, discussed the passions in ways that would have been recognizable to the Stoic philosophers of classical antiquity. Clearly, there was something serviceable and adaptable about the idea and its many applications. Passions were part of the stuff that made human

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1 All quotations from Hazlitt are taken from *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe, 21 vols (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1930-4). References are by volume and page.

2 There have been some excellent recent studies of the passions. I am indebted to two in particular: Susan James, *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Early Modern Philosophy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) and David Punter, *Writing the Passions* (London: Longman, 2000).

beings what they were, and it made sense to talk about them, not least because they offered a way of understanding a perennial problem about the difference between what people were supposed to do and what they in fact did.

The passions were a major preoccupation of what Hazlitt described as the 'modern philosophy' (ii, 124).<sup>3</sup> In the seventeenth century, Hobbes identified them as one of the sources of motion in human and animals, and therefore one of the manifestations of life. Passions were bodily events, physical movements within us, the small beginnings by which the imagination eventually motivates us to action. In the sixth chapter of *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes identified what he called the simple passions as 'Appetite, Desire, Love, Aversion, Hate, Joy and Griefe'. These in turn were the basis for a more elaborate taxonomy that depended on a number of considerations including how long the passions lasted, what their objects were, and whether they were fulfilled or frustrated. So appetite is called hope when we believe it can be gratified; despair when it cannot. A sustained state of hope is called confidence and a sustained state of despair, 'Diffidence of ourselves.'<sup>4</sup>

Hobbes lists the different modes of the passions at some length. An important distinction – and one that will be echoed by Hazlitt – has to do with the relation of the passions to time. This is not just a matter of their duration – whether short or long lasting – but of their relation to the present and the future. Elaborating on the pleasures and pains that come out of the passion of Appetite, Hobbes distinguished between what he called 'Pleasures of the Sense' and 'Pleasures of the Mind'.<sup>5</sup> The first arise in the present and work through the senses. The second arise from states of expectation about the future. So sensuous pleasure in the present turns to joy when it becomes a pleasure of the mind and a state of expectation. And these have their corresponding negative states: pain for present displeasure, grief for anticipated pain. If the method of taxonomy, in Hobbes and other thinkers, classified the passions, it also charted their transformation from one state to another according to criteria of duration, intensity, and the possibility of satisfaction.

Eighteenth-century philosophers wrote extensively about the passions. Hume devoted a substantial part of his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40) to them. It was here that he famously declared that human motivation was based in the passions, not in reason: 'reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions,' thereby reversing a familiar idea that suggested it should be the other way round.<sup>6</sup> Like his predecessors, Hume has his taxonomies and distinctions. What his work brings out with particular clarity is the importance of the passions to a philosophical account of human experience. He set this out in a succinct paragraph of his *Treatise* which

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3 Hazlitt argues that the modern philosophy is based upon an impoverished account of inner experiences. The implications of this argument are amongst the issues explored in this essay.

4 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), ed. R.E. Flathman and D Johnston (New York: Norton, 1997), 33.

5 *Ibid.*, 33.

6 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40), ed. E.C. Mossner, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 462.

begins with the idea that our experience has its primary source in the impressions of our senses:

An impression first strikes upon the senses, and makes us perceive heat or cold, thirst or hunger, pleasure or pain, of some kind or another. Of this impression there is a copy taken by the mind which remains after the impression ceases; and this we call an idea. The idea of pleasure and pain when it returns upon the soul, produces the new impressions of desire and aversion, hope and fear, which may properly be called impressions of reflection, because derived from it.<sup>7</sup>

Hume's 'impressions of reflection' are passions by another name. They familiarly come in groups of four. Hume's 'desire, aversion, hope, and fear' is an echo of the four primary passions identified by the Stoics: appetite, fear, distress, and pleasure. A classical architecture of the human soul persists in Hume's attempt to provide an empirical account of human experience. Impressions beget ideas, ideas beget reflective impressions or passions. Experience deepens and multiplies in a kind of lively commerce of the soul, one in which it is not simply ideas that are associated, but the passions that accompany them. Both sensations and ideas can be sources of passion. They can be in and of the moment, but they can also have a more prolonged life, returning 'upon the soul' in the form of ideas.<sup>8</sup>

Hume, like Hazlitt after him, wanted to unfold what Hazlitt in his essay on Lear in *Characters of Shakespear's Plays* (1817) was to call 'a logic of passion' (iv, 259). Like Hobbes, he wanted to trace their causes, consequences, and the patterns of their transformation. In Hume's work this was accompanied by another recurrent preoccupation: how to regulate or educate the passions. In his essay 'Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion,' Hume takes up this topic in the philosophy of the passions, and gives it a new twist. He identifies a certain character type or psychological disposition called delicacy of passion. This delicacy manifests itself in a tendency to be what Hume calls 'extremely sensible to all the accidents of life': to feel intense joy at good fortune, or equally intense grief in the face of adversity. This vulnerability to experience, the tendency to respond to everything passionately, is, Hume asserts a disadvantage. Our experience may be more intense as a result, but our capacity for self-mastery is threatened and undermined in a way that would not be true for what Hume describes as 'men of cool and sedate tempers.'<sup>9</sup>

Hume's solution to the problem is not to recommend a classical stoic 'apathea' – to use, that is a rational understanding of nature as a means of overcoming emotional turbulence – but, instead, to redirect the passions into the sphere of taste. He does this by noticing a resemblance between the two delicacies of passion

7 Ibid, 55.

8 For Stoic arguments about the passions see *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, ed. by A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 410–23.

9 David Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. E.F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), 3–4.

and taste: both are characterized by intensities of reaction to sensations of pleasure and pain. But in the sphere of taste – and this includes for Hume not just the appreciation of works of art, but also ‘polite and judicious conversation’<sup>10</sup> – the passions can be selected and cultivated: ‘The good or ill accidents of life are very little at our disposal: but we are pretty much masters of what books we shall read, what diversions we shall partake of, and what company we shall keep.’<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, the sphere of taste allows us to combine passion with judgement. The development of our appreciation depends not just on our own passionate responses but our knowledge of how others have responded. Taste, in short, becomes the sphere in which the passions can be educated and refined. We experience passion but in a way that makes them ‘tender and agreeable.’<sup>12</sup> Passionate experience supports rather than threatens self-composure.

