

THE HAZLITT REVIEW

The Hazlitt Review is an annual peer-reviewed journal, the first internationally to be devoted to Hazlitt studies. The *Review* aims to promote and maintain Hazlitt's standing, both in the academy and to a wider readership, by providing a forum for new writing on Hazlitt, by established scholars as well as more recent entrants in the field.

Editor Uttara Natarajan

Assistant Editors Helen Hodgson, Phillip Hunnekuhl

Editorial Board

Geoffrey Bindman	James Mulvihill
David Bromwich	Tom Paulin
Jon Cook	Seamus Perry
Gregory Dart	Michael Simpson
Philip Davis	Fiona Stafford
A.C. Grayling	Graeme Stones
Paul Hamilton	John Whale
Ian Mayes	Duncan Wu
Tim Milnes	

Scholarly essays (4000–7000 words) and reviews should follow the MHRA style. The Board is also happy to consider more informal submissions from Hazlitt's lay readership. Email u.natarajan@gold.ac.uk or post to Uttara Natarajan, c/o Department of English & Comparative Literature, Goldsmiths College, New Cross, London SE14 6NW. We regret that we cannot publish material already published or submitted elsewhere.

Subscriptions, including membership of the Hazlitt Society: £10 (individual); £15 (corporate). Overseas subscriptions: \$24 (individual) or \$35 (corporate). Cheques/postal orders, made payable to the Hazlitt Society, to be sent to Helen Hodgson, *The Guardian*, Kings Place, 90 York Way, London N1 9AG. Enquiries to correspondence@williamhazlitt.org or by post to Helen Hodgson.

www.williamhazlitt.org

ISSN 1757-8299

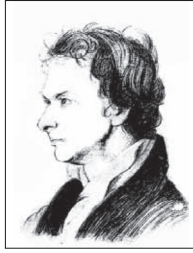
Published 2012 by The Hazlitt Society

c/o Dept of English & Comparative Literature, Goldsmiths College, New Cross, London SE14 6NW.

© 2012 Individual articles, the contributors; all other material, The Hazlitt Society

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Hobbs the Printers Ltd, Totton, Hampshire

Designed and typeset by HWA Text and Data Management, London



HAZLITT SOCIETY

FOUNDING PRESIDENT

Michael Foot

VICE PRESIDENTS

Ronald Blythe FRSL, DLITT

Michael Estorick

Peter McKay

Lord Myners of Truro CBE

Alan Rusbridger

Juan José Sánchez Arévalo

COMMITTEE

Chairman

Gregory Dart

Treasurer

Michael McNay

Secretary

Helen Hodgson

Sir Geoffrey Bindman

A.C. Grayling

Ian Mayes

Annalena McAfee

Niccoló Milanese

Uttara Natarajan

Duncan Wu

The Correspondent

Helen Hodgson

The Guardian

Kings Place

90 York Way

London N1 9AG

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 is closely associated with the annual Hazlitt Day-School that takes place each summer in Oxford and members qualify for concessionary rates.

The Society publishes *The Hazlitt Review*.

correspondence@williamhazlitt.org

www.williamhazlitt.org

THE HAZLITT REVIEW

VOLUME 5

2012

Hazlitt and Democracy PAUL HAMILTON TARIQ ALI	5
Reassessing Language, Liberality, and Patriotism in the Work of William Hazlitt MARCUS TOMALIN	21
Hazlitt, Modernity, and the Workings of Spirit JOHN WHALE	41
‘A Slaughter-House of Christianity’: A Short History of New College, Hackney STEPHEN BURLEY	55
Report on the 11th Hazlitt Day-School, June 2012: A Six-Course Banquet with Hazlitt DICCON SPAIN	61

HAZLITT AND DEMOCRACY

Hazlitt Society Annual Lecture, 2011

Paul Hamilton

Tariq Ali

Professor Paul Hamilton, one of the foremost of Romantics scholars today, spoke on Hazlitt's politics, and the writer and social commentator, Tariq Ali, took up the wider application of the issues with which Hazlitt was centrally concerned to the current political climate. Ian Mayes was in the Chair. This is an edited version of the talks.

IAN MAYES: Ladies and gentlemen, a very warm welcome to the seventh annual Hazlitt lecture, or perhaps I should say 'lectures' as today we have two distinguished speakers, Professor Paul Hamilton, a Hazlitt scholar, and one of Britain's leading public intellectuals, Tariq Ali.

[...]

Paul Hamilton joins the distinguished line of Hazlitt scholars who have addressed us each year. He is Professor of English at Queen Mary University of London and his research is primarily on Enlightenment and Romantic thought in literature. He is particularly interested in relations between literature, philosophy, and political theory, and that's what our two speakers have got in common. Paul has written extensively on Hazlitt and is on the Board of the *Hazlitt Review*. His subject today, Hazlitt's *Political Essays*, was published by William Hone in 1819, and the events of that momentous year, among other things, stimulated the birth of the *Manchester Guardian* which came into being a couple of years later, in 1821. In fact, one of the *Political Essays* is about Charles James Fox who, as far as I can tell, was one of the very few people that C. P. Scott, the most famous of the *Guardian* editors, idolized. He had a portrait print of Charles James Fox in his office in Cross Street, Manchester, behind the desk that he worked at. Paul has written about Hazlitt's *Political Essays* at greater length, for those of you who want a longer version of his speech, in the 2011 *Hazlitt Review*. I'll pass over now to Paul Hamilton.

PAUL HAMILTON: Thanks very much. I'm going to talk about Hazlitt's politics in a fairly general, user-friendly way. Because I'm an academic, I tend to get into knotty debates about the people I'm writing about, but fortunately the record of those debates go into journals and books and aren't inflicted on the public. So I'm going

to relax a bit today and try and talk more generally about Hazlitt, and about the kind of political commitments he had, and the ways in which he expressed them.

What were the politics of William Hazlitt? Tory? Whig? Dissenter? Jacobean patriot? Constitutionalist? Well, he wasn't a Tory and he wasn't a Whig either. In fact he wasn't a radical in a straightforward sense. He talked about the cavils of reformers as something that he had to compete with. He also talked about the threats of Tories and the sneers of Whigs. Was he a patriot? Yes, but he was also somebody who looked towards Europe – I'll talk a bit about this later – as producing the two fundamental events that he had to react to politically, one being the French Revolution, and the other being the treatment of Napoleon, and then the settlement of France and Europe after Napoleon, at the Congress of Vienna, 1815 onwards.

I find the easiest way to get a handle on Hazlitt and politics is to think of the phrase, 'the Good Old Cause'. I certainly find, reflectively, huge sympathy for the Good Old Cause. The Good Old Cause, as Hazlitt defines it in the *Political Essays*, is something quite straightforward, it seems. He calls it the internal right of any people to choose its own form of government, but this actually stands for a lost republican dream in Hazlitt's imagination. It's not a simple thing. It's as complex as any example that you'd find now in contemporary politics. If you look at the wars and the disputes going on at the moment and ask whether they're about the internal right of any people to choose its own form of government, the quick answer is yes, but then the debate begins.

Historically, the Good Old Cause for someone like Hazlitt and someone working within the British tradition, goes back to Cromwell, and then, succeeding Cromwell, to 1688 and the Glorious Revolution. It goes on into the Commonwealth men who tried to preserve the principles of Cromwell, as watered down but nevertheless re-enacted in 1688. It goes through to the Whig resistance to the Stuarts, the anti-Jacobite feeling, the desire never again to have an absolute monarchy. It continues through to that insistence and the constitutional character of the Hanoverian monarchy, which you get in Whig thinking through to Charles James Fox. It goes through to the sympathizers with the early stages of the French Revolution, and again Charles James Fox, whom Hazlitt accosted when he was sketching the Louvre. He saw Fox walking past and apparently had a rather engaging conversation with him. And Fox is often there as the Whig that Hazlitt really – perhaps not as much as C.P. Scott, but certainly in a big way – approved. A shared culture, a shared view of history, a notion that there is a constantly available radical tradition which goes through these stages that I've talked about, is the easiest way to understand what is powering Hazlitt when he writes about politics in his typically embattled, paradoxical, and polemical way.

The second thing that one has to say immediately about Hazlitt and politics is that his efforts primarily were in terms of literary politics, and the controversies that provoked. His most famous and perhaps most pithy statement on literary politics is his remark on Wordsworth, and 'the spirit of Jacobin poetry', which is how he understood Wordsworth's poetry: The spirit of Jacobin poetry is rank egotism.[...] The secret of the Jacobin poetry and the anti-jacobin politics of this writer is the

same' ('Illustrations of "The Times" Newspaper', *Political Essays*; vii, 144).¹ What did he mean by that? Well, the anti-Jacobin politics of Wordsworth, especially the later Wordsworth, were pretty obvious. He ended up being a distributor of stamps in Westmorland and taking on the job of being a government tax collector, and all the rest of it, all those sinecures that Hazlitt greatly disapproved of. The Jacobin poetry being rank egotism is interesting, though, because Hazlitt felt that there was something important here, that Wordsworth, in apparently broadening the franchise of subjects in his poetry, talking about poor people in his poetry, was not doing something politically enlightened at all, but was in fact levelling *down* poetry to being something which couldn't be enjoyed in that kind of aggrandizing way, that sort of self-glorifying way, that made it available to everybody as a form of self-elevation. Hazlitt felt that Wordsworth was doing something rather conservative and reactionary, demonstrating, in fact, what in another famous phrase, about the editor of the *Quarterly Review*, William Gifford, he called, the 'invisible link, that connects literature with the police' (*Letter to William Gifford* [1819]; ix, 13).

In contrast to that, Hazlitt thought he was doing something completely different. He thought he was establishing a kind of democracy of reading, in which, however elevated the poetry you read, however exalted its heroes and heroines, the genius of the offer of that poetry was to make them available to us all, to each of us. There was a kind of inherently democratic effort going on in poetry which Hazlitt thought was being scanted by people like Wordsworth, and had to be demonstrated in criticism again and again. Hence his own extraordinary way of writing, in which there is a quotation about every three lines. The genius of Hazlitt's writing is that it's not pedantic at all, it's facilitating, welcoming us to this erudition that he himself possesses, and telling us that we too can enjoy this literary republic, and in it, be citizens, learn the quotations, understand the excellences of the writing and make them our own.

At the same time, though, Hazlitt could be suspicious of poetry. His understanding of everything was, I think, paradoxical, divided. He thought the age was an age of abstraction. Abstraction was good in the sense that it abstracted you from your personal selfish interests. It allowed you to take an enlightened view of things. It allowed you in that sense to be egalitarian and say that there were principles of justice that ought to apply equally to everybody. To that extent, you abstract yourself from the individual differences of people in order to make sure that equitable laws treat them exactly the same, irrespective of those differences. On the other hand, Hazlitt thought that an age of abstraction meant that the age was not conducive to good poetry or drama. He felt it very significant that the Romantic age, despite a huge literary effort, did not produce dramatists of the calibre of Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, the great Elizabethans. He felt this was interesting, and he also thought it was a problem.

The way he understood this was to say that there was something about poetry that was, in its anti-abstraction, actually power-hungry. It was exclusive. It was

1 Parenthetical references for the speakers' quotations from Hazlitt are all inserted by the Editor. References, by volume and page, are to *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1930-4).

concerned with the vaunting of the individual at the expense of the abstract, egalitarian essence that we all shared. In that respect, he said poetry is ‘right royal’, and he wrote one famous essay on Shakespeare’s play *Coriolanus*, in which he expresses scepticism about poetry. It’s worth always remembering this, because it was a point of pessimism about what I’m calling the democracy of reading and the way in which poetry can enable us all to enjoy extreme expressions of individuality and see that they can too be our possession. This is a moment of great scepticism. Let me quote you a little bit from it.

Poetry is right-royal. It puts the individual for the species, the one above the infinite many, might before right. [...] The history of mankind is a romance, a mask, a tragedy, constructed upon the principles of *poetical justice*. It is a noble or royal hunt, in which what is sport to the few is death to the many, and in which the spectators halloo and encourage the strong to set upon the weak and cry havoc in the chase but they do not share in the spoil. We may depend upon it that what men read and delight to read in books they will put in practice in reality.

(‘Coriolanus’, *Characters of Shakespear’s Plays*; iv, 214–6)

So when we aestheticize politics, we get a kind of fascism, really, in Hazlitt’s view, and that is very different from other statements in which he says, for instance, in *The Plain Speaker*, that ‘all men who have the use of speech are kings’ (‘Sir Walter Scott, Racine, and Shakespear’; xii, 337). If everybody can be a king, there is nothing exclusive, is there, about a monarchy? And this kingly potential, to which literature gives us all access, gives the lie to any presumption in politics to be better than anyone else. In a rather delightful way, Hazlitt uses monarchy and monarchical thinking against itself. The legitimacy of monarchy, thinks Hazlitt, is make-believe, it’s romance. The truly exceptional person, the genius, is somebody who is always recognized as an exemplar, as someone who creates possibilities for all of us, who shows us another way of being human. When this happens, in language anyway, the proof is immediate. Why? Because we can use the language, we can quote it, we can translate it, we can parody it, we can make it our own.

Hazlitt’s own language shows this to perfection. Tom Paulin calls him a kind of quoting impresario. He often quotes slightly inaccurately, and again, the lack of pedantry in Hazlitt means that one doesn’t resent the inaccuracies. One sees them rather as a sign of this way in which – something we should follow ourselves – he makes quotations his own. Equally, what are often taken for extremes of romantic sympathy or imaginative identification, are actually, in Hazlitt anyway, about this enfranchisement, about this democratizing, with its political charge.

I want to quote another little bit of his Shakespearean criticism. Here he is talking about King Lear. He says:

The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual; the explosions of his passions are terrible as a volcano; they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom of that rich sea, his mind, with all its vast

riches. It is his mind which is laid bare. This case of flesh and blood seems too insignificant to be thought on, even as he himself neglects it. On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage; while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear; – we are in his mind; we are sustained by a grandeur, which baffles the malice of daughters and storms; in the aberrations of his reason, we discover a mighty irregular power of reasoning, immethodised from the ordinary purposes of life, but exerting its powers, as the wind blows where it listeth, at will on the corruptions and abuses of mankind.

(‘Lear’, *Characters of Shakespear’s Plays*; iv, 271)²

So you get the sense of this quality of identification in reading which elevates us to Lear’s status in a quite extraordinary way, and which then allows us to have a sort of generosity and an exemplary ethical attitude to the corruptions and abuses of mankind.

What have looks or tones to do with that sublime identification of his age with that of *the heavens themselves*, when in his reproaches to them for conniving at the injustice of his children, he reminds them that ‘they themselves are old!’ What gesture shall we appropriate to this? What has the voice or the eye to do with such things? (iv, 271)

In context, Hazlitt is deploring the rewriting of *King Lear* by Nahum Tate, who gave it a happy ending. Tate diminishes the politics of *King Lear*, in Hazlitt’s view. He diminishes the heights that we can reach when reading this wonderful play, because of the language which we can make our own. Another kind of grandeur altogether is at stake in this description of Lear, a kind of planetary elemental sympathizing of the heavens, an almost unbearable extension of our sympathies characteristic of tragedy and its unconsoling solace.

[...]

So that’s Hazlitt’s literary policy. I want to finish, then, by talking about the two main causes that shaped Hazlitt’s politics in his own time. I’ve mentioned them already: the French Revolution and the post-Napoleonic settlement. Napoleon, of course, is the huge problem with Hazlitt. He is an absolutely fanatical sympathiser with Napoleon. Nothing Napoleon can do is wrong. These are European forms of British self-understanding. Hazlitt is often thought of as one of the most English of writers, and of course, he is. Robert Louis Stevenson said famously, ‘We think we’re all very fine fellows these days, but none of us can write like Hazlitt’, and by that he meant, write English like Hazlitt. Hazlitt’s English is inimitable, but he was a very European thinker in many ways. He wasn’t in the least chauvinistic or self-enclosed nationally. He thought the French Revolution had produced a shock to the whole of mankind. By that he meant that the French Revolution had to be understood in as wide a context as possible. In other words, it wasn’t simply about

2 Editor’s note: The words are actually Charles Lamb’s, whom Hazlitt is quoting here.

French history, the conflict between Britain and France, and all the rest of it. It was about something which had huge cultural consequences, and which, if you like, began to produce modernity.

That sounds a rather trendy way of putting it, a way that Hazlitt would not have put it, but it's that kind of extending of the boundaries of understanding politics that Hazlitt is very interested in. And it's that on which turns the difficulty in locating him in a particular party, say a Whig or something to the left of a Whig. The difficulty is not explicable in terms of him side-stepping politics, but rather in him seeing politics as pervasive, in a way which seems to me extremely modern. If you like, he's anticipating the modern slogan that the personal is the political.

What was extraordinary about Napoleon? That Napoleon made himself a king, an emperor. Forget the imperialism; just hang on to the idea that he's exemplary in that sense. 'He,' says Hazlitt, 'one man, did this' ('Preface,' *Political Essays*; vii, 10). Hazlitt must be echoing Shakespeare's Coriolanus who, when he took the Volscians, said, 'Alone I did it!' 'He, one man, did this,' and Hazlitt goes on to say, 'There was an end of it with the individual' (vii, 12). So the understanding of the French Revolution is, then, about how it produced Napoleon, and how out of the French Revolution, came different versions of its original egalitarianism. That egalitarianism could take forms that Hazlitt, like any other person, probably, would disapprove of. The most egregious form of it was the Terror, Robespierre's Terror, and perhaps the excesses of Napoleon. But you have to hang on to the notion that the egalitarian impulse which produced the French Revolution was going to have all sorts of different forms, and you had to be alive to the different shapes those forms took, be critical of them, and then work out how you were going to continue it yourself.

Finally, the Congress of Vienna. What he really hated about that was that they had turned back British history. In other words the Foreign Secretary, Castlereagh, and the Duke of Wellington went over to confer with Metternich and Alexander, the Tsar of Russia, in Vienna, and what they did was establish a Europe constructed entirely on monarchies, which, if not quite absolute, nevertheless were rather stronger than constitutional monarchies. It was running the notion of the Good Old Cause backwards until the Good Old Cause was becoming an impossibility for Europe.