What kind and intensity of passion was good for you was a source of debate in the eighteenth century, and it again draws on discussions in classical sources.<sup>13</sup> Edmund Burke, for example, took a different view to Hume. In his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas on the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) – a work intended ‘to investigate the springs and trace the courses of our passions’<sup>14</sup> – Burke distinguished between two kinds of passion, those concerned with our self-preservation and those that sustained society. Passions stimulated by pain and danger – those that threatened our self-preservation – were the strongest emotions that the mind could feel. It might seem that these are things to avoid but that’s not the conclusion that Burke draws. Instead he argues that these passions can be a source of fascination and attraction. Burke brought a third term into play, between pleasure and pain, to help understand why this was so. He called it ‘delight’ and defined passions as delightful ‘when we have an idea of pain and danger, without actually being in such circumstances’: ‘this delight I have not called pleasure, because it turns on pain, and because it is different enough from any idea of positive pleasure. Whatever excites this delight, I call *sublime*. The passions belonging to self-preservation are the strongest of all passions.’<sup>15</sup>

Burke does not see this pleasure taken in pain as perversity. The fact, for example, that we delight in the sufferings of others, a delight that ‘hinders us from shunning scenes of misery’, is taken by Burke as evidence of God’s design: witnessing the miseries of others – and Burke includes in this category public executions – reinforces the ‘bond of sympathy’, our capacity to ‘enter into the concerns of others.’<sup>16</sup> Burke wants to keep the fascination we have in the misery of

10 Ibid, 4.

11 Ibid, 5.

12 Ibid, 6.

13 See, for example, Aristotle’s distinction between positive and negative passions in Book 2 of *The Art of Rhetoric*.

14 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 5.

15 Ibid, 47. Earlier in this work Burke defined delight as ‘the sensation which accompanies the removal of pain and danger’ (ibid, 34).

16 Ibid, 42–3.

others firmly in the moral sphere, even as he hints at the possibility that something else might be at work: 'We delight in seeing things, which so far from doing, our heartiest wishes would be to see redressed'.<sup>17</sup> This sentence from Section 15 of the *Philosophical Enquiry* strikes an uneasy balance between what we might delight in and what we might do. Burke does not want to enter into the nihilistic possibilities of experimenting with the destruction of others that de Sade would explore later in the century.

Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* does not argue that sublime delight is simply superior to the gentler passion stimulated by beauty. But he does want its turbulence to be recognized as a cultural value. In deciding what can and cannot be admitted into the sphere of taste, Burke wants something stronger than Hume's 'tender and agreeable' passions. Scary things can be good because they enable us to encounter our fears of death and pain without being destroyed by them.

Thus the debate about the passions was alive and well in the period immediately preceding Hazlitt's authorship, and it certainly informed work that he admired. When Wordsworth in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), maintains that the poems it contains will show the traces of the 'primary laws of our nature; chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement', he indicates his affiliation with eighteenth-century philosophical psychology of a kind exemplified by Hume.<sup>18</sup> The 'modern philosophy' was certainly interested in the association of ideas as a fundamental feature of human experience, but it was equally interested in the emotional states that were inseparable from these mental events. Hence Wordsworth's 'state of excitement', or passion by another name.

However, the attempts of philosophers to reason about the passions, to establish distinctions about them and their workings, was underscored by an irony that Hume, always alert to reason's limits, ruefully noted:

The reflective impressions may be divided into two kinds, viz. the calm and the violent [...] This division is far from being exact. The raptures of poetry and music frequently rise to the greatest height; whilst those other impressions properly called passions may decay into so soft an emotion, as to become, in a manner, imperceptible.<sup>19</sup>

Hume does not abandon the division between the calm and the violent passions, despite his sense of the fragility of the distinction. But this passage from the *Treatise* is an example of the way in which the passions have a habit of eluding the taxonomies put in place to understand them. Their capacity for transformation could mean, as Hume's example suggests, that they could turn into their opposites.

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17 Ibid, 44.

18 William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), ed. R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones, (London: Routledge, 1991) 245.

19 Hume, *Treatise*, 328.

## II

Hazlitt seemed to share the deep-seated ambivalence towards the passions that informs the traditions of thought sketched in the first part of this essay. The question of whether they were to be avoided or embraced, distrusted or acknowledged, recurs in his work. In his essay, 'On the Past and Future', first published in 1821 in *Table-Talk*, he gives a bitter and negative account of their effects on human happiness. The passions warp and disfigure 'the natural progress of life'. Under their sway we 'form violent antipathies and indulge exclusive preferences' (viii, 29). But these assertions emerge out of a complex pattern of argument and quotation that suggest they are by no means Hazlitt's resolved judgment on the consequences of living passionately.

The initial subject of 'On the Past and Future' is philosophical. Hazlitt wants to refute the claims of utilitarian thinkers who argue that our only real interest can be in the future as we seek to realize how to maximize our pleasures and minimize our pains. This argument about what can engage our interests is connected to another about the kind of reality or unreality that the past and the future possess. The link between the two is the psychological assumption that we can only take an interest in those things that seem real to us.

It is not, however, attempted to be denied that though the future is nothing at present, and has no immediate interest while we are speaking, yet it is of the utmost consequence in itself, and of the utmost interest to the individual, because it will have a real existence in the future, and we have an idea of it as existing in time to come (viii, 23).

But, by parity of reasoning, Hazlitt goes on to argue that the past has a parallel claim upon us. Although 'the actual sensation and the interest belonging to it are both fled' it 'has had a real existence' (viii, 23).