This takes you again back into this notion of the kingly: the kingly as Hazlitt deplored it, and the kingly as Hazlitt recommended it. If I had to find an echo behind his saying that all men who have the use of speech are kings, that echo wouldn't be Shakespearian, it would be Miltonic. It would be from Milton's sonnet on his blindness, 'When I consider how my light is spent,/Ere half my days in this dark world and wide.' You remember the sonnet ends with the statement about God, that his state is 'kingly'. Milton's exaltation of kingship here, I would argue, is as a human aspiration which actually gives the lie to monarchist politics, in exactly the way that Hazlitt wants: 'His state/Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed,/ And post o'er land and ocean without rest:/They also serve who only stand and wait.' When Milton talks about a king, it is in the poem which imagines a context in which his own talent, apparently blighted by blindness, can flourish in a form

equal to everybody else's. He's not saying it's good to be subservient, to 'stand and wait'. He's saying that the lowly – the people Coriolanus despises – are potentially as angelic, as those more obviously empowered emissaries of the divine, the angels flying all over the earth to do God's bidding. For Milton, a king is an imaginative principle that lets you find original fulfilment. And this is in contrast to what Hazlitt in the *Political Essays* calls the mediocrity of kingship. By that he means the hereditary principle, set against the imaginative principle of which he wrote, 'It's root is in the heart of man: it lifts its head above the stars' ('Romeo and Juliet', *Characters of Shakespear's Plays*; iv, 250). Again we encounter that movement of ennoblement which, as in *King Lear*, takes us beyond our normal orbit, but in language we can all quote and we can all enjoy. The politics, to that extent, is in the poetry. Great poetry makes its readers great and enforces the egalitarian principle of the French Revolution which Hazlitt never abandons.

IAN MAYES: Thank you very much indeed, Paul. [...] Would that Hazlitt were present to describe our next speaker, Tariq Ali. [...] Tariq has been at the centre of political life and protest in this country pretty much since he first set foot here in the early 1960s. During the protests at the time, particularly against the war in Vietnam, he was very quickly, in the time-honoured manner, demonized by the popular press in Britain, which at least allowed him to make the recent memorable statement, 'Tabloid hysteria made my name.' It sounds like a headline from one of the very tabloids that we've all come to love so much. He also made us believe that he was no less radical today than he was forty years ago as we shall see very shortly. Tariq Ali.

TARIQ ALI: Thanks very much, Ian. When Tom Paulin asked me to give a lecture to the Hazlitt Society, I did wonder why. But then I recalled that Michael Foot, many, many years ago had once told me, 'You must read Hazlitt.' I didn't follow this injunction through. I did read something from him, but I never actually sat down and read his writings systematically, which I attempted to do this time, not all of them, but some of them. So I'm very pleased to be here, because even though he lived in a different time – a different literary time and a different political time – there are certain things which one can learn from him and his writings.

The first of these is that you must never write to please, an important fact in his make-up, that you should write what you think, it doesn't matter whom it annoys, you should be straightforward and shouldn't write to please your cronies. He was pretty hostile to virtually everything that dominates our culture today, not just in this country, but more or less globally, judging from the way he wrote and the anger he aroused. As has already been pointed out, but is worth re-expressing, he was very much like every other individual. You're born at a particular time, and those times influence you, that environment – political, social, cultural – creates or helps to create your consciousness, regardless even of the fact that you're not involved in parts of it in a meaningful way.

In the case of Hazlitt, you have only to look at his biography. He was eleven years old when the French Revolution took place across the water in 1789, and he

was fourteen years old in 1793, when the French decided to execute their monarch and his wife. Now this wasn't a huge shock in England at the time, because the English had done this before anyone else, something some people try to forget these days. The English Revolution was the first revolution, the revolution that toppled the monarchy and led to the execution of the king, though not his wife. That created a storm in Europe at the time. Every crowned head trembled after Charles I was executed. So the actual execution of Louis and Marie Antoinette probably didn't shock too many people, because memories at that time of what had happened in England were much stronger than they are today. There was a sense of history. Hazlitt growing up in that period must have been infected, affected, certainly engaged, in conversations non-stop about what was going on across the water.

I would like to quote here from his *Life of Napoleon*, where he is very sharp in explaining what the French Revolution was:

Power was in the hands of a few, who used it only to gratify their own pride, cruelty, or avarice, and who took every means to extend and cement it by fear and favour. The lords of the earth, disdaining to rule by the choice or for the benefit of the mass of the community, whom they regarded and treated as no better than a herd of cattle, derived their title from the skies, pretending to be accountable for the exercise or abuse of their authority to God only – the throne rested on the altar, and every species of atrocity or wanton insult having power on its side, received the sanction of religion, which it was thenceforth impiety and rebellion against the will of Heaven to impugn (xiii, 39).

The book is full of explanations and causes for why that revolution took place.

Now I had not particularly come here to talk about Hazlitt, but since I agreed to do the lecture and having read him, I found of course that there are many analogies between the period in which he lived and what is happening in the Western world today, the period in which we live. There's one in that very quotation – and this involves democracy. Hazlitt grew up, lived, and died, in a period when no democracy existed, except the democracy or the freedom to write, to express your views. He was a very strong believer in the freedom of the press and the diversity of the press, to which I'll come in a minute. But democracy didn't exist. There was no question of what is now acknowledged as democracy, the right of the people to choose their government at regular intervals, and the right of all the people, not just half the people or a quarter of the people, or people on the basis of the property that they own, or men. This was not a definition of democracy. The democracy which is now acceptable is that everyone, regardless of class, colour, creed, gender, has the same right to exercise their choice when it comes to election time once every five years. This democracy had to be fought for. Something which is forgotten is that none of these rights were obtained or handed down from above without a struggle from below.

The struggle in this country didn't take the shape of the French Revolution, for reasons which we know: that the English Revolution had already created the

basis for a new type of socioeconomic society in this country, where merchants and traders, and ultimately, industrialists, became very strong and powerful. The compromise of 1688 had removed significant powers from the monarch as such. But although this was all very well and positive, actual democracy didn't come for some time afterwards, a long time afterwards, in fact. If you wanted to date the birth of English capitalism from the late seventeenth century onwards, you would have to say that it took over two centuries – till after the First World War – for democratic rights to be guaranteed to the bulk of the adult population in this country. These rights were first fought for by the Chartists, in a huge mass rebellion all over the country. But the Chartists fought for universal male suffrage, not universal suffrage. They fought for the right of all men to be allowed to vote, i.e., half the population. Even the Chartists couldn't encompass the notion that women had equal rights, or that they certainly had the right to vote, because women were largely regarded as chattels, as property. For a long, long time, they weren't even allowed their own bank accounts – I think you'll still find references to that – without the approval or signatures of their husbands, something which is still the case in Saudi Arabia today, where women aren't allowed to leave the country to travel, unless even a sixteen-year-old son has authorized it.

So the transition to democracy took place over centuries. The simplistic notion that capitalism equals democracy is nonsensical and it always was. There's absolutely no question that capitalists preferred a ruling government where there was no control, no regulation from anyone. They could do more or less what they wanted, provided that the ruling elite was prepared to go along with it, and that's what they did. What changed that was another revolution. If the French Revolution brought in ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity, even that Revolution didn't mean equality for all. Nor did the American Revolution: you know the great Jeffersonian constitution denied women the right to vote, and of course slaves were not regarded as full human beings, so they too were denied that right. [...]

The revolution which pushed through all these reforms was the Russian Revolution, not in Russia itself, but the threat of revolutions erupting all over the Western world, and mass movements from below – the rise of trade unions, the rise of labour parties, socialist parties – compelled the elites of the day to see that one way of staving off mass upheavals was to permit all the reforms that were possible within the system. So the bulk of the reforms that took place in the western world in relation to democracy, took place after 1917.

From 1919 to the 1960s and the 1970s, you had vast numbers of reforms in the Western world within capitalism. That marked a huge shift. The social democratic reforms which took place after the Second World War, which are identified in this country with the Atlee government, were very similar to what had happened in the United States without a Labour party under the New Deal, or what happened in France under de Gaulle, or what happened in Germany under a Christian Democratic government and an apparatus that consisted, at least between 50 and 60 per cent of it, of remnants of the Third Reich. In Italy, 70 to 80 per cent of the apparatus of the state was exactly the same as under Mussolini, but all the reforms that were pushed through were virtually the same, in terms of providing a higher

standard of living for working people and, to one to degree or another – Britain here was more advanced – a free health service and a free education system. Health, education, and housing were fully or, in the case of housing, largely, subsidised by the state.

All these reforms took place and their effect was very positive, certainly from the point of view of the elite, so there's no question of any revolutionary upheavals taking place in the west. In terms of keeping revolutionary forces at bay, but at the same time improving the conditions of our own people, here is a text published by Professor Dickinson in the *New Statesman* on 9 March 1958, criticizing the Labour Party programme of that time, 'Let Us Face the Future.' A big debate took place in the late 1950s and early 1960s, amongst the intelligentsia within and outside the Labour Party, as to whether a welfare state, which had come into being in Britain and, by extension, other parts of the world, could be kept going simply on the basis of progressive taxation. The Labour Party leaders said it could, but many people within the Labour Party said it was going to prove very difficult economically. Professor Dickinson, a leading economist, argued (I quote from his *New Statesman* article), 'If the welfare state is to survive, the state must find a source of income of its own.' By this he didn't mean taxation, but

a source to which it has a claim prior to that of a wage earner or a profits receiver. The only source that I can see is that of productive property. The state must come in some way or another to *own* a large chunk of the land and capital of the country. This may not be a popular policy: but, unless it is pursued, the policy of improved social services, which is a popular one, will become impossible. You cannot for long socialise the means of consumption unless you first socialise the means of production.

You can't even make this argument today, because people would think you were crazy. The pendulum has swung so far in the other direction that traditional debates about the shape of social democracy don't matter. A new consensus was created in the 1990s, and according to that consensus, virtually every single asset which had been owned by the state, in terms of housing, hospitals, and education, could and should be privatized, because the market was the only way – the discipline exerted by the market was the only acceptable discipline – in the world in which we live. This is not only the policy of successive British governments, whether Labour, Conservative, or now Liberal/Conservative, but the policy largely followed by the United States and most of the European countries, with varying degrees of unevenness.

These policies are implemented regardless of the popular will. When the Conservative government decided to privatize the railways in this country, virtually every single opinion poll said, that from 70 to 80 per cent of the population, regardless of whom they voted for, didn't want the railways privatized. This had absolutely nil impact because they *were* privatized. Labour initially hesitantly said – this was John Prescott's big speech in the 1990s to a Labour Party conference – that when they came to power, they would renationalize the railway system and

improve it, etcetera, etcetera. Well, we know what happened. When Blair came in, Labour not only continued with the previous policies but actually said, 'We want to go beyond them,' and they did. So we have now a method of running this country, which is semi-universal, in which the needs of capital and the needs of profit – the needs of the so-called market – receive greater priority from governments, regardless of their political complexion, than anything else in the country.

I could argue – and it should be argued – that the same applies to wars. The majority of the people in this country didn't want Blair to go to war in Iraq. It became obvious: you had a million and a half people on the streets in London, the largest gathering in English history, British history. Never had there been such a huge demonstration before, and it was the same all over Europe. Two and a half million in Rome, nearly three million in Madrid: these are huge assemblies of people and they were largely citizens. The Left was involved in them, but the Left couldn't mobilize these people even in its dreams. These were huge assemblies of citizens telling their leaders, 'We don't believe your lies; don't take us to war.' To war they went. Nor were these assemblies confined to Europe. Three quarters of a million people demonstrated in New York, over a million in the Bay area on the West Coast, tens of thousands in every single state capital, unprecedented even in American history. Nil impact. What this creates, then, is both a demoralization, and also bitterness and cynicism, which leads to people internalizing this, saying, 'There is absolutely nothing we can do.' Sooner or later, this leads to fewer and fewer people bothering to register to vote in the ballot box, because it doesn't matter.

The country where this form of politics is most advanced is the United States. American scholars have worked out that it now costs several millions to be elected president of that country, and sometimes more, so already the race is on, whether Obama is going to raise more millions from Wall Street than his Republican opponent, whoever that is going to be. This symbiosis between political power and money has now reached a stage in American politics where it is virtually inconceivable to imagine any other person, apart from those with the support of the wealthy, being elected president. This marks a shift even in that country. It's what an American friend of mine said: 'You know we hate socialism in the United States, except socialism for the rich.' There is a strong element of truth in that – over the last twenty-five years the state has been denounced, any state intervention denounced, state regulation of financial malpractices denounced. The state has no role to play and many have said, 'The state has disappeared now, we're all a multitude, and we have to fend for our ourselves.' But the state has disappeared nowhere. It exists in every single European country today, and in the United States. This state, which is forbidden by the governors of these societies to help the poor or the less well off, is absolutely necessary to allow capital to reproduce itself.

When the crisis in the fall of 2008 took place, what did we see? We saw virtually all the banking elites and the financial elites on their knees before the state, 'Please bail us out. Please help us.' And it did, to the tune of trillions of dollars globally. That process is still going on with the huge crisis that we're living through in Europe at

the moment, with countries who were told, 'Privatize, privatize, that's the way; the market will defend everything,' going under one after the other: Iceland, Ireland, Spain and Portugal in a very bad state, Italy in a huge crisis, Greece collapsed, lifted, and collapsing again. The money they give is to the bankers, so that the system can be preserved.

Essentially this is whittling away democratic accountability and democracy. If we have all the mainstream parties saying exactly the same thing, then we have virtually fewer differences today than there were between the Whigs and the Tories, who at least fought each other on certain issues quite strongly. Even though they accepted the system, they did argue; they fought, they campaigned. Today we have a situation where the political parties start off by destroying or getting rid of oppositions within their own ranks. The Liberal Party in this country was the best on that until they entered the Coalition, in terms of allowing a debate to take place within their ranks. They are now curbing it. If you read *The Guardian* today, you will find evidence of that. They're curbing it quite firmly. There is a logic to that, unfortunately, which is to appear responsible, to show the great financial elite of this country, 'We're with you.' And the logic of all this is that once you stop an opposition within your own party, what is the point of encouraging any opposition in society at large? So politics increasingly becomes something that is to do with power and money and little else; no alternatives are possible.

That is the situation which we confront in country after country. In Germany since the war, they've normally had coalitions of both parties to emphasize this fact, and again they're talking about it. Here we have a *de facto* coalition, I mean a national coalition. Labour is not officially in it, but it behaves as if it is. Essentially, we're living in a land without an opposition. There is no opposition party on the mainstream level. France is not dissimilar. If you watch the socialist candidates debating each other on French television, as I had the misfortune to do a few days ago, it's just depressing. There's no big frontal assault on Sarkozy or anything. In Germany, the big debate, which is a more interesting one at least, is on whether Germany should acquire its own independence again, or remain permanently attached to the United States. At least some debate takes place, albeit in the newspapers or behind the scenes, not in public as yet. Here we don't even have that debate. All three parties are totally aligned to the United States. The last prime minister to oppose military bases in this country being used to launch wars in the Middle East was Edward Heath. He didn't last too long.

So we have this strange amalgam today, in which democracy is the least important element of what is going on, and this affects the media. If you look at the new military strategy adopted by the United States and read what the generals, the Pentagon, write, you know there's a lot of the usual stuff about how technology has advanced to such a level that we can target anything we want with real precision and without too much collateral damage. Tell that to the million dead in Iraq. But in any case, the interesting thing in that military strategy is that information is absolutely crucial, and they have it under control. Journalists go as embedded journalists with the approval of the military on both sides when wars are being

fought. Here I quote another thing from Hazlitt, which unfortunately is no longer the case, with some exceptions:

From the moment that the press opens the eyes of the community beyond the actual sphere in which each moves, there is from that time inevitably formed the germ of a body of opinion directly at variance with the selfish and servile code that before reigned paramount, and approximating more and more to the manly and disinterested standard of truth and justice. Hitherto force, fraud, and fear decided every question of individual right or general reasoning' [...] – now a new principle is brought into play [...]. This power is public opinion.
(*Life of Napoleon*; xiii, 40)

Absolutely true when Hazlitt was writing and later too. The media, or the press, as we used to call it, the print media, had different views. The quality of this media was quite high. Debates took place. Journalists were intelligent. They read. They travelled. Where is this now? The level of dumbing down that has taken place across the board in most parts of the Western world – just compare it to what used to exist in the United States or here. There are of course a few independent papers around, *The Guardian* being one of them, but fewer and fewer. You have to rely on smaller papers – the *London Review of Books*, the *New York Review of Books*, papers like that – which publish lengthy essays of the Hazlittian sort that criticize but are not part of the mass communication networks. The global media networks today are thoroughly and completely integrated in the needs of this particular form of capital that rules us today.

We have the interesting development that in the United States, where this is most pronounced, many people set up alternative radio stations and television networks. By 'many', I mean that the programmes they make are watched by two to three million people a day in the best case. Which is not huge, but it's something. More than anything else, it shows an awareness of not trusting your own media. It's very interesting that after the events of 9/11, *The Guardian's* readership in the United States went up by over a million, if not more – I can't remember the figures. Americans turned to *The Guardian* website to read critical comments on what was going on, because all this had been wiped out in their own country. You couldn't speak. You were denounced if you said anything like the late Susan Sontag, who said, 'Whatever else you might call these terrorists the one thing you shouldn't call them is cowards because they actually weren't. They gave up their own lives which isn't exactly an act of cowardice'. For making this simple remark, she was denounced everywhere.

So it's not that people are not in search of other ideas. They look for them and they find them where they can. And of course there's the new media – I was thinking as I was driving here, 'Would Hazlitt have become a blogger, sending out three or four paragraphs every single day?' Probably. [...] Fewer and fewer young people are reading newspapers. It's not just that they don't like to read; they do, they read differently. But most of the newspapers give them very little, so why

bother? They're getting more and more expensive in any case. These are some of the problems.

So to return to the subject, the notion that capitalism and democracy are intertwined has never been true. The limited period in which social democracy and social reforms flourished within the Western world was between 1917 and 1991. After the collapse of Communism, the enemy for 70 years, capitalists felt, 'We don't have to convince anyone any more. We cannot quite revert to normal, but we can certainly disregard any opinions that we don't like.' If you look at where capitalism is at its most dynamic today, it is China, which doesn't have an inch of democracy. I remember I was giving a talk in Houston, Texas, on the Iraq war, and there were many oil millionaires present at my talk, who agreed with me on Iraq, but who were very, very angry at the thought that they had to go through this democratic rigmarole. 'How can we compete with China if we've got to waste our time on all this rather than just move ahead?' In a weird sense, there is a capitalist logic here, that anything that stands in the way of the market, competition, and, basically, profits should be swept aside. The Chinese model is a remarkable one because here it is done by the state, organized by the state, and the state creates the conditions for Chinese capital to flourish. By doing it in a carefully well-planned way, without any notion of democracy, the Chinese have become what Britain used to be known as in the nineteenth century: the workshop of the world. Virtually no good that is produced these days in most parts of the world, in the supermarkets of the world, does not come from China. Now what lesson does one draw from this? Is it democracy that is no good, or is it capitalism?

I think the form of capitalism under which we live today is not only defective, but is wrecking everything that many generations have grown up with. What the state of this country and other countries will be in three more decades if this goes on as it is, is that they will be unrecognizable, unrecognizable. But something might happen, I don't know what, it is difficult to predict. After all very few people predicted the Arab Spring; in fact, the mainstream media would tell us that the Arabs are not fond of democracy, they're not keen on it. But the Arabs showed that they were and fought really hard, and it is not over, but they carry on fighting to get what they want: new constitutions which enshrine some of these rights. It's like the European 1848, in some ways, that we're witnessing.

So this desire of people to control and determine their own lives, not just politically but socially and economically, will not go away as long as you have – and this is the important thing – a system which continually and continuously benefits the few at the expense of the majority of its citizens. If you look here, and if you look at the States, and if you look at other parts of Europe, you see that the difference now in wealth between those at the top and those at the bottom has grown and grown and grown. The last time there was some form of redistribution of wealth in this country was under the Wilson Labour government. Since then, the trend has been in the other direction. The wealth disparity actually increased and overtook that under Thatcher and Major during the Blair/Brown years. These are the criteria by which we have to judge society.

So, ironically, it might yet come to a stage, that in order to move society forward, to progress, the banner of democracy will have to be taken up by progressive people, thinking people on the Left, not because of any fetishism, but because that is the way actually to change some of the things that have been going on over the last 30 to 35 years. For that we need to fight. We need to fight with our pens as Hazlitt did for the causes he believed in, as the poet Shelley did for the causes he believed in, and as many others did. That dissenting tradition, regardless of what it was – and it was largely determined by the times in which these people lived – has to be kept going and to be kept alive, obviously in different ways.

[...]

IAN MAYES: Thank you very much, Tariq, not least for the image of Hazlitt as a blogger, and I find even more beguiling perhaps is the image of Hazlitt using Twitter.

TARIQ ALI: We shouldn't wish that on him.

IAN MAYES: Perhaps it's a subject for a competition in the *Hazlitt Review*: how would Hazlitt have Tweeted the riots in London? Anyway, thank you both very much indeed.

REASSESSING LANGUAGE, LIBERALITY, AND PATRIOTISM IN THE WORK OF WILLIAM HAZLITT

Marcus Tomalin

Arriving in Rouen

We arrived rather late but were well received and accommodated at the Hotel Vatel. My bad French by no means, however, conciliates the regard or increases the civility of the people on the road. They pay particular attention, and are particularly delighted with the English, who speak French well, or with tolerable fluency and correctness, for they think it a compliment to themselves and to the language; whereas, besides their dislike to all difficulty and uncertainty of communication, they resent an obvious neglect on this point as an affront, and an unwarrantable assumption of superiority, as if it were enough for an Englishman to shew himself among them to be well received, without so much as deigning to make himself intelligible. A person, who passes through a country in sullen silence, must appear very much in the character of a spy (x, 96).¹

In this way Hazlitt describes his arrival at Rouen in *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy* (1826). The kinds of sociolinguistic intricacies that he refers to in this passage complicate most journeys that require travellers to use a second language, especially when pristine fluency is lacking. Offence can be caused easily and unintentionally, and Hazlitt was clearly familiar with these dangers. As he drolly suggests, though, taciturnity had perils of its own, especially in France in the years leading up to the July Revolution. Consequently, he chose to speak French in France, even though his linguistic skills were self-professedly 'bad'. But some caution is required here: this playfully self-deprecating *léger de main* is misleading since there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Hazlitt's reading

1 Unless otherwise specified, 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 & Sons, 1930–4). References are by volume and page.

knowledge of French (at least) was actually very good. Travel writing is rarely strictly autobiographical; there are plenty of opportunities for striking postures and adopting personas – and Hazlitt was not averse to such practices. Given these complexities, this article will take Hazlitt's knowledge of French as the starting point for a broader discussion of his assessment of the linguistic and political significance of the French language during the Romantic period.

A study of this kind is timely – perhaps even overdue. While Hazlitt's deep interest in the philosophy of language, and his extensive reflections on the nature of linguistic theory, have become a prominent focus of scholarly research in recent years, the emphasis has generally fallen upon such topics as the literary impact of different stylistic registers (e.g., the familiar style, the vulgar style), the dangers of analysing English using a Graeco-Roman grammatical framework, and his response to the provocative etymological theorizing of John Horne Tooke.² Given the predominance of these undeniably important concerns, it is fair to say that Hazlitt's rather sophisticated appreciation of the French language has never been assessed in sufficient detail – and this neglect is unfortunate since many of his other Gallic preoccupations have been carefully examined at length. Several characteristic concerns – including his literary and philosophical appreciation of Rousseau and Voltaire, his complex relationship with Jacobinism, his assessment of the significance and impact of the French Revolution, and his paradoxical championing of Napoleon – have been closely scrutinized in prominent studies such as Seamus Deane's *French Revolution and Enlightenment in England, 1789–1832* (1988), Simon Bainbridge's *Napoleon and English Romanticism* (1995), and Gregory Dart's *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism* (1999).³ The importance of these influential (re)appraisals is sufficiently well-established not to require extensive comment here. Suffice it to say that they have helped to elucidate Hazlitt's self-positioning in the context of 'the splintering of the English Jacobin tradition.'⁴ However, although his views concerning different aspects of French culture have been astutely considered, specifically linguistic matters have usually been relegated to the periphery, and this marginalization has necessarily delimited the possibility of exploring the way in which his interest in such matters intersects with his responses to the refashioned notions of cosmopolitanism and patriotism that were emerging in Britain at the start of the nineteenth century. In effect, therefore, while it seeks to locate itself in relation to the well-established

2 For instance, the poetics of Hazlitt's prose is discussed in Tom Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style* (London: Faber, 1998), while his response to Horne Tooke is assessed in Uttara Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense: Criticism, Morals, and the Metaphysics of Power* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), Chapter 1. By far the most detailed discussion of Hazlitt's views concerning linguistic theory can be found in Marcus Tomalin, *Romanticism and Linguistic Theory: William Hazlitt, Language, and Literature* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

3 Seamus Deane, *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England, 1789–1832* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), Chapter 7; Simon Bainbridge, *Napoleon and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Chapter 6; Gregory Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Chapter 7.

4 Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism*, 210.

literary-critical discourses concerning Hazlitt and French culture more generally, this article is also part of a more recent and ongoing attempt to ensure that his writings about language and linguistic theory are analysed with the same depth and probing attentiveness as his better-known reflections on literature, painting, metaphysics, politics, and the like.

Hazlitt's 'bad French'

Before discussing any of the topics mentioned above, it is important to try to answer one lurking question: just how bad was Hazlitt's allegedly 'bad French'? As mentioned earlier, this question is complicated slightly by the fact that it is possible for someone to speak French ineptly, but to read it with ease (and vice versa). Hazlitt first encountered the language as a child at Wem when, according to his early letters, he was taught at home by 'Mrs Tracey', a parishioner at his father's church. Mrs Tracey mixed in Dissenter circles, and when she moved to Liverpool, in 1790, the twelve-year-old Hazlitt went to stay with her and her daughters during the summer. The letters he wrote to his father provide a glimpse of his studies there: 'Mrs. Tracey said, I said my French task very well last Saturday. [...] I do not converse in French; but I and Miss Tracey have a book, something like a vocabulary, where we get the meanings of words.'⁵ Although he does not say which particular book he was using, it is highly likely to have been a guide such as Louis Chambaud's *The Treasury of the French and English Languages* (1750) or John Murdoch's *A Radical Vocabulary of the French Language* (1782). During the eighteenth century, there was a proliferation of teaching materials that were designed for use either in school classrooms, or else in private domestic settings.⁶ In Hazlitt's case, though, his language studies in Liverpool were not solely book-based: he also had conversation classes with 'Mr Doloungphryée'.⁷ It seems most likely that this was John Lemprière who is best remembered today for his influential *Bibliotheca Classica* (1788), a text which provided an extensive summary of Greek and Roman mythology and history.

William Hazlitt Sr. clearly approved of such labours, and he encouraged his son to persevere: '[i]t is a pity that you cannot have another month at the French, &c. But, as matters are, I hope you will be soon able to master that language.'⁸ This

5 Willam Carew Hazlitt, *Memoirs of William Hazlitt, with Portions of his Correspondence*, 2 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1867), I, 13.

6 Michèle Cohen, 'French Conversation or "Glittering Gibberish": Learning French in Eighteenth-Century England' in *Didactic Literature in England 1500-1800*, ed. Natasha Glaisyer and Sarah Pennell (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 99-117. Detailed information about the French grammar textbooks that were published in Britain during the eighteenth century can be found in Robin C. Alston, *A Bibliography of the English Language, Vol. 12, Part I: The French Language, Grammars, Miscellaneous Treatises, Dictionaries* (Ilkley: Janus, 1985). For a detailed discussion of the teaching in French in British schools during this period, see Marcus Tomalin, 'The torment of every seminary': The Teaching of the French in British Schools, 1780-1830' in *History of Education* 40. 4 (2011), 447-64

7 W.C. Hazlitt, *Memoirs* I, xxiii.

8 *Ibid.*, I, 15.

enthusiasm for modern European languages was shared by many members of the various Dissenting communities in Britain during the 1790s, and, unlike some of the most ancient schools and universities, the non-conformist establishments had the flexibility to respond and adapt their syllabuses so as to offer something more than merely the Classical languages. For instance, while many of the traditional public and grammar schools *chose* not to include French, others were prevented from doing so by their statutes.⁹ Some institutions only offered weekend French classes, at a premium rate, and therefore the pupils rarely attained fluency. The situation in the ancient universities was similar: although professorships in 'Modern History and Modern Languages' had been established at Oxford and Cambridge by George I in 1724, it was not until the nineteenth century that these languages were formally taught as part of the official syllabus.¹⁰ By contrast, the Dissenting Academies could easily prioritize non-Classical subjects. Therefore it was not unusual to find modern languages on the curriculum, along with chemistry, physics, and other subjects of great contemporaneous significance. Such arrangements could cause considerable difficulties, and when Hazlitt commenced his studies at Hackney New College in September 1793, the teaching of French there was mired in controversy. The French protestant, John Scipio Sabonadière, who had been the French tutor since December 1790, was expelled as an enemy alien in early 1793.¹¹ From Hazlitt's letters, it is apparent that, by the time he arrived there, the main linguistic emphasis had reverted to more traditional subjects (especially Hebrew, Greek, and Latin), though shorthand was also taught. Despite this, Hackney was not entirely a French-free environment during the mid-1790s. Joseph Priestly, one of the tutors, had included French on the syllabus that he devised for the Warrington Academy, and some of Hazlitt's letters contain small fragments of French which suggest an ongoing engagement with the language.¹² The fact that Sabonadière was believed to have been working as a French agent while he was at Hackney must have helped Hazlitt to appreciate the potential dangers that were associated with the seemingly mundane task of acquiring a good working knowledge of French. The notorious 'Alien Act' had come into force in 1816 in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, and William Cobbett had anticipated the manner in which it would be used. As

9 The most notorious case was that of Leeds Grammar School: after a decade of deliberation, the Lord Chancellor, Lord Eldon, ruled in 1805 that the school could not alter its statutes to enable it to teach modern languages. For details, see A.C. Price, *A History of the Leeds Grammar School* (Leeds: Richard Jackson, 1919), 140–1.

10 Nicholas Tyacke, *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume IV, Seventeenth Century Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 269–70; Peter Searby, *History of the University of Cambridge: Volume III, 1750–1879* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 233.

11 Sabonadière included an autobiographical summary in *Principes d'Équité Appliqués aux Finances* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1795), 89–106. He was closely connected to the Barbauld family and married Louisa Barbauld in 1789. For specifics, see William McCarthy, *Anne Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 268–9.

12 For example, he ends a 'P.S.' in a letter to his father with 'Adieu'. See *The Letters of William Hazlitt*, ed. Herschel M. Sikes, Willard H. Bonner, and Gerald Lahey (New York: New York University Press), 66.

he put it in the *Political Register* in 1815, the Act would enable the government 'to seize any foreigner and send him out of the country; or at least, to compel any foreigner to quit the country'.¹³ Viewed from a particular cultural frame of reference, foreign languages usually have perceived socio-political connotations, and the Sabonadière affair meant that Hazlitt would have already been fully aware of this by the time he joined Hackney New College.

The above details suggest that Hazlitt had acquired a reasonably secure knowledge of French by the late 1790s, and he was compelled to make more extensive use of this ability from October 1802 to February 1803 when he lived in Paris and studied the Old Masters in the Louvre. Once again, his letters summarize his linguistic struggles. On 16 October 1802, he commented (with self-parodic exaggeration, no doubt) that 'I am so perplexed with French that I can hardly recollect a word of English'.¹⁴ Nonetheless, he seems to have deepened his understanding of the language during these months, and the philosophical work he produced soon after his Parisian sojourn, which culminated in the publication of *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805), explicitly demonstrates the extent of his familiarity with influential French thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Claude Adrien Helvétius, Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, the Marquis de Condorcet, and Baron d'Holbach.¹⁵ It is also clear that by the early 1800s, he could confidently make use of French vocabulary when it served his expository purposes. Musing upon the hypersensitivity of the French in *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, he comments that '[i]t is difficult to express this in English: but there is a French word, *ressort*, which expresses it exactly' (i, 25).¹⁶ From 1812 onwards, when he began to focus on journalism rather than painting, his language skills proved to be a considerable asset: he read French texts in the original, sometimes producing translations, and he incorporated lengthy extracts into some of his own essays. Indeed, so distinctive was his proficiency, that some of his most recent editors have taken this as a reasonably secure ground for authorial attribution. In his *New Writings of William Hazlitt* (2007), Duncan Wu claims that the article 'To the Editor of the *Morning Chronicle* [Baron Grimm on Aufresne]' should be attributed to Hazlitt:

Despite its being presented as a letter, the author was no ordinary reader of the paper. He must in the first place have been fluent in French – sufficiently so to translate a fairly challenging piece of discursive prose and submit it for publication. This was something Hazlitt had done on several occasions [...] Furthermore, the author of the letter must have read Grimm's *Correspondance*

13 William Cobbett, *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register* 30.18 (4 May 1816), col. 554.

14 William Hazlitt (Jr), *Literary Remains of the Late William Hazlitt*, 2 vols (New York and London: Saunders and Otley, 1836), I, xv.

15 For instance, Hazlitt quotes at length from Rousseau's *Émile*, in French, in *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (i, 17).

16 For Hazlitt, the French word *ressort* – which can mean 'spring' (e.g., *faire ressort* = 'to spring back') or 'energy' (e.g., *avoir du ressort* = 'to have spirit') – conveyed the sense of an immediate response to an external stimulus.

Littéraire, Philosophique et Critique. It is not possible to say for sure that Hazlitt did so, but we know that he had read the selection in Grimm's *Mémoires Historiques* [...] because his disagreement with Francis Jeffrey's review of it produced 'Baron Grimm and the Edinburgh Reviewers' [...] That fact places him among the very small proportion of readers of the Chronicle likely to have read the Paris edition of the *Correspondance Littéraire* – not impossible to find in London in spring 1814, but certainly a book that needed to be sought out.¹⁷

Examples such as this suggest that both Hazlitt's (reading) knowledge of French, and his familiarity with French literature, were not commonplace acquisitions in the 1810s. As mentioned earlier, though, Hazlitt would not be Hazlitt if he did not provide troublesome and destabilizing alternative perspectives, and there are certainly remarks in some of his later writings which suggest that his knowledge of the language was far from perfect. Another representative instance can be found in the 'Advertisement' which precedes his *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy*. Here he remarks that '[t]he only thing I could have wished to expatiate upon more at large is the *manners* of the country: but to do justice to this, a greater length of time and a more intimate acquaintance with society and the language would be necessary' (x, 85). Such comments may simply constitute synthetic modesty, or they may accurately indicate that Hazlitt's *spoken* French was not as secure as his *reading* knowledge. However that may be, many details preserved in his essays (some of which have been briefly summarized above) suggest that he could at least read French, and translate from it, with considerable ease. Also, given his residency in Paris in 1802–03, as well as his subsequent travels in France, it is highly likely that he could speak French with some confidence too. Seemingly, then, in many respects, Hazlitt's French was far from being 'bad'.

Language and liberality

Despite his own occasional self-deprecation, then, Hazlitt's French appears to have been impressively competent, and this must be borne in mind when his views concerning the status of the language within Europe are considered. He recognized, of course, that it was the most widely used modern European language, and he mused upon the implications of this in his incisive late essay 'On Travelling Abroad' (1828). In this piece, he reflected (frequently by means of anthyphora) upon the pointlessness of even attempting to comprehend cultural differences. Some of the questions he both poses and answers include '[w]hy are the French so delighted with themselves? They never quit Paris. Why do they talk so fast? French is the current language of Europe' (xvii, 332). The French nation is presented as being insularly self-regarding and culturally dominant within Europe. Since Hazlitt was finely attuned to the complex redefinitions and reconfigurations which had characterized political discourse in Britain from the 1790s onwards, it

17 Duncan Wu (ed.), *New Writings of William Hazlitt*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), I, 159.

is to be expected that he should muse at length upon the practical and symbolical role of the language in this context.¹⁸ In an 1813 essay, he argued that linguistic dominance was simply one particular (and particularly effective) form of cultural imperialism: '[h]e who speaks two languages has no country. The French, when they made their language the common language of the Courts of Europe, gained more than by all their subsequent conquests' (iv, 68). These striking observations have usually been presented as constituting a surprisingly simplistic endorsement of the imperialistic advantages of monolingual homogeneity. Initially, this interpretation appears to be perfectly reasonable – indeed, virtually unavoidable – and similar ideas were certainly promulgated in the periodical press at the time. In 1807, for instance, an anonymous *Anti-Jacobin Review* article alleged that

the universality, if we may so say, of that language, has already proved a great political evil, by giving the French numerous advantages over other countries, by facilitating the success of their wicked intrigues, and by favouring the accomplishment of their infamous plans.¹⁹

Such sentiments appear to be disconcertingly close to Hazlitt's remarks quoted above. As this article will seek to demonstrate, though, these apparent similarities are in fact entirely illusory.