This initial analysis of the different realities of past and future is then overtaken, if not displaced, by another manner and mood. The conventions of philosophical argument are subsumed by a sequence of quotations that summon, amongst other texts, Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode* and Rousseau's 'Reveries of a Solitary Walker'. Hazlitt seeks out his readers' agreement not by philosophical argument, but by a cumulative presentation of recollected experiences that show how the past dwells in us not as an abstract idea of what has been, but as an emotional reality, a source of painful pleasure and pleasurable pain. Recollection has itself become a source of passionate experience, but in a paradoxical way. Recollection returns us to scenes of intense passion; it recreates them imaginatively, but it also mourns their passing away. Passion recollected mingles joy and grief in a way that can make the two oddly indistinguishable. This double aspect of recall and loss gives these experiences their special value, their emotional tonality, and, for Hazlitt, Wordsworth and Rousseau are the two modern writers who exemplify this sensibility. His quotation from the *Immortality Ode* draws on lines that have become iconic for the poem as a whole: 'What though the radiance which was

once so bright/Be now for ever vanish'd from my sight/Though nothing can bring back the hour/Of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flower' (ll 180–3). Hazlitt's language at this point in the essay is like a summarizing echo of Wordsworth's. The past is summoned through 'the glowing image of some bright reality' (viii, 23). And once Rousseau is brought into the essay his achievement is evoked by an echo of Coleridge's poem 'Kubla Khan': '[Rousseau] seems to gather up,' Hazlitt writes, 'the past moments of his being like drops of honey-dew to distil a precious liquor from them'(viii, 24). Hazlitt's own memories are swayed and shaped by these literary comparisons. They become the markers of his kinship with Rousseau and one aspect of Wordsworth's poetry.

The past is, according, to Hazlitt what 'gives me most delight and most assurance of reality' (viii, 24). But the delight Hazlitt has in mind is very different from Burke's; it has very little to do with the 'ideas of pain or danger'. Similarly, the question of self-preservation has a different bearing. If the past gives Hazlitt 'most assurance of reality', one implication is that the present and future do not, or only give a lesser assurance. Compared to the plenitude of past experience, the present and the future appear desolate and tenuous. The past self exists, or existed, more vividly than the self in the present. The pressure of this contrast only heightens a sense of fitful existence in the present. 'On the Past and Future' shares with Wordsworth's Immortality Ode and many other Romantic texts the conviction that life in the present lacks the vitality and beauty of life in the past.

But the essay does not conclude in this mood. Its tone shifts again, back to the philosophical voice of its beginning:

Neither in itself then, nor as a subject of general contemplation, has the future any advantage over the past. But with respect to our grosser passions and pursuits it has. As far as regards the appeal to understanding or the imagination, the past is just as good, as real, of as much intrinsic value as the future: but there is another principle of the human mind, the principle of action or will; and of this the past has no hold, the future engrosses it entirely to itself (viii, 25).

What sense might we make of this analysis? Hazlitt adopts the well-established procedure of discriminating amongst the passions according to their orientation towards the past or the future and their alliance with either imagination and understanding, or action and will. At the same time, their emotional colouring changes. The passions become 'grosser' by comparison with their more elevated state in recollection. They become appetites to be satisfied, not joys whose passing can be mourned. And this grossness is associated with their capacity for 'tyranny'. The tyrannical passions, those that 'contract and warp the natural progress of life', are bound up with our efforts to secure future pleasure and avoid future pain. The future, according to Hazlitt, is still 'in our power' whereas the past is not. We believe that what we do in the present will have a bearing on whether we realize our pleasures or avoid pains. But the passionate character of these beliefs, directed towards the possibility of future satisfaction, turns them into obsessions.

This is Hazlitt's pessimistic account of our maturity. The possibilities of the future shrink down to those few things that passion convinces us we must have. The pleasure we take in the idea that what we passionately want might happen is accompanied by the tormenting thought that something will prevent it. In this state, the passions are no longer a source of sweet melancholy. They become addictive: 'any pause,' Hazlitt writes, 'any release from the rack of ecstasy on which we are stretched, seems more insupportable than the pangs we endure. We are suspended between tormenting desires and the horrors of ennui' (viii, 25). The suspension here is telling. Turned towards future experience, 'tormenting desires' are the only alternative to 'the horrors of ennui,' another phrase for that fear about a vacancy of experience that has already entered into the essay. What starts as a traditional philosophical and cautionary maxim turns into a vivid portrait of a life lived under the tyranny of passion. The self in Hazlitt's essay is subject to a destructive intensification by passionate force: 'the machine is over-wrought: the parching heat of the veins dries up and withers the flowers of Love, Hope and Joy' (viii, 29-30).

'On the Past and Future' turns on a paradox that has a central bearing on Hazlitt's understanding of the passions. 'Therefore of things past, there is no Deliberation; because manifestly impossible to be changed,' writes Hobbes in Chapter 6 of *Leviathan*,<sup>20</sup> and, as we have seen, Hazlitt seems to agree with him: 'What has happened to us we think of no consequence; what is to happen to us, of the greatest,' he writes and then adds the reason for this '[...] the one is still in our power, and the other not' (viii, 25, 26). We may regret something in the past but we can do nothing to alter it. It is, in a sense, part of the greater existential reality of the past over the future that it has happened, whereas the future has not. Yet the immutability of the past allows our passions, allied to understanding and imagination, an expansive freedom. They are not engaged in the effort to make something happen. The past is, in Hazlitt's phrase, 'well-stored'; it is full of scenes and situations that exercise the passions (viii, 25). The future, which appears to be a realm of possibility and action, can turn into the opposite, constrained and constricted by the operation of obsessive passion, allied to the will: 'We make up our minds to some one thing and if we cannot have that we will have nothing' (viii, 29).

'On the Past and Future' appears to inherit traces of the distinction between the calm and violent passions that preoccupied many earlier thinkers. Hume classified 'an agreeable melancholy' as one of the 'tender and agreeable passions.'<sup>21</sup> Something like that seems to be on display in Hazlitt's invocation of Wordsworth and Rousseau and his own reminiscence of lost love. Equally, the passions that tyrannize over us in our anticipation of future outcomes are violent in their working. But Hazlitt is not interested in classifying the passions in this way. If he assumes that the distinction is at work in his readers' minds, it is not one that he wants to reinforce or refute. He is not preoccupied with the cultivation of the

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20 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 36.

21 Hume, *Essays*, 6-7.

tender passions in the way that Hume is. But nor does he take the route opened up by Burke's advocacy of the sublime. Instead his thinking takes another and altogether more original turn.

### III

'Gusto in art is power or passion defining any object' (iv, 77). This aphoristic first sentence of Hazlitt's essay of 1816 is one of the most succinct statements of a philosophy of art in the Romantic period. It brings together two key words in his lexicon – 'power' and 'passion' – at the same time as it raises the question of their relation one to another. The alliterative force of their connection suggests a new compound word: 'power-or-passion'. They seem to be two words characterizing a single force that is at work when gusto is displayed in art. But the established grammar of 'or' points in another direction: gusto in art has two sources, separate and distinct, although each produces the same effect.