Hazlitt's comments concerning bilingualism first appeared in an essay that was offered to James Perry in the summer of 1813,²⁰ but he reused them in 'Illustrations of Vetus (Concluded)', which appeared first in *The Morning Chronicle* on 5 January 1814, and subsequently in his *Political Essays* (1819), while an extract from 'Illustrations of Vetus (Concluded)' was published separately as 'On Patriotism – A Fragment' in *The Round Table* (1817). The first of these essays had originally been written in response to a series of letters by Edward Sterling (a.k.a. Vetus) which had appeared in *The Times* during 1812 and 1813. Sterling had reflected upon recent developments in the Napoleonic Wars, including the defeat of Napoleon and his armies at the Battle of Leipzig in October 1813. Predictably, he adopted a fiercely anti-Napoleonic stance, and he urged the allied forces to push deeper into France rather than to broker some kind of pusillanimous peace deal. Hazlitt was roused, and he wrote a series of pieces rebutting Sterling's arguments. He described his adversary, with coruscating irony, as '[t]his patriot and logician' (vii, 63), and it

18 The relationship between language and politics during the Romantic period has been painstakingly assessed in texts such as Hans Aarsleff's *The Study of Language in England, 1780–1860* (London: Athlone, 1983), Olivia Smith's *The Politics of Language 1719–1819* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), James McKusick's *Coleridge's Philosophy of Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), William Keach's *Arbitrary Power: Romanticism, Language, Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), Susan Manly's *Language, Custom, and Nation in the 1790s: Locke, Tooke, Wordsworth, Edgeworth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), Jane Hodson's *Language and Revolution in Burke, Wollstonecraft, Paine, and Godwin* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), and Tomalin's *Romanticism and Linguistic Theory*.

19 *The Anti-Jacobin Review* 27 (June–September, 1807), 146.

20 Hazlitt, *Letters*, 135.

is significant that his comments concerning the French language appeared in the context of this political exchange.

As far as Hazlitt was concerned, although France had made significant military advances since 1803, and had acquired territory in large parts of western Europe, these strategic gains were less effectual than the cultural gains which had arisen from the establishment of French as the primary language of international diplomacy. Accordingly, as mentioned above, his observation that '[h]e who speaks two languages has no country' is usually interpreted as a straightforward condemnation of multilingualism. For instance, in his recent monograph, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (2008), Murray Pittock quotes Hazlitt's pithy aphorism and comments that 'English opinion formers such as Priestley and Hazlitt viewed a standard language as a unifying principle of the British nation.'²¹ Hazlitt's understanding of patriotism will be assessed later. What is important here is to consider whether it is indeed the case that he consistently advocated a imperialistically monolingual cultural perspective, as a contributory means of ensuring socio-political cohesion and a stable national identity. Although the quotation from 'Illustrations of Vetus (Concluded)' and 'On Patriotism – A Fragment' appears to advocate this position, the following extract from his essay 'French Plays' (1828) complicates the picture considerably:

[t]he universality of the French language is not an unalloyed advantage to them [i.e., the French]: it saves the trouble of learning any other, but the necessity of acquiring a new language is like the necessity of acquiring a new sense. It is an increase of knowledge and liberality. (xviii, 381)

The need to learn a new language is like the need to acquire a new 'sense' – but what sort of 'sense' is intended here? Presumably a physical rather than a moral one, since Hazlitt frequently rejected the idea that our actions can be guided by a fixed innate moral sensibility. In his essay 'On Self-Love', he commented that '[...] I can form an idea of my five senses, and of the organs which constitute them: but I confess that I have no more idea of a moral sense than of a moral elephant and castle' (ii, 220). But when is it ever *necessary* to acquire a new physical sense? Hazlitt may have been alluding to the hypothetical case in which a blind man regains his sight. This scenario had been a recurrent philosophical preoccupation since at least the late 1680s. In particular, William Molyneux had written to John Locke in 1688 asking him whether a person who had been taught to recognize certain geometrical shapes (e.g., a cube, a sphere) while blind, would be able to recognize them without touching them if the power of sight were miraculously restored.²² Whether Hazlitt had this specific philosophical problem in mind or not, his point seems to be that languages profoundly alter one's perception of the external world. In other words, he appears to be espousing a gentle form of the kind of linguistic

21 Murray Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 108.

22 For an overview, see Marjolein Degenaar, *Molyneux's Problem: Three Centuries of Discussion on the Perception of Forms* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996).

relativism which Wilhelm von Humboldt began to advocate in the 1820s, and which, in the twentieth century, would lead to the formulation of the Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis.²³ Put simply, the French and English languages provide unavoidably and irreconcilably different worldviews, and (as far as Hazlitt is concerned) it is advantageous to consider the world from more than one perspective.

So, obtaining a new language is like obtaining a new physical sense. Hazlitt's subsequent claim that it also results in an increase in 'knowledge' is surely straightforward: language acquisition necessitates the (conscious or unconscious) learning of factual information not only about the language itself (e.g., syntactic rules, vocabulary), but also about culturally-specific entities, social conventions, classificatory distinctions, and so on. This is undeniable and unproblematic. By contrast, his claim that learning a new language engenders greater 'liberality' is initially more opaque, and accordingly merits closer attention. In Hazlitt's critical lexicon, the word 'liberality' is usually a positive one, at least when it refers to sentiment rather than to gratuitous profusion. In 'Character of Lord Bacon's Works', which appeared in his *Lectures on the Age of Elizabeth* (1819), he praises Bacon specifically because '[h]e had great liberality from seeing the various aspects of things (there was nothing bigotted, or intolerant, or exclusive about him), and yet he had firmness and decision from feeling their weight and consequences' (vi, 328). Here 'liberality' is presented as being a desirable quality, and is associated directly with the ability to perceive a range of contrasting perspectives – a stance which is presented as being diametrically opposed to narrow-minded bigotry and blinkered intolerance. An advocacy of pluralism lurks behind statements of this kind, and Hazlitt was often highly sympathetic to such approaches. Indeed, his own tendency towards pluralism has been noted by many attentive commentators through the years. As early as 1962, Herschel Baker described him as being 'a pluralist who thought nature so multiform and varied that it transcends not only our rules and categories and formulas but even our perceptive faculties. Anything we know, or think we know, is but an aspect of the whole that we can never comprehend.'²⁴ Hazlitt's willingness to view the same subject from a range of dazzlingly contrasting perspectives certainly complicates his work, producing beguiling involutions and convolutions that sometimes constitute an amalgamated totality which, as John Whale has emphasized, 'defies system or theory.'²⁵ Consequently, his own intellectual 'liberality' frequently tempts his readers into being assiduously (and, from time to time, reprehensibly) selective when seeking to identify and reveal underlying coherences in his writings.

23 The basic idea is that different languages encode cultural and cognitive categories in different ways to the extent that they alter the way in which a given individual thinks. For more information, see John Lucy, *Language Diversity and Thought: A Reformulation of the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), especially Chapters 1 and 2.

24 Herschel Baker, *William Hazlitt* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1962), 278.

25 John Whale, *Imagination under Pressure, 1789–1832: Aesthetics, Politics, and Utility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 110.

Be that as it may, Hazlitt asserted that 'liberality', in general, was desirable primarily because it eradicates unthinking narrowness. It is of some importance, then, that in 'On Travelling Abroad', he explicitly accused the monolingual and culturally insular French of lacking this quality, amongst others:

[t]here are four charges that I would bring seriously against the French, and that they themselves are not prepared to repel, for they do not expect them: the want of politeness, the want of imagination, the want of liberality, and the want of grace. (xvii, 336)

He acknowledges that these claims all 'require proof' (xvii, 337), but, strangely, he does not justify all four charges. He opines that the politeness of the French is merely 'officiousness and compliance', that their lack of imagination is due to their 'having no idea of anything but what is French', and that their want to grace is due to a lack of poise: '[g]race is made up of curved lines, of continuous, undulating movements; but with the French all is discontinuous, pointed, angular' (xvii, 337-9). However, he does not discuss their want of liberality explicitly. Instead, he associates it with their perceived lack of imagination:

They are too well pleased with themselves to be at the trouble of going out of themselves. This is one reason of their dislike of drunkenness. It puts them quite beside themselves, and disturbs that natural intoxication and smooth flow of animal spirits in which they delight to contemplate their own image as in a glass. A drunken man is no longer a Frenchman. The consciousness of himself and others is gone. I wonder what a Frenchman's dreams are made of – there is no trace of them in his poetry – there is nothing there but *idées nettes*. (xvii, 338)

This was not an uncommon complaint at the time: the French were widely perceived in Britain to be unwilling to encounter cultures that differed from their own, preferring instead to surround themselves with things that were familiar. The following extract from an 1803 *Anti-Jacobin* article is pretty typical:

It has long been, and is *still*, a reproach to the French nation that, although they grant (but with a visible reluctance) a certain degree of *genius* to writers of other countries, they almost universally refuse to allow them any portion of who they consecrate to themselves by the appellation of *Taste*. In this respect they are Greeks and Romans to all the rest of mankind, who with them are, when weighed in the balance with the French, no better than *Barbarians*. The natural consequence of this overweening conceit is, that they themselves have acquired a *manner* in all works of taste, which, though they hold forth as the great exemplar to all, is very far from being an unerring standard. Except in France this *manner* appears every where meretricious, when compared to the chaste sobriety of true taste. It possesses a glare and flutter which dazzle at

first, but which ultimately leave the judgment unsatisfied, and fail in rousing the affections of the heart.²⁶

For these reasons, in the eyes of many British commentators, French culture in the early nineteenth century was deemed to be sterile, constricted, and reprehensibly self-regarding. It is crucial, though, to stress that for Hazlitt, this tendency was not exclusively characteristic of the French; it was not a distinctive and unique *national* trait, but one identifiable in many nations, to be condemned whenever it obtrudes itself, irrespective of cultural and political allegiances. Indeed, in the very same essay, he emphasized the fact that the British were just as inclined to myopic isolationism:

Liberality begins and ends at home. It is not a neighbourly accomplishment. Or all its professions are verbal, affected, strained, without vital heat or efficacy in them. We make a great gulp to swallow down our prejudices, resolve to be magnanimous, and say, – Come, let us acknowledge the plain truth; the French do not get drunk, they do not rob, nor do they murder people for their money. We do not think one bit the better of them for this triple certificate of merit and absolution from moral turpitude, but of ourselves for our condescension in granting it. (xvii, 333)

In this scenario, when a British critic makes a conscious effort to view the French with a degree of sympathy and magnanimity, it is not done for reasons of true and sincere appreciation. Rather, it is simply a covert form of self-aggrandizement. On the whole, though, publications such as the *Anti-Jacobin* did not usually attempt to offer faux compliments, preferring instead overt condemnation: ‘*French* is now the language of fraud, of hypocrisy, of outrage, of violence, of blasphemy, of rebellion, and of murder.’²⁷ Needless to say, for Hazlitt, this kind of xenophobic ranting was blatantly risible, and in attempting to expose its inherent absurdity, he not infrequently drew upon his own personal experiences. As he put it, in his most mischievously plaintive style, ‘I get into a great many scrapes by maintaining that the mutton is good in Paris’ (xvii, 335). Whatever their veracity, such daringly counterintuitive gastronomical assertions were purposely designed to cause disquiet in Britain by destabilizing the crude and artificial cultural boundaries that could only be perceived by those who lacked sufficient liberality. The learning of foreign languages, therefore, was to be encouraged, not discouraged, primarily because it helped to prevent intellectual and cultural remoteness. Consequently, if forced to choose, it was far better to have two languages than merely a country.

There are obvious tensions, though, inherent in the position that Hazlitt adopts. He suggests that linguistic annexation is even more potent than geographical annexation. In other words, imposing international linguistic homogeneity

26 Anon, review of Delille’s *Malheur et La Pitié*, *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* 16.66 (December 1803), 500.

27 *The Anti-Jacobin Review* 27 (June–September 1807), 146.

accrues greater political gains than the laborious process of conquering nations and acquiring territory through warfare. Consequently, considerable cultural advantages follow from enforcing linguistic subservience upon other nation-states, even if they retain their sovereignty. However, the potential advantages for the dominant culture are undercut by the fact that linguistic imperialism prevents the acquisition both of knowledge and liberality. This juxtaposition of concerns has a number of troublesome aspects. For example, Hazlitt's summary suggests that speakers of the dominant language risk cultural impoverishment, while speakers of the dominated languages potentially benefit from their subservient position, since they profit from being forced to acquire a secure understanding of a foreign language. This is a profoundly uncomfortable conclusion, especially given current anxieties about the nature of cultural imperialism, national identity, and colonial power hierarchies. As Janina Brutt-Griffler has noted, many recent theorists have assumed that 'to have *political* control is to have *linguistic* control', and it is helpful to situate Hazlitt's thinking in the context of recent critical discussions concerning such matters.²⁸ Robert Phillipson, for instance, has outlined a controversial framework for assessing the impact of linguistic domination.²⁹ With reference to the status of English in the modern world, he has claimed that dominance 'is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages.'³⁰ In a more recent analysis, he puts it as follows:

Linguistic imperialism entails unequal exchange and unequal communicative rights between people or groups defined in terms of their competence in specific languages, with unequal benefits as a result, in a system that legitimizes and naturalizes such exploitation. Linguistic imperialism was manifestly a feature of the way nation-states privileged one language, and often sought actively to eradicate others, forcing their speakers to shift to the dominant language.³¹

In contemporary research, these issues have mainly been addressed in relation to English as the dominant international language of the modern world (particularly with reference to colonial expansion), but the same analytical frameworks can equally be applied to French in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is Phillipson's acknowledgement that dominated cultures can garner 'benefits' (even if unequal ones) as a result of the enforced acquisition of linguistic knowledge that recalls Hazlitt's observation that learning other languages (presumably including

28 Janina Brutt-Griffler, *Word English: A Study of its Development* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Press, 2002), viii.

29 For instance, see Robert Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), *English-only Europe?* (London: Routledge, 2003), and *Linguistic Imperialism Continued* (London: Routledge, 2009).

30 Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*, 47.

31 Robert Phillipson, 'Language Policy and Linguistic Imperialism' in *An Introduction to Language Policy: Theory and Practice*, ed. Thomas Ricento (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 348–9.

dominant ones) can engender an advantageous pluralism. The implication of this claim requires careful positioning in the context of Hazlitt's political writings more generally. At times, he was unambiguously adamant that tyranny and oppression were abhorrent, stating bluntly that '[t]he love of liberty consists in the hatred of tyrants,' while at other times, he fervently eulogized Napoleon because '[h]e put his foot upon the neck of kings' (vii, 151, 11). As Simon Bainbridge has expertly demonstrated, Hazlitt's championing of the French leader is characterized by an 'underlying paradox':³² his idolization of Napoleon's assault upon Legitimacy partially conflicts with his own critique of tyrannical power. Revealingly, similar paradoxes destabilize his remarks concerning linguistic imperialism – and this is an important aspect of his political philosophy that merits more searching scrutiny than it has so far received.

Patriotism and cosmopolitanism

At this point it is worth returning to the passage that Hazlitt included in both 'Illustrations of Vetus (Concluded)' and 'On Patriotism – A Fragment'. The key sentences quoted earlier actually appeared in a footnote, and they should now be reinserted into their full context:

It was said by an acute observer, and eloquent writer that the love of mankind was nothing but the love of justice: the same might be said, with considerable truth, of the love of our country. It is little more than another name for the love of liberty, of independence, of peace, and social happiness. We do not say, that other indirect and collateral circumstances do not go to the superstructure of this sentiment, (as language,¹ literature, manners, national customs) but this is the broad and firm basis. All other patriotism, not founded on, or not consistent with truth, justice, and humanity, is a painted sepulchre, fair without, but full of ravening and all uncleanness within.

1. He who speaks two languages has no country. The French, when they made their language the common language of Europe, gained more than by all their subsequent conquests. (iv, 68; vii, 68)

The 'acute observer, and eloquent writer' was of course Rousseau, and Hazlitt is here alluding to, and adapting, an idea expressed in Book 4 of *Émile* (1762).³³ In so doing, he intentionally renders indistinct the division that separates philanthropy and patriotism, suggesting that they are both simply different manifestations of the more general love of liberty. Elsewhere in 'On Patriotism – A Fragment', he states that '[o]ur country is a complex, abstract existence, recognized only by the

32 Bainbridge, *Napoleon and English Romanticism*, 197.

33 'L'amour du genre humain n'est autre chose en nous que l'amour de la justice' ('the love of mankind is nothing else in us but the love of justice') – Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, ou de l'éducation* (1762; Paris: Garnier Frères, 1961), 303. Hazlitt was clearly impressed by this aphorism, since he had quoted it (in French) eight years earlier in *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (i, 17).

understanding. It is an immense riddle, containing numberless modifications of reason and prejudice, of thought and passion' (iv, 67), and it is the abstract nature of the concept that creates difficulties. Indeed, Hazlitt's discussion bears striking resemblances to Dugald Stewart's essay 'Of Patriotism' which first appeared in *The Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers* (1828) and which was reprinted in his posthumous *Works* of 1829.³⁴ Specifically, Stewart identified two distinct kinds of patriotism: 'instinctive' and 'rational'. The former arises as a result of 'the *imagination* and the *association of ideas*', while the latter is the result of logical argument and a sense of duty.³⁵ Anticipating Stewart's more explicit distinction, Hazlitt is clearly advocating a form of rational patriotism which must be 'the creature of reason and reflection, rather than the offspring of physical or local attachment' (iv, 67). Indeed, as James Mulvihill has aptly noted, Hazlitt 'describes nationhood in essentially epistemological terms, noting that the modern state emerges not from "physical and local attachment" but from reflection.'³⁶ In this context, it is significant that Duncan Wu has attributed to Hazlitt a *Morning Chronicle* article, which appeared on 21 December 1813 and which gives a summary of James Mackintosh's maiden speech in the House of Commons. In this speech, Mackintosh contrasts 'instinctive patriotism' with 'moral patriotism', describing the latter as 'a love for a country because it is a country which deserves to be loved; an attachment to a government because it is a government which deserves attachment.'³⁷ Clearly, Hazlitt was brooding deeply about the different types of patriotism in the months before and after the Battle of Leipzig (1813). Nonetheless, despite his consistent advocacy of rational patriotism, it is still disconcerting that he chose to describe 'language, literature, manners, and 'national customs' as being merely 'collateral circumstances' which are not part of the 'basis' of patriotism. This view is especially noteworthy since (as discussed above) he was adamant that acquiring a new language effectually engenders liberality. Seemingly, while delineating a version of patriotism which could accommodate the social and political predilections of his fellow sour Jacobins, he found himself trapped in a (quasi)-paradoxical position.³⁸ Following Rousseau, he argued that the love of one's country is simply a particular manifestation of a broader concern for liberty, justice, independence, peace, and happiness; therefore he was obliged to abstract away from restricting national particulars such as language, literature,

34 In recent years, many of the connections that relate Hazlitt's work to that of the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers has been explored in some detail. In particular, see Tomalin, *Romanticism and Linguistic Theory*, Chapter 4, and 'This Go-Cart of the Understanding': Contextualizing Hazlitt's Criticisms of Logic', *The Hazlitt Review* 3 (2010), 39–54.

35 Dugald Stewart, *The Works of Dugald Stewart*, 7 vols (Cambridge: Hilliard and Brown, 1829), V, 68.

36 James Mulvihill, 'Hazlitt and the Idea of Identity', in *Metaphysical Hazlitt: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. U. Natarajan, T. Paulin, and D. Wu (London: Routledge, 2005), 34.

37 Wu, *New Writings*, I, 110.

38 Writing in *Blackwood's Magazine* under the pseudonym 'Z', John Gibson Lockhart had referred to Leigh Hunt's patriotism as being 'a crude, vague, ineffectual, and sour Jacobinism' – John Gibson Lockhart, 'On the Cockney School of Poetry', *Blackwood's Magazine* 2. 7 (October 1817), 39.

manners, customs, and the like. Such things cannot be included as part of the core. The ‘broad and firm basis’ of patriotism must be above and beyond such localized specificities, otherwise patriotism is nothing other than narrow-minded parochialism. So far so good. However, Hazlitt simultaneously advocated a form of linguistic relativism in which natural languages offered distinct and contrasting worldviews, thereby helping to undermine (and perhaps even fully eradicate) the kind of bigoted jingoism that prevented the development of truly patriotic sensibilities. Specifically, the (quasi)-paradox is that linguistic considerations, and cultural concerns more generally, were simultaneously located at the periphery *and* at the core of Hazlitt’s reworked notion of patriotism. In some respects, in his political philosophy, foreign languages can be viewed as a Derridean *supplément* to his notion of patriotism: they are non-essential essentials which are simultaneously both extraneous and indispensable.³⁹ Inevitably, he battled to reconcile these potentially conflicting stances.

It is illuminating to relate Hazlitt’s arguments concerning ‘the love of our country’ to contemporaneous attempts by radicals and reactionaries alike to construct revised notions of patriotism in the early nineteenth century. The gradual shift from a worldview in which patriotism existed in a state of ‘symbiosis with dissidence’, to one in which it became equated with loyalism has been insightfully discussed over the years in classic studies by Linda Colley and Hugh Cunningham, as well as in more recent work by Philip Harling, Harriet Guest, Jennifer Mori, and Kathryn Chittick, to name but a few.⁴⁰ Although it is well known, Cunningham’s frank assessment of the complexity of the situation is worth quoting at length:

The patriotism of the war years was not a unanimous declaration of national unity. On the contrary, while the war made it possible for patriotism to be reclaimed in part from the radicals, at the same time it made it necessary for everyone to declare his or her patriotism – but not necessarily the same patriotism. The patriotism of loyalists was set against that of the radicals, the patriotism of evangelicals against that of prizefighters. [...] Patriotism was a political prize much fought over in the war years, and while in the circumstances of war, or at least of invasion threat, it became more associated

39 See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1967; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 144ff.

40 A classic collection of essays on patriotism can be found in Raphael Samuel (ed.), *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity, Volume 1: History and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989). In particular, see Linda Colley’s ‘Radical Patriotism in Eighteenth-Century England’ (169–87) and Hugh Cunningham’s ‘The Language of Patriotism’ (57–89). Other important writings on patriotism include Philip Harling’s ‘Leigh Hunt and the Language of Patriotism’, *The English Historical Review* 111.444 (1996), 1159–81, Harriet Guest’s *Small Change: Women Learning and Patriotism 1750–1810* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), Jennifer Mori’s ‘Languages of Loyalism: Patriotism, Nationhood, and the State in the 1790s’, *English Historical Review* 118.475 (2003), 33–58, Linda Colley’s *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837*, revised edition (London: Yale University Press, 2009), and Kathryn Chittick’s *The Language of Whiggism: Liberty and Patriotism, 1802–1830* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010).

with loyalty to government, it never lost its accompanying rhetoric of liberty, nor did radicals and others cease to invoke it in pursuit of their own ends.⁴¹

While prominent Tory politicians and intellectuals such as George Canning, John Hookham Frere, George Ellis, William Gifford, Hannah More, and William Jones were seeking, in different ways, to appropriate the language of patriotism which the eighteenth-century radical groups had partially discarded in the 1790s, a new generation of reformers sought to present the love of one's country in such a way that it could embody more than merely a crudely simplistic form of xenophobic jingoism.⁴² Some stressed repeatedly that patriotism of the latter kind was inherently pernicious. An anonymous 1824 essay in *The European Magazine, and London Review* made the point succinctly:

That an excess of patriotism tends to break the moral harmony that should exist among all nations, needs not to be proved by argument, because it is matter of fact. Experience shews us, that it creates a spirit of opposition, animosity, and prejudice against the people of every nation whose interests are opposed to our own; while it makes us look upon ourselves with that self-complacency which arises from a belief that we possess virtues denied to other nations. It creates a selfishness that prevents us from seeing their good qualities; and though we may be willing to acknowledge that many of the foreigners with whom we are acquainted are good and honest men, yet we cannot divest ourselves of a certain feeling, that we are superior to them in every respect.⁴³

As a direct result of these sorts of anxieties, a central concern in the revisionist projects undertaken by various groups of radicals during the 1810s and 1820s was to devise a form of patriotism which could nonetheless readily accommodate trans-cultural sympathies. Such attempts were sometimes referred to as being exercises in 'universal patriotism'.⁴⁴ Inevitably, all such manoeuvres produced predictable tensions between the opposing tendencies of cosmopolitanism and nationalism. In Anthony Page's words, 'British radicals became hamstrung in their appeals to

41 Hugh Cunningham, 'The Language of Patriotism', 65–6.

42 For instance, see Hannah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts* (London: John Marshall, 1795–7), William Jones's *A Letter to John Bull Esq.* (London: Norman and Carpenter, 1793), and George Canning's early writings for *The Anti-Jacobin Review* (e.g., his poem 'The New Morality' which appeared in the edition from July 1798). Frere, Ellis, Canning, and Gifford were all involved in the establishment of *The Anti-Jacobin Review* and stated bluntly that '[w]e avow ourselves to be *partial* to the COUNTRY in which we live, notwithstanding the daily panegyrics which we read and hear on the superior virtues and endowments of its rival and hostile neighbours' ('The Prospectus' from *The Anti-Jacobin Review* 1 [November 1797], fourth ed. revised and corrected [London, 1799], 4).

43 'Patriotism no Virtue' in *The European Magazine, and London Review* (August 1824), 116.

44 For instance, see David Erdman, 'The Dawn of Universal Patriotism: William Wordsworth among the British in Revolutionary France' in *The Age of William Wordsworth: Critical Essays on the Romantic Tradition*, ed. K. Johnston and G. Ruoff (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 3–20.

patriotism by their association with French and cosmopolitan republican ideals.⁴⁵ In recent years, the different kinds of cosmopolitanism (e.g., political, cultural, commercialist, patrician, republican) which flourished during the Romantic period have started to be examined in much greater detail. In particular, Jon Klancher has described what he refers to as 'enlightened cosmopolitanism', defining the 'ethos and practice' of this specific variety as being

[...] city-centered and globe traveling, yet intimately sociable and skilled in arts of conversation; universalizing and often philosophically skeptical; tolerant of cultural and religious differences, yet finely discriminating in matters of taste; oriented to particular markets of publication but writing in broad and unspecialized prose; bowing to no king, yet always well-connected, prizing association over division.⁴⁶

The oxymoronic contrasts presented here are striking: this kind of cosmopolitanism is urban yet universal, accepting yet discriminating, beyond the range of a single monarchical order yet fully integrated within prestigious and influential social networks – and so on. These opposing tendencies and sympathies meant that a patriot with a propensity for sour Jacobinism had to tread with great care, and Hazlitt recognized the dangers. Since the semantic connotations of patriotism and loyalism had begun to merge in the years after 1790, it was easy for critics to query his own status as a patriot, especially since he willingly goaded the Tory press concerning such matters.⁴⁷ In 1815 he reviewed a translation of August Schlegel's *Über dramatische Kunst und Literatur*; his article contained an extended analysis of national traits, and he emphasized the paradoxical tendencies of the French:

Extremes meet. This is the only way of accounting for that enigma, the French character [...] They are the gayest of the gay, and the gravest of the grave. Their very faces pass at once from an expression of the most lively animation, when they are in conversation or in action, to a melancholy blank. They are the lightest and most volatile, and, at the same time, the most plodding, mechanical, and laborious people in Europe (xvi, 88).

In such passages, Hazlitt was appealing to prevailing convictions concerning language and national character. In his 1784 article 'L'Universalité de la langue française', for instance, Antoine de Rivarol had argued influentially that the French language was characterized by a distinctive *légèreté* which facilitated elegance and

45 Anthony Page, *John Jebb and the Enlightenment Origins of British Radicalism* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 213.

46 Jon Klancher, 'Discriminations, or Romantic Cosmopolitanisms in London' in *Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene of British Culture, 1780–1840*, ed. James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 66.

47 These linguistic shifts are discussed in Jennifer Mori's 'Languages of Loyalism: Patriotism, Nationhood, and the State in the 1790s.'

sociability in polite conversation.⁴⁸ Such arguments had become commonplace in France by the 1780s, and, as David Bell has emphasized, '[s]ociability, *légèreté*, and politeness were all closely linked to the concept of "civilization", which took shape in the mid eighteenth century and depended on a vision of historical progress and cosmopolitan exchange between civilized people.'⁴⁹ Hazlitt was familiar with these preoccupations. As Seamus Deane noted many years ago, he was able 'to take the stereotyped notion of French volatility, instability, and so forth and convert it into an aesthetic dominated by directly opposite terms'⁵⁰ – and the above extract exemplifies this procedure well. However, there was nothing here to rile his enemies since he was not rejecting prevailing anti-Gallic sentiments. The problems arose, though, when Hazlitt subsequently wrote a related piece which offered a similarly probing and dismissive assessment of the *English* character. His essay was pointedly entitled 'On the Character of John Bull' and it was an hilariously brutal assault on indigenous national traits:

If a Frenchman is pleased with every thing, John Bull is pleased with nothing, and that is a fault. He is, to be sure, fond of having his own way, till you let him have it. He is a very headstrong animal, who mistakes the spirit of contradiction for the love of independence, and proves himself to be in the right by the obstinacy with which he stickles for the wrong. You cannot put him so much out of his way, as by agreeing with him. [...] An idiot in a country town, a Presbyterian parson, a dog with a cannister tied to his tail, a bull-bait, or a fox-hunt, are irresistible attractions to him. The Pope was formerly his great aversion, and latterly, a cap of liberty is a thing he cannot abide. [...] He will have it that he is a great patriot, for he hates all other countries (iv, 99).

Written with a respectful awareness of John Arbuthnot's *The History of John Bull* (1712), this relentlessly discerning list of characteristics was clearly designed to provoke recriminations, and the barbed assertion that the alleged patriotism of the British was little more than isolationist xenophobia was a potent one in the 1810s. Hazlitt's essay was included in *The Round Table* (1817), and when that collection was reviewed, his apparent lack of patriotic fervour prompted inevitable reprisals. The *Quarterly Review* was unequivocal:

[...] he abuses the English: he abuses the Irish: he abuses the Scots. [...] He appears to feel all the warmth of a private quarrel against whole nations; against none so strongly as his own. Of poor John Bull his mildest expressions

48 Antoine de Rivarol, 'L'Universalité de la langue française' in *De l'universalité européenne de la langue française*, ed. Pierre Pénisson (1784; Paris: Libraire Arthème Fayard, 1995). For detailed discussions of French *légèreté*, see David A. Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism 1680–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), Chapter 5, and Matthew Lauzon, *Signs of Light: French and British Theories of Linguistic Communication, 1648–1789* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2010), Chapter 5.

49 Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France*, 149.

50 Deane, *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England*, 138.

are that 'he is silent because he has nothing to say, and looks stupid because he is so'.⁵¹

Predictably, Hazlitt was vilified as a traitor to his own nation, and his fiercest critics castigated him publically in the pages of the periodical press, denouncing his disloyalty. Ironically, of course, it was precisely this erroneous conflation of mindless jingoism with rational patriotism that was itself (as far as Hazlitt was concerned) inherently and irredeemably unpatriotic. He argued consistently that the seductively reductivist expedient of hating all other countries, while mindlessly loving one's own, was insufficient to establish anyone's credentials as a true patriot. On the contrary, he attempted to outline a form of patriotism which was compatible with a cosmopolitan worldview and which therefore permitted transcultural sympathies. Crucially, as described above, his reflections upon the international status of the French language (in particular) were a central component of his outward-looking socio-political theorizing. When viewed in this way, it becomes clear that his abiding linguistic interests were inextricably intertwined with his political philosophy and, given this, it is unfortunate that the tendency in the recent critical literature has been to study these aspects of his thought largely in isolation from each other. In fact, as this article has attempted to show, it is impossible to explore the complex implications of Hazlitt's thinking about such important topics as patriotism and cosmopolitanism, without also reflecting deeply upon his writings about languages and linguistic theory – and his intricate response to the practical and symbolical connotations of the French language provide a convenient starting point for an assessment of this kind.

Conclusion

In 1988 Seamus Deane observed that 'Hazlitt's attitude toward France is the most pronounced version of his attitude toward his age and the spirit which he perceived to be its informing principle'.⁵² This observation is as pertinent today as it was over twenty years ago. As this article has shown, in order to appreciate fully Hazlitt's 'attitude towards France', it is essential to reflect upon his attitude towards the French language, and such an exploration is indeed timely. In recent years, the literary, political, and pedagogical implications of his convictions concerning the English language have started to receive the attention they deserve, and such topics as his enthusiastic advocacy of 'the familiar style' and his purposeful mixing of different linguistic registers have been situated in their broader literary and cultural contexts.⁵³ By contrast, though, his assessments of other European languages have so far remained in a penumbra of critical neglect. As far as the French language is concerned, despite his occasional protestations to the contrary,

51 'Hazlitt's *Round Table*', *The Quarterly Review*, 12.33 (April–July 1817), 158.

52 Deane, *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England*, 131.

53 These matters are discussed at length in Tomalin, *Romanticism and Linguistic Theory*. For a discussion specifically of his advocacy of the 'familiar style', see Chapter 4.

his reading knowledge was undoubtedly good, and he certainly made extensive use of these linguistic skills in his journalism, not infrequently translating from French source material. In addition, he meditated deeply upon the advantages and disadvantages of the cultural annexation that occurs when one nation successfully imposes its language upon others, and he consistently emphasized that the learning of other languages beneficially encourages greater liberality, thereby helping to eradicate stunted jingoism. Although his remarks about such matters are occasionally ambiguous, it is apparent that he was fully engaged in the ongoing debates which raged throughout the 1810s and 1820s (and especially after Waterloo) concerning the nature of British patriotism, and, like many of his radical peers, he sought to identify a rational form of nationalism which rose above tawdry parochial attachments and which could be reconciled with more modern cosmopolitan ideals.

When considered in this broader political context, it is astonishing that Hazlitt's aphorism '[h]e who speaks two languages has no country' (iv, 68; vii, 68) could ever have been interpreted as a dire warning concerning the dangers of multilingualism and internationalism. On the contrary, far from believing that polyglottism *undermined* national identity, he argued consistently and persuasively for a greater and more extensive familiarity with modern European languages. Therefore, rather than simply recommending a form of linguistic isolationism and advocating 'a standard language as a unifying principle for the British Nation,'⁵⁴ Hazlitt's own variety of 'enlightened cosmopolitanism' (to use Klaner's phrase) prompted him to argue instead for much greater diversity and greater (linguistic) pluralism – and if this meant that a bilingual citizen had 'no country' (in a strictly parsimonious and insular sense), then so much the better. This fascinating aspect of Hazlitt's writings about European languages and cultures merits far more extensive consideration than it has received to date, and the present article has merely attempted to signal the presence of several important and interconnected themes which deserve sustained critical reassessment.

DOWNING COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

54 Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism*, 108.

HAZLITT, MODERNITY, AND THE WORKINGS OF SPIRIT

John Whale

I

Recent scholarship, critical activity, and events have combined to create a context in which it is perhaps no longer possible to refer to Hazlitt as England's 'missing critic.'¹ The subject of this article is a response to the consequences of making Hazlitt more familiar to us. Very simply put, I wonder if the success of making Hazlitt our contemporary runs the risk of losing something of his particularity, even something of his historical strangeness. In recent years Hazlitt's claim to be our contemporary has also rested, somewhat problematically given its subject, on *Liber Amoris*. As Jon Cook puts it in *Hazlitt in Love*, 'Few books are more telling about the nature of a distinctly modern solitude, a craving of intimacy that cannot be satisfied.'² Side by side with this seemingly familiar agony of selfhood, however, is an unpalatable and now morally disturbing gender politics. But Cook's sense of a recognizable psychology accompanied by a rational, critical self-consciousness captures the attraction of the 'recovered' Hazlitt which has emerged in recent years.

The question of Hazlitt's modernity has also been provocatively placed at the forefront of our critical thinking by the two recent biographies of A. C. Grayling and Duncan Wu. In their different ways both books champion their subject's secular critical intelligence as a sign of his modernity. Grayling gives this claim a more philosophical turn by locating it in a long-standing tradition of sceptical thinking. If Grayling presents us with Hazlitt the philosopher, Wu is concerned to define him in the more pragmatic and mixed terms of the literary critic, but is no less celebratory in attributing to him the kind of unsystematic, anti-theoretical, and richly organic thinking which, he suggests, best characterizes our current aesthetic.³

1 'William Hazlitt: England's Missing Critic?' has been the title accompanying the Hazlitt Day-School organized and originated by Tom Paulin, Uttara Natarajan, and Duncan Wu in 2000. A version of this essay was delivered to the 2010 Day-School in Hertford College, Oxford. This annual event is affiliated to the Hazlitt Society which was founded in 2003.