The opening sentence of the essay 'On Gusto' is not the only occasion when the two words are aligned in Hazlitt's work. In his *Lectures on English Philosophy*, delivered in 1812, Hazlitt comments on the notion of power in Locke and Hume. He finds that Hume remedies a defect in Locke's philosophy. We can, he argues, gain no notion of causal power on the basis of observation of the external world. Hume's achievement was to see that causation is supplied by the mind – it comes, so to speak, from within – on the basis of repeated experience of events happening in succession. Hazlitt elaborates on this as follows:

We get this idea [of cause and effect] solely from the exertion of muscular or voluntary power in ourselves: who ever has stretched forth his hand to an object, must have the idea of power. Under the idea of power I include all that relates to what we call force, energy, weakness, effort, ease, difficulty, impossibility, etc. Accordingly I should conceive that no man of strong passions, or great muscular activity, would ever give up the idea of power (ii, 260).

These sentences give a rapid sketch of the source of our ideas of cause and effect and of power. As in the passage from 'On Gusto', that teasing word 'or' is at work in the juxtapositions of 'muscular or voluntary power' and 'strong passions, or great muscular activity'. They suggest a series of analogies between what is and is not done through the agency of the will and between physical and mental activity. Hazlitt presents ideas and physical experiences in a continuum, each having a causal relation to the other. The simplest gesture can become the genesis of a concept; equally, its performance implies the existence of an idea.

If Hazlitt begins by thinking that our physical actions are one source of our idea of power, he rapidly qualifies that by adding that 'strong passions' can have the same outcome. But the idea of a source here can be misleading. While Hazlitt is certainly concerned with the problem of where our ideas come from, and his answer to that is that they do not simply come from external evidence but from

physical and emotional dispositions, he also sees these same dispositions as the causes of our attachment to ideas. 'Strong passions' like 'muscular activity' are both forms of power within the self that sustain a belief in power's operations in the external world.

Once he has praised Hume for his philosophical insight, Hazlitt qualifies that praise with a thumb-nail sketch of his character and one that illustrates his argument about why we become attached to certain ideas:

Hume, who seems to have discarded it [the idea of power] with the least compunction, was an easy, indolent, good tempered man, who did not care to stir out of his armchair; a languid, Epicurean philosopher [...] who was hurried away by no violent passions [...] He was one of the subtlest and most metaphysical of all metaphysicians. And perhaps he was so for the reason here stated (ii, 260-1).

Thought is an unconscious expression of character, according to Hazlitt and here Hume's indolence and good nature is connected to his aversion to violent passions. The same indolence is seen as the source of his subtlety as a metaphysician. Reasoning about experience becomes a way of calming it down. Hume's temperament, Hazlitt suggests, prevents him from pursuing the consequences of his own ideas.

Hazlitt does not discuss Hume's ideas on the role of taste in his *Lectures on English Philosophy*. But his character sketch of Hume's indolence taken with the evidence of the essay 'On Gusto' show his distance from any idea of taste as a means to calm and control the passions. The essay's title itself implies as much. Hazlitt replaces the word 'taste', which he may well associate with torpid discrimination and gentlemanly ease, with a word that animates the idea of taste with energy and appetite. The power or passion that is gusto is released in at least some works of art with an exuberant force. Like the remembrance of the past in the essay, 'On the Past and Future', the passion of gusto engages with detail and diversity. Writing of Titian and the way in which his figures seem 'sensitive and alive all over', Hazlitt suggests an analogy:

As the objects themselves in nature would produce an impression on the sense, distinct from every other object, and have something divine in it, which the heart owns and the imagination consecrates, the objects in the picture preserve the same impression, absolute, unimpaired, stamped with all the truth of passion, the pride of the eye, and the charm of beauty' (iv, 77).

The 'truth of passion' is not its tyranny. In the sphere of art as in the activity of memory, passion is not allied to the will; it is not directed to future outcomes, but is associated with imagination. The 'truth of passion' respects the integrity of objects while projecting feelings upon them. It does not reduce the world to the trade-off, set out in 'On the Past and Future', between 'some one thing' or 'nothing' (viii, 29).

'On the Past and Future' and 'On Gusto' do not then rest upon a preference for calm over violent passions. The axis of value has changed. Hazlitt discriminates between states of passion that expand the range of experience and those that close it down. Strong passions may exist on either side of this difficult line of discrimination. And this forms a bridge between works that manifest gusto and those that don't. Hazlitt excluded Shakespeare from his canon of artists who manifested gusto. But the importance of passion in Shakespeare is never in doubt. In his reflections on King Lear in *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, Hazlitt discovers a proportion between 'the power of imagination' and passion's strength. As with his discussion of Hume and Locke, one kind of strength begets and interacts with another. Describing the 'strongest Passions' calls out an imaginative power in Shakespeare that would not have been evident had he chosen gentler subject matter. It expands the range of his drama. Both Lear and Othello are characters subject to the kind of obsessive passions of the will that Hazlitt described in 'On the Past and Future'. Each of them must have 'some one thing' or 'nothing'. But dramatic art, at least in Shakespeare's case, does not confine itself to 'one habitual feeling or sentiment preying on itself'. Instead, as Hazlitt argues in an 1818 lecture on Shakespeare and Milton, 'passion is modified by passion [...] the passions are in a state of projection' (v, 51).

In *The Day Star of Liberty*, Tom Paulin has offered a fine analysis of the different meanings of 'projection' in Hazlitt's work and its complex metaphorical action.<sup>22</sup> One context is drawn from the proto-science of alchemy: the 'powder of projection' was cast upon metals in the belief that it would transmute them into silver or gold. Another draws on the new visual technologies of Hazlitt's day, magic lanterns, phantasmagorias, and dioramas amongst them, and suggests something close to a modern meaning of the word: the projection of images onto a screen. Hazlitt also uses the word to describe the moment, whether in drama, politics, or the process of writing, when something that has been in long and perhaps unconscious preparation is suddenly precipitated into action, speech, or gesture.