2 Jon Cook, *Hazlitt in Love: A Fatal Attachment* (London: Short Books, 2007), 197.

3 Duncan Wu, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xiii-xiv.

Grayling has championed Hazlitt not only as an essayist but as a fierce defender of truth and, in particular, as a significant contributor to British philosophy with his ‘metaphysical discovery’, his argument in *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805) that our motivation is not necessarily selfish – what Hazlitt himself refers to in the work’s subtitle as the ‘natural disinterestedness of the human mind’.⁴ For Grayling, Hazlitt is ‘a great example of a democrat, a liberal, and a humanist [...] What he has to say of general purport on the rights and liberties of mankind remain wholly and unequivocally valid to this day.’⁵ This understandable assertion of Hazlitt’s enduring qualities, however, leads him on to a more problematic judgement that: ‘[h]e was trebly an alien in his own land and time: because of his inexorable personality, because he was of Dissenting stock, and because he was a radical in politics.’⁶ Grayling’s eagerness to locate Hazlitt in his Dissenting culture means that he properly acknowledges the power of religious inheritance, but a corollary of bringing Hazlitt so firmly into the present is to suggest that he is ‘an alien in his own time.’⁷ A key part of Hazlitt’s modernity for Grayling, as it is for a number of critics, is his supposed renunciation of religious belief based on his refusal to take up the ministry after his training at New College Hackney; and this is supported by the contemporary testimony of Henry Crabb Robinson who described him as ‘one of the first students who left that college an avowed infidel.’⁸ Grayling confidently asserts that: ‘Politics, theatre, and especially philosophy, between them killed the last vestiges of religious faith in Hazlitt.’⁹ Even more categorically he concludes: ‘Hazlitt was in no way a religious man – as a precocious boy he was given to sententious pronouncements of a religious and moral sort, but as soon as he began to think seriously he turned agnostic – but the fiercely autonomous and intellectually questioning Dissenter upbringing he received explains much about his independence of mind and adherence to principle.’¹⁰ There is a danger of over-statement in the first part of this sentence which is significantly held back by the second ‘but’. The opening statement on the extremity of Hazlitt’s lack of religious belief here is curiously haunted by the last one. Grayling’s proposition exhibits in miniature the more general proposition of

4 The full subtitle reads: ‘An Argument in Defence of the Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind’. See *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1930-4), I, 1. All subsequent quotations from Hazlitt are taken from this edition, and are referenced, by volume and page, in the main text of the article. For a consideration of the importance of this aspect of Hazlitt’s thinking see A. C. Grayling, *The Quarrel of the Age: The Life and Times of William Hazlitt* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2000), 362–5.

5 A. C. Grayling, *The Quarrel of the Age*, 348.

6 *Ibid.*, 4.

7 *Ibid.*, 4.

8 *Ibid.*, 41.

9 *Ibid.*, 40.

10 *Ibid.*, 5.

this article: the recalcitrant presence of religious sentiment and a residual sense of the sacred in Hazlitt's writing.¹¹

As its title suggests, Duncan Wu's recent biography, *William Hazlitt: the First Modern Man* (2008), goes much further than Grayling in presenting a case for Hazlitt's symptomatic modernity and in confidently asserting his secular identity. 'Hazlitt's modernity depends partly on his grasp of psychology', he argues. For Wu, 'Hazlitt is the father of modern literary criticism' and with him 'the eighteenth century had given way to the nineteenth.'¹² This translation of Hazlitt into modernity also removes him from his own time: 'Yet Hazlitt was no "radical", at least in any sense his contemporaries would have understood; he was, rather, an independent freethinker, intolerant of cant, hypocrisy, and lies.'¹³ And for both Wu and Grayling, there is a sense that this recognizably modern man is, one might say, 'produced' by the most significant moment of his life, which is delivered by Wu in a forthright contemporary idiom:

By June 1795, shortly after his seventeenth birthday, William knew he no longer believed in God and left Hackney 'an avowed infidel'. This was the most catastrophic event of his life and would have an effect on everything that followed [...] Now he would deliver to his loving parents the mother of all disappointments; not only was he to withdraw from his studies, but he rejected their religion.¹⁴

In comparison with this picture of a thorough-going renunciation, Tom Paulin's suggestion, in *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style* (1998), that Hazlitt 'replaces Christian redemption with the spirit of criticism' and, at moments of crisis, identifies with Unitarian values and Dissenting Protestantism, allows for a continuation of the contest.¹⁵ Being an 'avowed infidel', as Crabb Robinson put it, might involve a more complex ongoing relationship with religion. The eruptions of a residual spirituality which Paulin points to in Hazlitt's work need not necessarily be seen as a relapsing back into a rejected belief system or as the last vestiges of a lost Christian inheritance. Rather, they might be viewed as heralding a new formation and redefinition of the spirit, one that helpfully and

11 Popular online accounts of Hazlitt refer to his 'humanism' as if it can be easily assumed. See, for example, the 'Summary' of Hazlitt in 'Book Rags' which refers to his relationship to religious faith as follows: 'Hazlitt kept faith politically with his Unitarian heritage, but at an early age revolted against his father's rationalistic theology'; and which ends its biographical portrait with the claim that '[i]n the England of 1830, when Hazlitt died impoverished in London, a humanism so darkly paradoxical found little favor': <http://www.bookrags.com/research/hazlitt-william-17781830-eoph/> Wikipedia's current entry for Hazlitt also straightforwardly claims that he is remembered for his 'humanistic essays': http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Hazlitt

12 Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 238.

13 *Ibid.*, 266.

14 *Ibid.*, 60–1.

15 Tom Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style* (London: Faber, 1998), 178.

representatively charts a significant migration from the religious to the secular within early nineteenth-century literary culture. It might suggest that in Hazlitt's writings we can witness something of that larger transition actually taking place. They could be read equally as the afterlife of the metaphysical spirit of Dissent or as Dissent's contribution to the formation of a new subjectivity of the enquiring spirit founded on critique.¹⁶

II

Hazlitt's ongoing commitment to a sense of the sacred is evident in his need as a young metaphysician to prove that our nature is at root unselfish. Rather than arguing that his 1805 *Essay* is simply an achievement of philosophy, itself a disinterested act of the rational understanding, one might suggest that it depends on a deep-seated desire to free human nature from the inherent moral taint of selfishness.¹⁷ In a similar way, one might explore his *Reply to Malthus's Essay on Population*, a series of letters and extracts gathered in book form and published anonymously in 1807, to find an equally deep-seated and perhaps over-determined response to social selfishness manifest in the sexual instinct. Malthus's argument on population triggers a depth of response in Hazlitt which stems from his perception of it as an offence against humanity. Clearly, there is an immediate, practical, political, and social context in play here: Hazlitt begins his assault by exposing the degree to which Malthus's *Essay* will have dire material consequences for the poor. A key aspect of his critique is his exposure of the effects of aristocratic vice misapplied and hypocritically projected onto the lower orders. Beyond this immediate ideological terrain, Hazlitt's response anticipates the level of disgust and cultural shock generated half a century later by the work of Charles Darwin.

For Hazlitt, Malthus's argument represents a perverse inversion of the order of things: 'It seemed, on the first publication of the *Essay on Population*, as if the whole world was going to be turned topsy-turvy, all our ideas of moral good and evil were in a manner confounded. We scarcely knew whether we stood on our head or our heels' (i, 192). And this inversion of a natural order is readily applied by Hazlitt to Malthus's own psychology. He is described as a 'sentimental nightman', someone who seeks out the disgusting side of things: 'in proportion as the end is low, and the means base, he acquires confidence [...] What is grand and

16 This article is based on a lecture entitled 'Hazlitt and the Sacred' given at the Hazlitt Day-School in 2010. It took its inspiration from Kevin Gilmartin's lecture on 'Hazlitt and the Memory of Radical Culture', which was delivered at the International Conference of the British Association for Romantic Studies at the University of Roehampton in 2009. Gilmartin offered an impressive account of the way in which the previous generation of radical Dissent operates within the trenchant critique of Hazlitt's thinking and writing, central to which is his respect for the religiously-founded culture of his father and his own education.

17 See John Whale, 'Hazlitt and the Selfishness of Passion' in *Metaphysical Hazlitt: Bicentenary Essays* (London: Routledge, 2005), ed. U. Natarajan, T. Paulin, and D. Wu, 56–67. See also Tom Paulin's suggestion that 'the whole weight of Unitarian culture, as well as Francis Hutcheson's philosophy [...] shapes this rejection of Hobbesian selfishness' (*The Day-Star of Liberty*, 35).

elevated, seems to be his aversion' (i, 345). Hazlitt describes him in apocalyptic terms as a version of Satan: 'His name hangs suspended over the heads of the poor *in terrorem*, like some baleful meteor' (i, 181). Malthus's greatest offence, however, is in Hazlitt's eyes at least, against our very nature. According to the logic of the *Essay*, he argues, 'man is to be degraded to the condition of the brutes' (i, 228). The *Essay on Population* threatens Hazlitt's belief in the progress of civilization and in the moral efficacy of knowledge: 'However great or however small our attainments in arts or science, or in all the other virtues might be, in this respect we should still be the same, that is, we should be exactly in the condition of the brutes, entirely governed by impulse, over which we should have neither check nor control' (i, 211–212). At times Hazlitt comes quite close to Edmund Burke when he focuses on the degree to which Malthus exposes our naked shivering natures, threatening like a revolutionary enthusiast or projector to do away at once with the accumulations of civilization, culture, and science. But Malthus's greatest crime is his mis-creation of a new species of evil. This new version of the 'great devil, the untamed Beelzebub' (i, 204) of population is represented by Hazlitt almost as if it is visiting a second Fall upon human kind, a new kind of aboriginal guilt: 'He would pass an act of bastardy on every mother's son of us; and prove that we come into the world without a proper license (from him) merely to gratify the coarse, selfish, immoral propensities of our parents' (i, 362).

The facility with which Hazlitt characterizes Malthus as a false prophet should not surprise us, especially since his assault on his opponent can easily be read as an attack on the danger of mixing religion and politics. At one point Hazlitt is indeed quite explicit about this other slippery duplicity, which the Parson exposes alongside his more deep-seated hypocrisy of rank: 'Mr Malthus here appears in the double character of a politician and a divine [...] I must say, I do not like to see a philosopher in a cassock. [...] When he is pressed hard, or sees his arguments in danger of being cut off, he puts them into the false belly of theology. It is like hunting an otter: you do not know where to have him' (i, 342).

The clean separation between philosophy and religion which Hazlitt implies at this point is not something that characterizes the mixed mode of his own *Reply*. When, early on in the text, he considers Samuel Whitbread – a politician then preparing a new Poor Bill in the context of Malthus's argument – Hazlitt is quite happy to muster his own knowledge of Christianity for polemical and moral effect: 'The author of our religion, when he came to save the world, took our nature upon him, and became as one of us: it is not likely that any one should ever prove the *saviour* of the poor, who has not common feelings with them, and who does not know their weaknesses and wants' (i, 186). Hazlitt makes his point from the outside, but working on the assumption of our shared revelation and salvation.

What I wish to draw attention to in the *Reply to Malthus*, then, is not any clear-cut declaration, or textual evidence, to prove the extent – or even the presence – of Hazlitt's religious faith, but the text's complex imbrication of the language and culture of religion. In some of the instances just cited there is a polemical convenience and even a tactical pragmatism in Hazlitt's conjuring of Christian theology and imagery. In this respect, his *Reply* to Malthus is typical of many of

his essays as they inhabit the rhetoric of religion. More significantly, the space of Hazlitt's critique – indeed its very motive force – can be seen to occupy the interstices of religious debate. Rational critique here emerges alongside religious polemic.

In my next example, the celebrated essay, 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', there is a similar set of configurations to those we have just examined, including a mixing together not just of the philosopher and the preacher, but of the poet, philosopher, and preacher. Hazlitt's strong attachment to the object of his new idolatry – the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge – is here articulated precisely through this combination of the divine and the secular coexisting within an individual.

III

This most famous of Hazlitt's essays might be seen as providing evidence of his initiation into the new religion of the aesthetic, in particular the cult of poetry represented by the admirers of the authors of *Lyrical Ballads*. Certainly, his encounter with Coleridge in Shropshire has all the trappings of a moment of conversion.¹⁸ The scene enacts a complex substitution in which Hazlitt replaces his minister father with his new hero, the minister-poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The essay retrospectively contains a critique of his Unitarian father and his heroes Coleridge and Wordsworth even as it asks us to re-live the precious moment of first contact with the latter. As we might expect of Hazlitt, he extends his capacity for excoriating, unstinting critique to himself. His account of his early heroes and hero-worship is strongly coloured and inflected by a pervasive sense of their fall from grace. At the heart of the essay is an account of his father that is finely struck between filial respect and melancholic regret. It conveys a sense of a life wasted in pursuit of the wrong object:

After being tossed about from congregation to congregation in the heats of the Unitarian controversy, and squabbles about the American war, he had been relegated to an obscure village, where he was to spend the last thirty years of his life, far from the only converse that he loved, the talk about disputed texts of Scripture, and the cause of civil and religious liberty. Here he passed his days, repining but resigned, in the study of the Bible and the perusal of the Commentators, – huge folios, not easily got through, one of which would outlast a winter! Why did he pore on these from morn to night (with the exception of a walk in the fields or a turn in the garden to gather broccoli-plants or kidney-beans of his own rearing, with no small degree of pride and pleasure)? – Here were 'no figures nor no fantasies' – neither poetry nor philosophy – nothing to dazzle, nothing to excite modern curiosity; but to his lack-lustre eyes there appeared within the pages of the ponderous,

18 Reggie Watters briefly identifies the attraction of Coleridge's Unitarianism to the young Hazlitt at this meeting. See his 'Coleridge the Unitarian: A talk given at Mary Street Unitarian Church, Taunton, May 29, 1998', published in *Coleridge Bulletin* n.s. 18 (Winter 2001), 25–31: <http://www.friendsofcoleridge.com/MembersOnly/CB18Reggie.htm>

unwieldy, neglected tomes, the sacred name of JEHOVAH in Hebrew capitals [...] and though the soul might slumber with an hieroglyphic veil of inscrutable mysteries drawn over it, yet it was in a slumber ill-exchanged for all the sharpened realities of sense, wit, fancy, or reason. My father's life was comparatively a dream; but it was a dream of infinity and eternity, of death, the resurrection, and a judgment to come! (xvii, 110)

This passage makes painful, poignant, and difficult reading. Hazlitt presents his father as inhabiting a kind of unfair exile or removal from the main business of life. The transaction or transfer which has taken place is seen by Hazlitt to have sold his father short and to have left him marooned in a superannuated existence distinct from modernity – here defined by its ‘curiosity’ and its ‘realities of sense, wit, fancy, or reason.’ The final sentence reasserts the force and eschatological burden of a powerful dream from what may have looked to secular eyes like a straightforward or lesser form of consciousness. Hazlitt is here moving between belief and unbelief with remarkable elasticity as he pays homage to, and at the same time critiques, his own father's religious musings.

This ambivalent portrait of Hazlitt Senior prepares the measured transactional ground for the main transformation of the essay: the young Hazlitt's first encounter with Coleridge. If ‘On My First Acquaintance with Poets’ stages a conversion, it goes out of its way to qualify it. Rather than make a straightforward substitution, it is careful not to leave the spiritual behind. Like many of Hazlitt's works, it resolutely maintains its proximity to the religious even as it marks out its own version of the self, one that we have come to identify, perhaps too easily, as a form of Romantic individualism or modern secular humanism.

Later on in the essay – on his walk from Wem to Shrewsbury to hear Coleridge preach — Hazlitt presents himself experiencing ‘a Siren's song’: ‘I was stunned, startled with it as from deep sleep’ (xvii, 107). He describes himself as ‘dumb, inarticulate, helpless, like a worm by the way-side’ before the transformative effect of Coleridge's ‘genius’ which ‘shone into my soul like the sun's rays’ (xvii, 107). At this point in Hazlitt's life, the harmonious coinciding of his spiritual, philosophical, and literary enthusiasms lies at the heart of the experience: ‘And for myself, I could not have been more delighted if I had heard the music of the spheres. Poetry and Philosophy had met together. Truth and Genius had embraced, under the eye and with the sanction of Religion. This was even beyond my hopes’ (xvii, 108).

Reinforcing this sense of a spiritual rebirth, Hazlitt describes his encounter with Coleridge the preacher-poet in the language of a conversion experience. He writes of being ‘won over to his imaginative creed’ and of ‘initiating [him]self in the mysteries of natural scenery.’ Most spectacularly, his new-found, translated experience of nature takes place on the road to Llangollen. Reading Coleridge's ‘Ode on the Departing Year’ *con amore*, Hazlitt enters into ‘the cradle of a new existence’, a moment at which his ‘spirit was baptised in the waters of Helicon!’ (xvii, 115).

For all this profession of a conversion, however, the essay is of course pervaded by its own antidote to enthusiasm and metamorphosis. Like many of Hazlitt's essays of this period, it is haunted by a melancholic sense of personal

loss and disappointment. Youthful hopes and enthusiasms are being revisited and represented with an attendant realism that is at times almost elegiac. In the unthinking passionate corporeality of youth there is an exchange of sense with thought, energy with repose:

In the outset of life (and particularly at this time I felt it so) our imagination has a body to it. We are in a state between sleeping and waking, and have indistinct but glorious glimpses of strange shapes, and there is always something to come better than what we see. As in our dreams the fullness of the blood gives warmth and reality to the coinage of the brain, so in youth our ideas are clothed, and fed, and pampered with our good spirits, we breathe thick with thoughtless happiness, the weight of future years presses on the strong pulses of the heart, and we repose with undisturbed faith in truth and good. As we advance, we exhaust our fund of enjoyment and of hope. We are no longer wrapped in *lamb's-wool* lulled in Elysium. As we taste the pleasures of life, their spirit evaporates, the sense palls; and nothing is left but the phantoms, the lifeless shadows of what *has been!* (xvii, 116-7)

While describing the phantom life of advancing age, Hazlitt still registers a lively sensation, conjuring, in exclamatory mode, those 'lifeless shadows of what has been!' The passage seems to re-articulate a reverential sense of the spiritual force to be found in a youthful union of body and mind.