According to Hazlitt, thoughts can be worked up into a state of projection, as can public opinion. But what might it mean to describe the passions as being in this condition? The idea of alchemical metamorphosis is at work, clearly. Shakespeare's plays show us how 'passion is modified by passion' and, in Hazlitt's reading of Shakespeare's tragedies, this is both a violent process and one that can play itself out to exhaustion with destructive force. Or it can produce an unforeseen transfiguration, as if base metal had been turned to gold. But for this to be the case, the passions are projected in another sense. They are not concealed but on display or, if concealed, they are in the process of being uncovered. And it is not just the fact of this display, but its intensity and rapidity that Hazlitt captures by the idea of projection.

The idea that the Shakespearian stage displays passions in 'a state of projection' raises a question about their direction of travel. What are they being projected

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22 Tom Paulin, *The Day Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style* (London: Faber, 1998), 17–46.

onto or towards? One way of answering this question is to argue that the passions are projected onto each other. This is how 'passion is modified by passion.' This process arises from the interactions of Shakespeare's characters: Lear's 'uncontrollable anguish' in the face of the 'petrifying indifference' of Goneril and Regan (iv, 259–60) is one touchstone for Hazlitt, as is 'the *passion* of hypocrisy' that Othello provokes in Iago (iv, 209). These passionate interactions are one source of the distinctive vitality that Hazlitt finds in Shakespeare's characters. They give the dramatic action of a Shakespeare play its special energy.

But Hazlitt does not confine the projection of passion to what takes place between Shakespeare's characters. It's also a way of saying something about the audience's relation to what is happening on stage. Shakespeare's plays project passion outwards towards the audience and the audience's response to that projection helps define their experience of the plays. In Hazlitt's case, the experience is at once one of intense intimacy and of heightened spectacle. It is their living in and through their passions that brings us close to Shakespeare's characters, but it also gives them their grandeur, the sense that they are living life on a great scale. What seems great and what seems little can suddenly change places: 'Years are melted down to moments, and every instant teems with fate' ('On Shakspeare and Milton'; v, 51).

When Hazlitt writes about Shakespeare or Titian, he is drawn towards a participation in the distinctive life he finds there. In the case of Shakespeare, accounting for this participation can put a pressure on particular words. The idea, in Hazlitt's essay on Lear, that the 'greatest strength of genius is shown in describing the strongest passions' (iv, 271), is revised, in his *Lectures on the English Poets*, in the thought that Shakespeare's plays alone 'are properly expressions of passion not descriptions of them' (v, 50).

This distinction between expression and description is one indication of Hazlitt's attempt to break free from a criticism of art based upon the idea of imitation. In the essay 'On Gusto', his celebration of Titian moves in a similar direction. The 'sort of tingling sensation to the eye which the body feels within itself' which is one effect of Titian's painting, as is the flesh that 'seems sensitive and alive all over', is not the result of his skills in the pictorial imitation of his models (iv, 77). Claude's landscapes are, according to Hazlitt, 'unequalled imitations of nature', but they lack the 'power or passion in definition' that is *gusto* (iv, 79).

*Gusto* is not at all at odds with representation, any more than is the 'projection' of the passions that Hazlitt finds in Shakespeare. Both speak to a vitality in art, drama, or literature that is carried in the medium of the passions. *Gusto*, as Hazlitt makes clear, is a name for a way that we can experience some kind of art and not others. To have this kind of experience is to know a manifestation of genius. It is inextricably linked to an impression of how a work originated as well as to its continuing life. Similarly, to experience 'the passions in a state of projection' is, for Hazlitt, part of an audience's experience of Shakespearian tragedy. The passions are certainly located in his characters, but they are not confined there.

These features of Hazlitt's writing about Titian and Shakespeare show how he displaces earlier traditions of thought. Although there are recognizable continuities

in the psychology of the passions that he inherits from Hobbes, Hume, and their classical predecessors, Hazlitt does not establish a taxonomy, nor a series of protocols about how they are to be cultivated or regulated. His ambivalence about the passions in his essay 'On the Past and Future' does not lead to an assessment of how obsessional passions, directed towards the future and allied to the will, can be avoided or overcome. Taxonomy is replaced by a different set of discriminations based on the distance and intimacy between passion and the objects that it seeks and animates. In this volatile condition, distance and intimacy are not simply opposed to each other. In this context, the passions are re-imagined by Hazlitt as so many possibilities of experience. They can be in a state of 'gusto' or passion in definition; they can be in a Shakespearian condition of projection or, again, of Miltonic unfolding, as in the opening of the essay, 'Why Distant Objects Please,' when Hazlitt reflects upon the experience of looking out over a landscape that marks the ambiguous boundary between the visible and the invisible:

Whatever is placed beyond the reach of sense and knowledge, whatever is imperfectly discerned, the fancy pieces out at its leisure; and all but the present moment, the present spot, passion claims for its own, and brooding over it with wings outspread, stamps it with an image of itself. Passion is lord of infinite space, and distant objects please because they border on its confines, and are moulded by its touch (viii, 255-6).<sup>23</sup>

Passion here is singular, not plural. It has become an allegorical figure as much a philosophical or psychological concept, an effect reinforced by the allusion to the opening lines of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Hazlitt invokes that epic context but gives it a curiously intimate, pastoral setting. This transposition is helped by affinity with another text that carries powerful associations of divinity: Coleridge's account of imagination in *Biographia Literaria* (1817). This gives another and more veiled level of allusion in the passage, one in which Hazlitt establishes a constellation between Milton and Coleridge. Hazlitt invokes both aspects of Coleridge's account of the nature and action of imagination: the 'Primary' ('the living power and prime agent of all human perception [...] a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I am'), and the 'Secondary' ('identical with the primary in the kind of its agency [...] differing only in its mode of operation. It dissolves, diffuses and dissipates in order to recreate').<sup>24</sup> Echoes of the primary imagination occur by way of allusion to Milton's Holy Spirit. Echoes of the secondary imagination arise from the claim that distant objects please because we experience a dissolution of the certainties of 'sense and knowledge', an experience that liberates imaginative surmise and recreation.

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23 See also the comparison between Shakespeare and Milton in *Lectures on the English Poets* (v, 46-68) and for another association of Coleridge and Milton, see 'My First Acquaintance with Poets' (xvii, 108).

24 S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (1817), ed. G. Watson (London: J.M. Dent, 1956), 167.

In 'Why Distant Objects Please', passion takes on significance through its association with ideas of imagination. We might take it as another example of the way the word 'passion', in Hazlitt's prose, takes on significance through its juxtapositions with other words: 'passion and power', 'passion in definition', 'the passions in a state of projection.' But in 'Why Distant Objects Please' the juxtaposition is made by way of allusion rather than directly stated. 'Fancy', not 'imagination', is the term that Hazlitt explicitly uses in the essay, and, if the allusion to Coleridge is at work in way I've suggested, this raises a question about the claims that Hazlitt is making for the status of the pleasurable experience of distant objects. The opening paragraphs of the essay end in bathos. Hazlitt recalls his childhood experience of looking at the Shropshire hills, 'whose blue tops blending with the setting sun had often tempted my longing eyes and wandering feet'. But the imaginative magic endowed by distance does not survive a close-up view: 'At last I put my project in execution, and on a nearer approach, instead of glimmering air woven into fantastic shapes, found them huge lumpish heaps of discoloured earth. I learn from this in part to leave "Yarrow unvisited"; and not idly disturb a dream of good!' (viii, 256). The allusion is to Wordsworth's poem, 'Yarrow Unvisited'. Hazlitt's brief anecdote of childhood is an ironic counterpoint to one of the claims, delivered with a ballad-like simplicity in the poem, about the need to harbour and protect some kinds of imaginative experience: 'Be Yarrow stream unseen, unknown!/It must, or we shall rue it;/We have a vision of our own;/Ah! why should we undo it?' (ll 49–52). The moment of disenchantment in 'Why Distant Objects Please' suggest that we may be compelled to test our imaginative visions to destruction. The shaping power of secondary imagination finds its end and antithesis in a resolutely untransformed clod of earth.

#### IV

The analysis so far has begged an important question about Hazlitt's understanding of where the passions are located. They seem to be 'inner' states, placed between sensation and thought, and possessing the properties of both. They are felt, that is, as bodily – in the way that sensations of touch or smell or sight are – but they also have cognitive properties: passions are preferences for some things over others, and these preferences are not simply instinctive reactions. They play a role in the creation of value, whether positive or negative.

Yet this idea of passions as 'inner' is equivocal for a number of reasons. If the passions are felt as movements within the self they are not therefore private or concealed. If anything, the opposite is the case. The passions manifest themselves in facial expressions, speech, and gesture. The development of physiognomy was based upon this supposition and it was one that Hazlitt shared. He thought that the passions turned selves into characters. They provided a varied language of description, and made others legible. In *The Spirit of the Age* (1825) Hazlitt provides a 'physiognomical sketch' of Jeremy Bentham and the 'lackadaisical bonhomie of his whole aspect, none of the fierceness of pride or power'; or the poet, Thomas Campbell, the 'character' of whose mind is driven by a 'lofty and

self-scrutinising ambition'; or Wordsworth, whose face is like 'some of Holbein's heads, grave, saturnine, with a slight indication of sly humour' (xi, 7, 159, 91). None of these descriptions make laborious use of a psychology and physiology based on the passions. They take them for granted and, in doing so, move back and forward between inner and outer appearances. Minds, like faces, can have characters; both are shaped by passion.

These transitions between what is assumed to be inside the self and what lies outside it are given a further inflection by Hazlitt's fascination with the acting of Edmund Kean. Hazlitt evoked the relation between performance and passion without directly analysing it, as in this commentary on Kean's Othello: 'Into the bursts and starts and torrent of the passion in Othello this excellent actor appeared to have flung himself completely; ... his heart seemed to bleed with anguish while his tongue dropped broken, imperfect accents of woe' (*The London Magazine*, June 1820; xviii, 332). A question about the nature of Kean's performance hovers around the verbs in this passage – 'appeared', 'seemed' – implying an uncertainty about what happens when Kean plays Othello. In identifying with Othello so strongly does he feel the character's passions in performing them? Or is he, in a sense hard to define, just pretending? A similar uncertainty occurs in another passage about Kean, where Hazlitt wonders at the sources of the actor's versatility, his 'involvement of faculties, circle within circle, that enables the same individual to make a summersault, and that swells the veins of his forehead with true, artificial passion, and that turns him to a marble statue with thought' (*The London Magazine*, July 1820; xviii, 348). 'True, artificial passion' sounds like a witty paradox. Does the phrase imply a distinction between artificial and natural passion? If that is the case, Kean is praised because he acts passions contrived by others as though he really felt them. But that distinction hardly makes the problem go away if Kean really does feel passions while he acts them. The paradox then becomes more pointedly about passion, that it can be true and artificial at one and the same time.

The idea that our passions are performances suggests that they have another location. They come, if not exactly from the outside, then from the words that supposedly report or express them. But these expressions may themselves be the source of the passions, part of language's affective power. It's the saying of the words that makes us feel the passions they purportedly express, not the other way round. As Burke had argued in the concluding chapters to his work on the sublime and the beautiful, words have this special infectious quality. They, more than any other medium, reinforce the human tendency to 'take an extraordinary part in the passions of others.'<sup>25</sup>

Such a thought was not alien to Hazlitt's work. *Liber Amoris* (1823) is haunted by it. The constrained dialogues in the first section of the book show the desolation that arises when one person is committed to performing the passion of love while the other is not. Hazlitt's alter ego in the book, the thinly disguised but anonymous

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25 Burke, *Enquiry*, 158. For a fuller discussion of the relation between words and passions see the fourth chapter of J. Hillis Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

H, finds himself in a condition where his passion is increasingly ironic, recognized as a performance but one which the performer cannot help but act out. The irony is underlined by the book's repeated allusions to other such performances, whether in Richardson's *Clarissa* or Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Troilus and Cressida*. 'H' is uneasily aware that the words he utters do not exactly sound like his own. He knows they have certainly been performed elsewhere. The question for him is whether the echo he hears in what he says makes his words hollow or gives them strength.