Early on in the text, as if to anticipate and deflect any residual idealism, Hazlitt establishes in his reader's mind an account of the current state of his soul:

My soul has indeed remained in its original bondage, dark, obscure, with longing infinite and unsatisfied; my heart, shut up in the prison-house of this rude clay, has never found, nor will it ever find, a heart to speak to; but that my understanding also did not remain dumb and brutish, or at length found a language to express itself, I owe to Coleridge. But this is not to my purpose. (xvii, 107)

Although it is offered apologetically as an autobiographical intrusion or even digression, this statement on the fixity of his soul and the severe restriction of any new-found articulacy or capacity to speak in tongues acts as a severe check on this essay's celebration of a corporeal and youthful enthusiasm.

The difference between our sense of life and the life of spirit is the focus of Hazlitt's essay 'On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth'. Here the discrepancy between youth and age is explored, as the title suggests, in relation to the very condition of our mortality. The essay's opening gambit – 'No young man believes he shall ever die' (xvii, 189) – lies at the heart of Hazlitt's concern. This isn't so much a confident, robust humanism as a further example of a pre-Darwinian psychic shock to our status as human beings. Coping with that shock, we constitute ourselves in an act of transition. The unnerving movement from the vitality of the mind to inert matter is presented here as another potential reduction to the life of brutes. Hazlitt's dangerously over-

extended sentence illustrates in its syntactical bravura the proximity of vitality to precariousness and the inevitable end-stop of our mortality:

To see the golden sun and the azure sky, the outstretched ocean, to walk upon the green earth, and to be lord of a thousand creatures, to look down giddy precipices or over distant flowery vales, to see the world spread out under one's finger in a map, to bring the stars near, to view the smallest insects in a microscope, to read history, and witness the revolutions of empires and the succession of generations, to hear of the glory of Sidon and Tyre, of Babylon and Susa, as of a faded pageant, and to say all these were, and are now nothing, to think that we exist in such a point of time, and in such a corner of space, to be at once spectators and a part of the moving scene, to watch the return of the seasons, of spring and autumn, to hear

— 'The stockdove plain amid the forest deep
That drowsy rustles to the sighing gale,' —

to traverse desert wildernesses, to listen to the midnight choir, to visit lighted halls, or plunge into the dungeon's gloom, or sit in crowded theatres and see life itself mocked, to feel heat and cold, pleasure and pain, right and wrong, truth and falsehood, to study the works of art and refine the sense of beauty to agony, to worship fame and to dream of immortality, to read Shakespear and belong to the same species as Sir Isaac Newton; to be and to do all this, and then in a moment to be nothing; to have it all snatched from one like a juggler's ball or a phantasmagoria; there is something revolting and incredible to sense in the transition, and no wonder that, aided by youth and warm blood, and the flush of enthusiasm, the mind contrives for a long time to reject it with disdain and loathing as a monstrous and improbable fiction, like a monkey on a house-top, that is loath, amidst its fine discoveries and specious antics, to be tumbled head-long into the street, and crushed to atoms, the sport and laughter of the multitude! (xvii, 192–4)

The taxonomy of species with its own peculiar force of proximity to human nature haunts this passage in which the great secular achievements of learning and culture are compared to a monkey's antics. Hazlitt's historic-cultural rumination might have begun with a rational consideration of decay reminiscent of Volney's *Les Ruines*, but its accumulating anxiety takes it beyond the orbit of secular intellectualism. As in his view of Malthus, the disturbing revolt to sense, which his text enacts, threatens the whole point of human endeavour. The transaction of the soul depicted in his father's existence in rural Shropshire here takes on a disturbing capacity to make all human achievement vain and worthless.

Later in the same essay and with the same capacity for ruthlessly puncturing the illusion of human achievement, Hazlitt turns his attention to the mind and senses. His seemingly very modern view of the fragility of memory and the failing of the senses, which here ends in a stark reminder of our limited quotidian existence, is premised on the absence of soul:

That we should thus in a manner outlive ourselves, and dwindle imperceptibly into nothing, is not surprising, when even in our prime the strongest impressions leave so little traces of themselves behind, and the last object is driven out by the succeeding one. How little effect is produced on us at any time by the books we have read, the scenes we have witnessed, the sufferings we have gone through! Think only of the variety of feelings we experience in reading an interesting romance, or being present at a fine play – what beauty, what sublimity, what soothing, what heart-rending emotions! You would suppose these would last for ever, or at least subdue the mind to a correspondent tone and harmony – while we turn over the page, while the scene is passing before us, it seems as if nothing could ever after shake our resolution, that ‘treason domestic, foreign levy, nothing could touch us farther!’ The first splash of mud we get, on entering the street, the first pettifogging shop-keeper that cheats us out of two-pence, and the whole vanishes clean out of our remembrance, and we become the idle prey of the most petty and annoying circumstances. The mind soars by an effort to the grand and lofty: it is at home in the grovelling, the disagreeable, and the little. (xvii, 199)

In this passage, Hazlitt’s essay resolutely and entertainingly contemplates the gradual death of the self – our dwindling imperceptibly into nothing – but there is also celebration at work. Rather than its reduction to the status of a brute which was evident in the previous passage’s description of the monkey on the house-top, this time the downward movement from the soaring mind to a local littleness is registered by that powerful key phrase: ‘at home’. Being ‘at home’ or the act of coming home to ourselves is perhaps just about as reassuring and as confidently human as this supposed humanism can be. The kind of spectacular transition we have witnessed at length in the essay ‘On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth’, one that is produced out of something revolting and ‘incredible to sense’ (to the extent that the mind continues to reject it with disdain and loathing), is, I would suggest, an important feature of Hazlitt’s writing. A number of his finest essays manifest precisely this kind of transition, this drama of the mind in responsive reflex; and as they do so they inhabit and mark out Hazlitt’s particular territory of the spirit.

One of the most famous instances of the mind being brought into reflexive self-consciousness takes place in ‘The Indian Jugglers’. Here Hazlitt offers us a celebration of dexterity in the form of a perfected mechanical skill. For the first part of the essay, it seems as though we are to enjoy a pleasing alignment of sinuous prose and manual dexterity employed to eulogize human achievement. But at the point we expect this description of ‘Man’ as a ‘wonderful animal’ he suddenly presents us with a disturbing ambivalence:

Coming forward and seating himself on the ground in his white dress and tightened turban, the chief of the Indian Jugglers begins with tossing up two brass balls, which is what any of us could do, and concludes with keeping up four at the same time, which is what none of us could do to save our lives, nor

if we were to take our whole lives to do it in. Is it then a trifling power we see at work, or is it not something next to miraculous? It is the utmost stretch of human ingenuity, which nothing but the bending the faculties of body and mind to it from the tenderest infancy with incessant, ever anxious application up to manhood, can accomplish or make even a slight approach to. Man, thou art a wonderful animal, and thy ways past finding out! Thou canst do strange things, but thou turnest them to little account!

[...]

To catch four balls in succession in less than a second of time, and deliver them back so as to return with seeming consciousness to the hand again, to make them revolve round him at certain intervals, like the planets in their spheres; to make them chase one another like sparkles of fire, or shoot up like flowers or meteors, to throw them behind his back and twine them round his neck like ribbons or like serpents, to do what appears an impossibility, and to do it with all the ease, the grace, the carelessness imaginable; to laugh at, to play with the glittering mockeries; to follow them with his eye as if he could fascinate them with its lambent fire, or as if he had only to see that they kept time with the music on the stage—there is something in all this which he who does not admire may be quite sure he never really admired any thing in the whole course of his life. It is skill surmounting difficulty, and beauty triumphing over skill. It seems as if the difficulty once mastered naturally resolved itself into ease and grace, and as if to be overcome at all, it must be overcome without an effort. The smallest awkwardness or want of pliancy or self-possession would stop the whole process. It is the work of witchcraft, and yet sport for children. (viii, 77-8).

In 'The Indian Jugglers' there is a deep-seated ambivalence about both the spectacle of the juggler as an example of mechanical excellence and the category of perfection itself. Hazlitt has this physical *tour de force* collapse dramatically into a recoil of shame and self-abjection. The essayist falls into a despond of self-loathing and self-doubt about his status as a writer until, at the last, he rescues himself with a further level of self-reflection with the recognition that he can indeed capture the juggler's dexterity in his essay:

It makes me ashamed of myself. I ask what there is that I can do as well as this? Nothing. What have I been doing all my life? Have I been idle, or have I nothing to show for all my labour and pains? Or have I passed my time in pouring words like water into empty sieves, rolling a stone up a hill and then down again, trying to prove an argument in the teeth of facts, and looking for causes in the dark and not finding them? Is there no one thing in which I can challenge competition, that I can bring as an instance of exact perfection, in which others cannot find a flaw? The utmost I can pretend to is to write a description of what this fellow can do. I can write a book: so can many others who have not even learned to spell. What abortions are these Essays! What errors, what ill-pieced transitions, what crooked reasons, what lame

conclusions! How little is made out, and that little how ill! Yet they are the best I can do. (viii, 79)

There is here a 'testing of the spirit', to use Keats's term.¹⁹ To rewrite a famous phrase of Coleridge's: Hazlitt's text enacts not a 'drama of reason,'²⁰ but a drama of doubt, which involves reason, understanding, and the performance of the body and the passions. Through this drama it offers a dialectical representation of the limit of what we are: the tipping point between body and mind.

This drama is also played out in the climax to Hazlitt's most famous sporting essay, 'The Fight', where the much anticipated and deliberately delayed presentation of the contest between the two boxers – Neate and Hickman – provides a characteristic twist to the proceedings. At the moment of delivery, Hazlitt offers us a typical reflex of revulsion or disgust, a recoil which threatens the very spectacle he has been investing in. Having taken his reader through the dangerously subcultural build-up to the fight, he risks all by presenting his description of pugilism alongside a disruptively metaphysical category. This most corporeal of essays is suddenly pushed into conflict with the Christian category of hell in the form of Dante's *Divine Comedy*:

[...] to see two men smashed to the ground, smeared with gore, stunned, senseless, the breath beaten out of their bodies; and then, before you recover from the shock, to see them rise up with new strength and courage, stand steady to inflict or receive mortal offence, and rush upon each other, 'like two clouds over the Caspian' – this is the most astonishing thing of all: – this is the high and heroic state of man! From this time forward the event became more certain every round; and about the twelfth it seemed as if it must have been over. Hickman generally stood with his back to me; but in the scuffle, he had changed positions, and Neate just then made a tremendous lunge at him, and hit him full in the face. It was doubtful whether he would fall backwards or forwards; he hung suspended for a second or two, and then fell back, throwing his hands in the air, and with his face lifted up to the sky. I never saw any thing more terrific than his aspect just before he fell. All traces of life, of natural expression, were gone from him. His face was like a human skull, a death's head, spouting blood. The eyes were filled with blood, the nose streamed with blood, the mouth gaped blood. He was not like an actual man, but like a preternatural, spectral appearance, or like one of the figures in Dante's *Inferno*. [...] Ye who despise the FANCY, do something to shew as much *pluck*, or as much self-possession as this, before you assume a superiority which you have never given a single proof of by any one action in the whole course of your lives! – When the Gas-man came to himself, the first words he uttered were,

19 John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats, 1814–1821*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1958), I, 184.

20 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956–71), III, 281.

'Where am I? What is the matter!' 'Nothing is the matter, Tom – you have lost the battle, but you are the bravest man alive'. (xvii, 82-3)

This is the limit of body and spirit. If the juggler pushes mechanical skill towards perfection, here the body of the pugilist is pushed to the edge of existence so that he hovers between life and death – and at that moment of 'the high and heroic state of man' becomes a mere preternatural spectre. Thereafter, instead of self-critique Hazlitt rounds on the reader before returning again to the common humanity of the boxer as he emerges from the confusion of his knock-down. Corporeal and gory as this is, it is also an anatomy of the human spirit which is intent on measuring and defining the nature of spirit, here captured in the demotic word 'pluck'.

In the essay 'On Living to One's-Self', Hazlitt conjectures another kind of 'spirit' altogether – one that is 'pure' and merely conjectural:

What I mean by living to one's-self is living in the world, as in it, not of it: it is as if no one knew there was such a person, and you wished no one to know it: it is to be a silent spectator of the mighty scene of things, not an object of attention or curiosity in it; to take a thoughtful, anxious interest in what is passing in the world, but not to feel the slightest inclination to make or meddle with it. It is such a life as a pure spirit might be supposed to lead, and such an interest as it might take in the affairs of men, calm, contemplative, passive, distant, touched with pity for their sorrows, smiling at their follies without bitterness, sharing their affections, but not troubled by their passions, not seeking their notice, nor once dreamt of by them (viii, 91).

What I've attempted to show, in direct contrast to this spectral anonymity which is cut off from the world in a different way from his father, is something of the movement of Hazlitt's prose as it demonstrates a mind at work in the world and in the medium of an essay. Rather than the 'pure spirit' referred to above, it is very often a laudably impure and engaged spirit that moves between the real and the ideal, between ennobling ideas and basic physical sensations. In those very movements, those refluxes of thought and feeling, Hazlitt demonstrates his modernity, but he does so by marking out a territory that is strategically proximate to the spiritual and what we take to be sacred. The ease with which he seems able to do this might say as much about the role of the sacred within Unitarianism as it does about Hazlitt's apparent renunciation of his faith – his becoming 'an avowed infidel'. That step into a relocation of the sacred might be less spectacular precisely because this was already happening within his Unitarian faith, a creed in which the sacred is to be found 'in the very livingness of life itself in which we live and move and have our being'. As a result, Unitarianism finds itself, even now, in a position where it has to take steps to preserve this 'realm of the sacred or the divine'.²¹ Hazlitt's Dissenting inheritance might thus be said to have offered

21 See Ian Ellis-Jones, 'The Challenge for Modern Day Unitarians and Universalists: Reclaiming the Sacred and the Holy', an address delivered on 4 October 2009 at the Biennial Conference of the Australian and New Zealand Unitarian Universalists Association

him a particularly open opportunity to move into the proximate territory of what we might now recognize as that of the humanistic essayist, one characterized by reflexive self-consciousness and trials of the spirit.

In his famous letter to Bailey dated 22 November 1817, John Keats articulated a similar process of refracted self-consciousness, what he refers to as a 'reward' or compensation for the 'imaginative mind', which takes the form of 'the repetition of its own silent working coming continually on the spirit with a fine suddenness'. In the same letter Keats also refers to someone with a 'complex Mind' 'hav[ing] the pleasure of trying the resources of his spirit'; and, more famously, claims that: 'I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination.'²² This provocative claim for the 'holiness' of affections is matched by Hazlitt's own daring celebration of the dangerously translating passion of love in *Liber Amoris*. More particularly, Keats's suggestion here in the private context of a letter that the mind works in conjunction with 'spirit' to offer a sacred sense of self-consciousness is something which, as we have seen, many of Hazlitt's published essays explore as their central subject.

In 'The Letter-Bell', written only weeks before his death, Hazlitt uses this ordinary, everyday sound announcing the arrival of the mail as a spring-board for the contemplation of the narrative of his life, a journey he compares explicitly with 'the pictures in the *Pilgrim's Progress*'. The sound of the bell, Hazlitt claims, 'brought me as it were to myself, made me feel that I had links still connecting me with the universe, and gave me hope and patience to persevere'(xvii, 377). This 'trifling object' offers him a link between 'the sacred shrine of our own breasts' and 'the living lamp of nature' – as he puts it in his lecture 'On Shakespeare and Milton' (v, 46). A simple object of the sense in this way exposes the mechanism of a mind at work. The process is one of linkage with the external world of nature, but is also self-involved. It consists of bringing one's self before one's self and might be thought of as distinctly secular save that the letter-bell echoes the summoning bell of a church. This is the context in which Hazlitt weighs the worth of life and the narrative of his own life and famously declares: 'I have never given the lie to my own soul.'(xvii, 378). Such a statement might be read as definitive of Hazlitt's moral integrity – one based on a self-regarding and self-regulating mode of consciousness. Its language is suffused not just with the rhetoric of religion, but also, as one might expect, its sacred sense of the human. In its use of the word 'soul' this statement represents something more than a mere rhetorical reflex. It is powerfully representative of Hazlitt's conscientious engagement with the territory of the spirit.

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

(ANZUUA): http://unitarianministries.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/ANZUUA_Address_09.249184510.pdf. Tom Paulin anticipates my point, but with a warning: 'we may think that Unitarian doctrine is simply a form of liberal humanism, which retains a slight tincture of Christianity. But this is a culture with a principled faith in God' (*The Day-Star of Liberty*, 8). Tim Milnes has drawn attention to a 'reasoning imagination' as a faculty which will 'simultaneously satisfy the Unitarian in Hazlitt' as well as 'the harassed epistemologist' – see his *Knowledge and Indifference in English Romantic Prose*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 120.

22 Keats, *Letters*, I, 184.

‘A SLAUGHTER-HOUSE OF CHRISTIANITY’

A Short History of New College, Hackney

Stephen Burley

‘I do not seem to have altered’, Hazlitt wrote in his essay ‘On Consistency of Opinion’, ‘any of my ideas since I was sixteen years old.’¹ His comment serves to highlight the profound formative significance of his early years within the tightly-knit networks of radical Protestant Dissent; furthermore, it’s interesting to note that he locates the formation of his mature thought in the year 1794, during his studies in London at New College, Hackney, where he trained to become a Dissenting minister. This was a pivotal moment in his life, yet one that is barely mentioned in his extant writings. As a result, however, of recent interdisciplinary scholarship on the history of the Dissenting academies in Britain, it is now possible to recover a sharper understanding of Hazlitt’s experiences in Hackney. In this short essay I want to draw upon a body of new research to offer a brief history of the controversial institution at which Hazlitt lived and studied from 1793 to 1795, before pointing to some of the recent scholarship that has begun to reassess the contribution of the Dissenting academies more generally to British life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The story of New College, Hackney begins in a coffee house in Cheapside on 13 December 1785. After the closure of two important Dissenting academies at Warrington and Hoxton, a group of well-to-do Protestant Dissenters met to discuss the problems that now faced English nonconformists. Unable to take degrees from the universities at Oxford and Cambridge, and without suitable academies to educate and train new generations of nonconformist ministers, the very future of Protestant Dissent was at stake.² Within a month, however, of their first meeting, they had resolved on a solution: to establish an ambitious new academy in or near to London. This was the beginning of New College, Hackney (1786–96), the most controversial of the eighteenth-century liberal Dissenting academies.

1 *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe, 21 vols (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1930–4), xvii, 22–3.

2 At Oxford, students were required to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England at matriculation; at Cambridge, subscription to the Articles was required at graduation. These requirements worked as a strong disincentive for British nonconformists.