Fifteen years after Hazlitt's death, his friend and literary collaborator, Leigh Hunt, wrote an essay on poetry as an introduction to an anthology called *Imagination and Fancy: Selections from the English Poets* (1845). Hunt defines poetry as a passion 'because it seeks the deepest impressions and because it must undergo in order to convey them.' He then adds a footnote, giving a gloss to what he means by passion: '[...] suffering in a good sense – ardent subjection of one's self to emotion.'<sup>26</sup> The idea of 'ardent subjection' here also illuminates the intersection between passion and performance in Hazlitt's own work. Passion becomes the name for a stance towards emotion. The state that Hume worried about, 'delicacy of passion', and sought to regulate through the sphere of taste, has now become something to be endured for the sake of poetry. Hunt's definition hints, too, at a modern and paradoxical kind of heroism. The self wills its subjection, not to others, but to the fullest experience of emotion. Hazlitt's essays are about how this happens in works of art through the force of gusto, or in Shakespeare's plays where passions are projected on stage, or in imaginative experiences of landscape, or through recollection. The passions in these contexts range freely. They are productive, creating paintings, dramas, or secular flights of experience. In the move away from a taxonomical classification of the passions, Hazlitt did not ignore the failure of the passions to be productive or their capacity to become forms of mental confinement. The uneasy dialectic between these two states – the passions as a source of intense vitality and of its opposite, a living death – is one of the constitutive features of his work, as his sense that both states of passion may be all and, perhaps, nothing more than a kind of show.

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26 Leigh Hunt, 'What is Poetry' in *Imagination and Fancy or Selections of the English Poets* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1845), 2.

## BOOK REVIEW

**Adrian Poole (ed.), *Lamb, Hazlitt, Keats*  
(Great Shakespeareans, Volume IV)**

pp. x + 193. London: Continuum International  
Publishing Group, 2010. Cloth, £75

The *Great Shakespeareans* series is an ambitious and very welcome initiative which, under the energetic editorship of Adrian Poole and Peter Holland is appearing volume by volume – there will be eighteen in all – in apparently rapid succession. This is amongst the first batch and contains three substantial and important essays: ‘Charles Lamb’ written by Felicity James, ‘William Hazlitt’ by Uttara Natarajan, and ‘John Keats’ by Beth Lau. I am taking this opportunity to write first about the projected series as a whole, then about this volume in the context of Romantic Shakespearean criticism, and finally, as befits the central interest of this journal, about the chapter on Hazlitt.

The series as a whole can be seen as a sign of our times, both as symptom and partial cause of a change of tone and direction in Shakespearean criticism and perhaps more widely. We may be emerging from a generation of criticism stretching from about 1980, inspired and fuelled by contemporary literary theory which has been manifested by the development of distinctive ‘schools’ such as cultural materialism, postmodern deconstruction, new historicism, post-colonialism and others. If older critics were mentioned at all it was either to value them as precursors of contemporary theories or more often to set them up as benighted Aunt Sallys speaking from a less rigorous and ahistorical set of commitments. In this rarefied atmosphere, creative writers and theatre practitioners as critics, apart from an avant-garde few, were neglected altogether. Now, however, just as we seem to be in full swing of a ‘retro’ movement in fashion circles, so criticism is recuperating what was valuable in older criticism, and also interestingly returning to using terms like ethics and emotions in analysing the plays.

This movement of minds does not need to be seen as a disruption or break since it can equally be interpreted as a logical development. If new historicism sought to bypass later centuries and recapture an early modern ‘literary history from below’ and if cultural materialism showed how rooted we all are in our own historical moments, then the next step was obviously to apply similar assumptions to the figures who made their marks in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, paying close regard to the locations of their own historical perspectives.

*Great Shakespeareans* fits into this new-old approach, as its writers are invited to place their subjects' contributions to Shakespearean 'appreciations' (again, a previously proscribed word) in the light of historical and professional contexts. The great 'winners' in the series are creators rather than scholars. Amongst some eighty figures in the projected series there are only about half a dozen professional academics, while the rest are poets, novelists, actors, directors, film-makers, and composers. In a welcome and explicit way the series acknowledges that Shakespeare has been a great creative stimulus and that the appropriation and reception of his works are just as valuable in providing imaginative insights as are the more analytically expressed works of discursive criticism.

Certainly it is true of this volume dealing with Lamb, Hazlitt, and Keats, especially since there could easily have been one more chapter on Kean (reserved for another volume), whose presence looms large throughout. What is interesting about the three essays taken as complementary is that each works from a different methodology in providing a contextual window into the world of the Romantics who came after Wordsworth and Coleridge, and yet each of these approaches could have been fruitfully applied to the other figures. Felicity James sees the clue to Lamb's contribution as lying in the sociable network of friendships of which he was part which included not only most of the major Romantics but also others like de Quincey and less celebrated actors ('a regular "rat's nest of drunkards and lunatics and divorced men"' [p. 62]), not to overlook his own sister with whom Lamb existed in a state of emotional and intellectual 'co-dependency' (James's term). What attracted Lamb was 'the unsettling, subversive potential of reading' (p. 19) and his radical coterie provided plenty of such insights. There is nothing to stop us, and everything to gain, by transferring this approach to both Hazlitt and Keats. James's conclusion makes the point: 'We have seen how Charles Lamb's attitude to Shakespeare – sociable, sympathetic, at times subversive – feeds into key Romantic viewpoints, subtly shaping the tenets of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Hazlitt and Keats' (p. 63). Uttara Natarajan, however, places Hazlitt's Shakespearean criticism within contexts such as his own intellectual development set against a range of earlier thinkers and the norms of publishing and playmaking in Regency London. The London theatre itself, with its three very different superstars in Kean, Kemble, and Siddons, as well as in its manifest limitations provided a rich testing ground for ideas. Again, the overall approach could be applied to Lamb and Keats with different but equally illuminating results. Meanwhile, Beth Lau traces the accumulation of Keats's momentary bursts of excitement and ideas generated by his readings of Shakespeare (and by listening to Hazlitt and Kean) more in the 'micro-terms' of his recorded readings and his poetry rather than larger contexts. Taken as a whole, the three chapters open up different aspects of the layered richness in a very complex literary age, in ways that just one essay on a specific writer cannot easily do.

Since this is, after all, *The Hazlitt Review*, the occasion requires more concentration on the chapter dealing with our hero. Let me say from the outset that Uttara Natarajan's essay is admirable, not only providing a comprehensive analysis of what Hazlitt thought about Shakespeare but also managing to place

this against a subtle tracing of Hazlitt's evolving and wide-ranging lines of thought and against the practical realities of both theatres and journal publishing in the period. To keep the various tributaries under lucid control is a tall order, yet achieved with an air of absorbing effortlessness. Readers of this journal especially will themselves appreciate the unobtrusive skill in presenting the main events of Hazlitt's life as a chronology, and the ways in which his various experiences influenced his Shakespearean criticism: how the *Characters* volume is an attempt to emulate in written form the Boydell Library images reflecting Hazlitt's early 'false start' as an artist, how his observations of Kean's acting drew upon not only some general romantic views but also his own idiosyncratic personality and non-conforming stance, and how his political attitudes to current affairs of the time fed forcefully into his criticism. The backdrop is a wide and colourful social panoply of the theatre, where Shakespeare was rarely acted from original texts, where *King Lear* was banned for its unsettling portrayal of a madness suffered by George III, and where most actors were lamentably mannered and deficient.

What is impressive in this chapter is a sense of Hazlitt's thought as it developed and subtly changed over time from his early theatre criticism to his later, wonderful moral and familiar essays in *The Plain Speaker*. The development is surprising insofar as Hazlitt continually repeats himself and superficially gives the appearance of a settled outlook expressed with a trenchancy bordering on the dogmatic. Admittedly he remained consistent to his political beliefs right through to his controversial life of Napoleon, deploring in Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey their descent into conservatism. However, as we see in this chapter, Hazlitt was flexibly modifying and adapting his thought to meet new circumstances. The famous recognition of the intrinsic royalist bent in poetry manifest in *Coriolanus* is not 'the whole story', but is modified in Hazlitt's mind to suit different material: 'The locus of power, in Shakespeare's works alone, is to be discerned in the creations, not the creator' (p. 85).

However, while Hazlitt does change and develop his ideas more than meets the eye, yet there are also important continuities in his basic views. For example, he always regarded Shakespeare as a touchstone of the sublime before which all other writers continued to fall short and prove themselves 'human'. Even the otherwise remarkable Kean could never reach the imaginative potential given by the text or 'render the infinite [...] by finite means' (p. 72). It was, however, the genius of Hazlitt to interpret Kean's relative failures as interesting in themselves, and to provide new 'readings' based on the actor's own insights: 'Hazlitt's report of the performance becomes indistinguishable from his interpretation of the character, or, more simply, his description of Kean becomes a reading of Shakespeare' (p. 70), a reading that is unique and revealing partly because Kean himself was not trying to give definitive but distinctive performances.

Natarajan's account also immeasurably sharpens our understanding of some of Hazlitt's concepts that have been hazy even amongst modern scholars. 'Gusto' emerges as not the broad brush that the word seems to suggest, but a subtle and philosophically derived notion of poetic and imaginative identity which can be imposed on subject-matter – a quality which Hazlitt sees exemplified in

almost all artists *except* Shakespeare. One whole area that invites amplification is 'character'. It is often assumed that Hazlitt by and large is accepting traditions of seeing character as earlier writers had done, as exemplary traits, stemming from the seventeenth-century genre of 'The Character', and that where Hazlitt differs from his predecessors is in applying this approach so systematically through the Shakespearean canon. However, as Natarajan briefly suggests, Hazlitt's whole approach to character is more radically original than this, dwelling on 'singularity of mind or character' or 'an inner principle of unity' that individualizes each dramatic personage (signalled in that '*inner* principle'). The fact that Hazlitt's concentration on character is sometimes seen as a sophisticated continuation of existing critical traditions may be because it has become difficult for us in a later age to imagine a world in which Shakespeare's characters were not appreciated for their non-typological uniqueness, and yet the evidence suggests that before 1800 an alternative concentration prevailed on plot structure, scenic design, and genre. Hazlitt's views of character became fundamental to post-romantic assumptions about identity in general but for Hazlitt himself they were original and stemmed from his world-view precociously expressed when he was a schoolboy in *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action*. Such ideas were 'in the air' of course, and Coleridge for one played his part, but in contrast to that writer's sometimes obfuscating metaphysical terminology, the sheer originality of Hazlitt's thinking on this issue may have been underestimated because of the disarming eloquence of his commonsense explanations and his transparent, lucid prose. He gives the impression he is giving a voice to 'what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed' while in fact he is expressing what may not have been oft thought at all before his time.

Other significant emphases which qualify any simple notion of character, and which have been generally overlooked, are first Hazlitt's repeated perception that many if not all Shakespeare's characters act from 'mixed motives' and secondly that a single textual character can be played in radically different ways on different occasions, even by the same actor and especially by one so many-sided as Kean. His true predecessors on the matter of character may have been the historically aberrant Montaigne and Sterne, both of whom he had read. At the same time, and lest he be seen as simplistically starting the industry of regarding Shakespeare's characters as having an autonomous life outside the plays, Hazlitt pays constant 'attention to the internal coherence of the plays, to unifying patterns of action, imagery, and language' (p. 82), the tissue and 'bye-play' (his term) through which the characters exist in their plays.

After encountering the three impressive chapters in this volume readers may feel inspired to browse in the works themselves, and in this sense it is a shame that no mention is made of at least two dedicated anthologies of their Shakespeare criticism. However modestly packaged and perhaps inadequate they may be, Joan Coldwell's *Charles Lamb on Shakespeare* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1978) and my own *Hazlitt's Criticism of Shakespeare: A Selection* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996) are more convenient to consult than searching through the many scattered volumes of Lamb's works and the towering but intimidating

twenty-one volumes of Howe's *Hazlitt*. Keats poses more problems for the would-be anthologist because of the embedded brevity and scattered nature of his glosses, but it would be good if somebody tried to collect and present them in a palatable way. Jonathan Bate's generous collection in the New Penguin Shakespeare Library, *The Romantics on Shakespeare* (1992) is also overlooked here, and given Penguin's ruthless policies it may well now be out of print.

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## HAZLITT SOCIETY

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The Hazlitt Society grew out of the project to restore Hazlitt's long-neglected grave in St Anne's churchyard, Soho. It was restored by public subscription and the renewed gravestone, in black Lakeland slate, was unveiled by Michael Foot on the 225th anniversary of Hazlitt's birth, 10 April 2003. The committee which was formed for the purpose of the restoration established the Society to encourage appreciation of Hazlitt's work and to promote his values.

Each year there is a lecture by an eminent Hazlitt scholar on the Saturday closest to 18 September, the day Hazlitt died. A newsletter, sent out in the spring of each year, alerts members of the Society to this lecture, which is free of charge, and any other events that may be of interest to admirers of Hazlitt.

The Society publishes *The Hazlitt Review*.

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