New College, Hackney, c. 1790 (reproduced with the permission of the London Borough of Hackney Archives and the City of London, London Metropolitan Archives).

The early institutional history of the college is one of rapid growth and development. The first five students had begun a course of lectures at Dr Williams's Library in Cripplegate in the autumn of 1786, and the following year the college was formally inaugurated in its magnificent new surroundings in Hackney, then one of the wealthiest areas in the country. Set in eighteen acres of carefully manicured pleasure gardens, Homerton Hall had been purchased, and work had begun to convert it into a residential academy for students. Originally built in the 1720s for the governor of the Bank of England, Stamp Brooksbank, it was the finest stately residence in the area. On 29 September 1787 the college opened its doors for the first time. Twelve students (eight lay and four ministerial) were admitted and immediately took up residence. It was a brief moment of triumph for British nonconformists as they dared to look ahead to a new era of religious toleration: with the parliamentary campaign to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts gathering momentum, it was hoped that, once the legal penalties against Dissenters were removed, New College would nurture the rising generation, providing a broad, liberal education superior to that offered by the English universities. Addressing the supporters of New College on 27 April 1790, Thomas Belsham, the divinity tutor, declared that the college 'shall burst like the morning sun through every mist of prejudice, envy and calumny; and [...] diffuse light, and truth, and virtue, and happiness to generations yet unborn.'³ His elevated rhetoric, informed by rational Dissent's theodicy of inexorable progress, captures the excitement of the moment.

The college soon became a centre of intellectual excellence and a magnet for some of the greatest minds of the day. It was a potent symbol of Dissenting power,

³ Thomas Belsham, *The Importance of Truth and the Duty of Making an Open Profession of it* (London: J. Johnson, 1790), 47.

wealth, and energy, of the limitless potential of the human mind when freed from the shackles of civil and religious disabilities. Among its students, tutors, and governors can be found some of the foremost writers, scientists, theologians, philosophers, parliamentarians, merchants and bankers of the day. The institution also gained prominence as an important centre of reformist and radical endeavour. In forging close connections with the London Revolution Society, the Society for Constitutional Information, and the Society of the Friends of the People, the college developed at the very centre of the network of metropolitan organizations which inspired reformist initiatives throughout the 1780s and 1790s. As a result, the formal events of the College – the governors’ meetings, annual dinners and anniversary sermons – brought together the leading Dissenting and radical figures of the era.

But amidst the crucible of counter-revolutionary turmoil of the early 1790s, it didn’t take long for the college to be identified as a hot-bed of sedition. In time, a series of events worked to associate the academy with ideas of political subversion and revolution rather than reformist ardour and academic success. In June 1792 Thomas Paine was the guest of honour at a republican supper held at New College, only a month after he had been summoned to answer a charge of seditious libel for the second part of *The Rights of Man*. Three months later a French spy, François Noël, formerly Professor of Belles Lettres at the University of Paris, dined with Joseph Priestley at the College. Noël had been introduced to Priestley by the college’s tutor of French and Italian, John Scipio Sabonadière (1752–1825), a man with high political connections who may well have been working as a French spy throughout this time at Hackney.⁴ Finally, in May 1794, as Hazlitt progressed towards the end of his first year of study, William Stone, a prominent college governor, was arrested on a charge of high treason. He was accused of providing military intelligence to the new French republic. At the heart of the case was his correspondence with William Jackson (1737?–95), an Irish journalist who was also working as a French spy. Three other New College governors, Benjamin Vaughan, John Hurford Stone, and the chairman, William Smith, were implicated in the plot, although, ultimately, they were not charged. William Stone was tried early in 1796 and after a lengthy trial he was acquitted.⁵ But within months of his release the college was closed for good. External factors such as the outbreak of the French Revolution, the declaration of war with France, and the failure to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts had contributed to the college’s problems, but it was internal difficulties that proved to be decisive in its demise. From the beginning the institution had suffered from poor financial management, divisive arguments between the tutors, and the deeply controversial behaviour of students, tutors, and governors. By the early 1790s its reputation was on the wane and, as several of its wealthy benefactors began to turn away, student numbers declined rapidly. As a

4 For more on Sabonadière’s activities in the early 1790s see William McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2008), 286–7, 328–9.

5 See John Barrell, *Imagining the King’s Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide 1793–1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 192.

consequence, the debts spiralled out of control and the institution loomed over the precipice of bankruptcy. Although the academy struggled on until 1796, its closure had been debated for years.

The decision to close the college was made in late 1795, only a few months after Hazlitt's departure. Theophilus Lindsey, a pioneer of Unitarianism in England, announced the sad news on 14 December in a letter to the Shrewsbury philanthropist, William Tayleur: 'It will give you concern to be informed, that our college at Hackney, to which you have been such a signal and generous benefactor, must now at last be broken up, and the premises disposed of, on account of the debts incurred and the clamours of the creditors.'⁶ The academic year ended in June 1796 for the last time and, a few days later, the college buildings and grounds were sold at auction. The failure of the academy was seen as a momentous victory for the forces of loyalist conservatism: a jubilant contributor to the *Gentleman's Magazine* captured the reactionary spirit of the day when he proclaimed that 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen.'⁷ In contrast, Joseph Priestley lamented that 'The giving up of the college is certainly very mortifying to the friends of liberty [...] but we must give way to the times, which are unfortunately against the good cause in England.'⁸

In 1800 the college was razed to the ground by developers. Today, the site where it once stood is home to the Jack Dunning Estate, a group of council blocks situated between Homerton University Hospital and Lower Clapton Road. No trace of the college survives. In fact, since its demise over two hundred years ago little effort has been made to revive its memory or to evaluate its cultural, educational, intellectual, and political significance.⁹ In the last five years, however, the signs have been more encouraging.¹⁰ Since 2007 a team of scholars from a range of disciplines based at the Dr Williams's Centre for Dissenting Studies have been working to recover the history of the Dissenting academies and their contribution to British culture in the period 1660–1860. The Dissenting Academies Project¹¹ has worked towards two objectives: firstly, the publication of a multi-authored volume, *A History of the Dissenting Academies in the British Isles, 1660–1860* (to be published by Cambridge University Press); and secondly, the creation of *Dissenting*

6 The John Rylands University Library (University of Manchester) MS Autograph Letters of Theophilus Lindsey, 1785–1800, fol. 88 [to William Tayleur].

7 *Gentleman's Magazine*, 66 (1796), 458–9.

8 J. T. Rutt, ed., *Life and Correspondence of Joseph Priestley*, 2 vols. (London, 1832), I, 360–1.

9 There was a some academic interest in the college in the 1920s, but very little has been printed since then: H. J. McLachlan's 'The Old Hackney College, 1786–96', *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, 3.3 (1925), 185–205, is still the standard scholarly source; Hazlittians may also be aware of H. W. Stephenson's two articles on Hazlitt's experiences at New College which were later issued as a pamphlet. See H. W. Stephenson, 'Hackney College and William Hazlitt 1', *TUHS*, 4.3 (1929), 219–47; 'Hackney College and William Hazlitt 2', *TUHS*, 4.4 (1930), 376–411; and *William Hazlitt and Hackney College* (London, 1930).

10 Readers of the *Hazlitt Review* will also remember David Halpin's account of Hazlitt's education in Wem and Hackney, 'Hazlitt's Learning: A Real and Negative Education', *The Hazlitt Review*, 2 (2009), 49–65.

11 <http://www.english.qmul.ac.uk/drwilliams/academies.html>

Academies Online which consists of an extensive *Database and Encyclopedia and Virtual Library System*, as well as other important resources and materials relating to the academies.

As part of this research, I have published online *New College, Hackney (1786–96): A Selection of Printed and Archival Resources* to try to resituate the College at the heart of eighteenth-century culture.¹² This publication draws upon the rich archival and printed materials relating to the College held at Dr Williams's Library, London. It is here that we can begin to recover the finer details of Hazlitt's life from 1793 to 1795 through a study of the sermons, lectures, textbooks, student notebooks, minute books, subscription lists, governors' reports, correspondence, polemics, poetry, and biographical memoirs that document the life of the institution during his years as a student. The online publication includes: a detailed chronology; comprehensive lists of students, tutors, governors, and benefactors; correspondence, minute-book entries, and other documents relating the origin and development of the college; selections from manuscript letters; newspaper articles discussing events at the academy; and poems composed to celebrate the liberal and progressive spirit of the institution. It also contains newly edited transcripts of the four letters that Hazlitt wrote from Hackney in the autumn of 1793. It is from these materials that we can begin to reassess the impact of these formative experiences on Hazlitt's mature political, philosophical, and religious thought, tracing the genealogy of his ideas back to the radical Dissenting networks of the late eighteenth century.

At the end of the nineteenth century the great Victorian biographer, Sir Leslie Stephen, responded somewhat dismissively to Hazlitt's claim to intellectual consistency: 'To claim to have learnt nothing from 1792 [sic] to 1830 is almost to write yourself down as *hopelessly impenetrable*.'¹³ Yet, to my mind at least, Stephen seems to have missed the point: behind Hazlitt's comment, with which I began this essay, lies not only his passionate fidelity to the radical cause, but also his acute sense of the apostasy of his contemporaries. In addition, I think he was also gesturing towards the deeper resonances of his New College education, pointing to this moment as one of unprecedented significance in his intellectual life. In doing so, he worked to affirm the significance of the culture of nonconformity that shaped every aspect of his work.

QUEEN MARY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

12 <http://www.english.qmul.ac.uk/drwilliams/pubs/nc%20hackney.html>

13 Leslie Stephen, *Hours in a Library*, 2nd edn, 3 vols (London: S. Elder, 1899), II, 84. See also John Kinnaird, *William Hazlitt: Critic of Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 1–3.

REPORT ON THE 11TH HAZLITT DAY-SCHOOL, JUNE 2012

A Six-Course Banquet with Hazlitt

*Being a Sketch of, and Personal Reflections on,
the 11th Hazlitt Day-School*

Diccon Spain

Like a dearly-missed friend who returns after travelling the world, the Hazlitt Day-School was with us again: brimming with character, different, but also very much the same. On Saturday 9 June 2012 in Room 101 of the labyrinthine Foster Court at University College, London, Hazlittians gathered for the eleventh day-school after a year's hiatus. It was very pleasing to see so many attendees at the day-school's new venue – a much larger number than two years ago in Oxford.

I am sure I am not alone in mourning the day-school's departure from Oxford. I have many fond memories of Hazlitt Day-Schools past, but, from a practical point of view, the day-school's new London location seems to work well. Also, I have to say that I sorely miss Tom Paulin's presence. Has Tom really retired? Among my many memories of previous Hazlitt Day-Schools one of the most treasured is of Tom reading Hazlitt at the wine reception at the end of the tenth day-school, in 2010, in the Hall of Hertford College, Oxford. Tom Paulin's exquisite, sometimes roiling, and sometimes rambling readings of Hazlitt were a joyful experience; the same characteristics were also there in his Hazlitt lectures and papers. Tom shares his relish for every morsel of our language, and when he dines on Hazlitt, we feast as well. Tom, we miss you, and wish you well in what I hesitate to call – from a selfish hope, or, secretly, expectation, to hear from you again – your retirement!

It is easy to look back with fondness on what has gone, but we should also, I think, be very excited about what we have now, and what is to come. This eleventh day-school, like all the others was a banquet for the mind. Could it be otherwise? Hazlitt himself is there at the banquet with us; through the speakers and lecturers, Hazlitt is alive, present, and, I am certain, smiling. As ever, the day-school is a high-point of the year. For my magpie-mind the day is a field rich with a myriad of intellectual 'shiny-things'; the speakers and lecturers bring their fascinating interests and perspectives on Hazlitt to us, and through their individual creative approaches and engagements with Hazlitt, they allow Hazlitt to be there with

us again: Hazlitt the habitual contrarian. Not only do we experience Hazlitt as a companion at this banquet, at his complicated, oppositional, and difficult-to-pin-down best, but we also experience him as our contemporary. Yes, Hazlitt is of his time, as we are of ours, but his breadth of interest and depth of engagement with all manner of subjects, his open prickly humanity, his honesty of expression, all make his thoughts relevant to us now. We like to think we are sophisticatedly modern, with our clever devices and our odd cultural foibles and addictions, but is our culture really so different from that of Hazlitt's time, and are *we* so different? It is perhaps part of Hazlitt's gift to us to help us explore the continuities of our culture, in all its complexity and also its simplicity. Hazlitt, with his ability to make strange our cultural frame, through his contrarian travels in his own, must surely be good for us.

This eleventh Hazlitt Day-School, this six-course intellectual feast, began with two shorter papers: 'On Depth and Superficiality', delivered by Fiona Robertson, Birmingham City University and 'Hazlitt, Print and Ephemerality', by David Stewart, Northumbria University. These two papers, different but complementing each other beautifully, sparked many thoughts and questions. Fiona's paper brought out much of interest in one of Hazlitt's lesser-known essays of the same name. She drew our attention to Hazlitt's surprising doubts about the new republic of the United States' potential to produce anything but a flat and superficial culture. In this he seemed to be shockingly doubtful about its cultural future, and from our twenty-first-century perspective, this seems even more odd. Fiona suggested that perhaps this came from a widely held fear at the time of what this unknown new thing, America, would become. One wonders if this fear of Hazlitt's, and so many of his 'old world' contemporaries, is so different from our nervousness about the 'new' economic and political powerhouse, China? There is also great resonance in Hazlitt's characterization of the United States and England as two sisters gnawing at each other with jealousy, with the United States described as the superficial but slightly more successful sister and England being the less successful and more jealous of the two. This is resonant, not because of its allocation of character, but in the ironic fact that we, as a nation and culture, are the inheritors of the superficial flatness that Hazlitt so clearly describes. Sitting alongside Fiona's paper, David Stewart's paper seemed to touch on issues that danced in and out of those raised in Fiona's: superficiality, ephemerality, culture, fashion, all seemed entirely relevant and resonant with our own situation in the early twenty-first century. Is Hazlitt a prescient genius, or is it merely that, at the core, nothing much has really changed since Hazlitt's time? It is a gift of Hazlitt's particular genius that he is able to manifest a potential of great literature, described in a quotation that David presented to us: 'It is one of the beauties and advantages of literature, that it is a means of abstracting the mind from the narrowness of local and personal prejudices, and of enabling us to judge of the truth and excellence by their inherent merits alone.'¹

1 'On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth', *Monthly Magazine*, March 1827, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P Howe, 21 vols (London and Toronto: J.M Dent, 1930-4), xvii, 193 n.

If Hazlitt, with the speakers and lectures of the day-school, helps us abstract our minds from the narrowness of our local and personal prejudices, both temporal and cultural, then he serves us very well indeed. If he roamed more through our children's minds in schools, and indeed, at home, would this not also be a boon for them, for us, and for our culture: more depth, less flatness? Does our future not hinge on lively minds, habitual contrarians, or, as we might call them, innovators? If we instead mass produce happy conformist-consumers, do we not guarantee ourselves a glittering but superficial future with more flatness?

From the very first taste of the third course of our Hazlittian banquet – ‘Hazlitt, Reynolds and the Rhetoric of Violence’, delivered by John Strachan, of Northumbria University – I, and I am sure many others in the room, knew we were in for a treat. John Strachan's nervously-energetic, pugilistic performance of his plenary paper was electrifying, its presentation perfectly matched to its content. His wide-eyed delight and lively presentation of the remarkable bare-knuckle boxers and their world through the writing of Hazlitt, John Hamilton Reynolds, and other contemporaries, brought his paper's subject to life. Again there was that sense that at heart our culture has changed less than we would like to think. With this paper, the comparison that arose was between our framing of the concepts of ‘sport’ and ‘pastime’ and those in Hazlitt's and Reynolds's time. Also highlighted was boxing's, and more widely, sport's role in setting a kind of societal norm for maleness, or more precisely, bolstering a male focus on the martial.

After the excitement of John's pugilistic plenary paper, followed by lunch, I'm afraid my brain was somewhat enervated. The papers, ‘Dissenting Legacies: Hazlitt and Godwin after 1828’, given by James Grande, of King's College, London, and ‘The “good hater” and a “Hazlitt-Hater”?: Hazlitt, Crabb Robinson, and the Truth of Sentiment’, by Philipp Hunnekuhl, of Queen Mary, University of London, certainly required more mental agility and energy to appreciate them fully than my poor worn-out old brain was prepared for, but they were, again, full of Hazlittian scholarship and insight.

One final session of caffeine imbibing, some movement, and conversation, and then we were seated again for our sixth and final course: ‘Hazlittian Horology’, delivered by Marcus Tomalin, of Downing College, Cambridge. What a delight! If John Strachan's paper was the flavoursome main course, then Marcus Tomalin's playful closing plenary was an unexpectedly fine last course of rare cheeses and port. Marcus managed to strike a fine balance between the scholarly, the playful, and even, in places, the bawdy. His construction of a Hazlittian ‘Horological Hierarchy’ was a stroke of near-genius, chiming with Hazlitt's own apparent humorous intentions; at the top of the hierarchy Hazlitt's beloved metal sundial, and at the bottom, the hated hourglass. As John Munson, my stepfather-in-law, a companion at most of these Hazlitt Day-Schools, remarked, ‘Exactly how did Hazlitt time his boiled eggs with a sundial?’ This, and many other questions about Hazlitt's horology, will sadly remain unanswered, but Marcus should be heartily congratulated for sharing many other intriguing insights. If the sundial near Venice that Hazlitt admired so much only counted, as its motto proclaimed, ‘the hours that are serene’, at the conclusion of this final paper of the day-school, I felt,

looking back on the day, that all its hours had been ‘serene’ and that our cares had been dispelled. Hazlitt’s sun had indeed shone upon us!

Throughout the day, many questions were raised, including, would Mr. Hazlitt be more at home in UCL or in the fields, within earshot of Wem’s church bells? Equally at home in either, was perhaps the answer to this question. One question that was conclusively answered was this: is the Hazlitt Day-School here to stay? Well, I would say the answer – thanks to the efforts of Gregory Dart and Uttara Natarajan, the contributions of the plenary lecturers, John Strachan and Marcus Tomalin, and the shorter papers from James Grande, Philipp Hunnekuhl, Fiona Robertson, and David Stewart, the attendance of many Hazlittians, and lastly, to the very real presence of Mr Hazlitt – is a resounding yes! A dearly-missed friend has returned to us; may the Hazlitt Day-School continue to return in the future, and long into the future after our time.

UNIVERSITY FOR THE CREATIVE ARTS, CANTERBURY