

# 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.

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

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

the Society is closely associated with the annual Hazlitt Day-School that takes place on the same day as the annual lecture in London. Members qualify for concessionary rates.

The Society publishes *The Hazlitt Review*.

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ULSTER ALTRUISM:  
FRANCIS HUTCHESON  
AND WILLIAM HAZLITT  
Hazlitt Society Annual Lecture, 2012

*Terry Eagleton*

I take it we can agree at the outset that there's a general connection between Gaels and good nature. From Adam Smith to Alasdair MacIntyre, Edmund Burke to John Macmurray, the Gaelic regions of the British Isles have been more marked by the communitarian spirit than orthodox English culture. In the eighteenth century, Hume, Ferguson, Smith, Burke, Goldsmith, Steele (who was born in Dublin of an Irish mother), Sterne, Mackenzie, Burns, Hugh Blair, Frances Sheridan, Charlotte Brooke, Francis Hutcheson, Macklin, Macpherson, Hugh Kelly, David Fordyce and others are all names we associate with the various currents of benevolism, sensibility, and sentimentalism, of sympathy and fellow feeling as against egoism and self-love. In one way or another, they are all in search of a form of rationality more affective and sensuous than that of Diderot or Samuel Johnson, a rationality which in eighteenth-century Europe would come to be known as the aesthetic.

The scientific reason for this relation between Gaels and good nature is surely clear: Gaelic types just are more cuddly, warm-hearted, and twinkly-eyed than the frigid English. I myself am of Gaelic provenance, and friends have been kind enough to remark that few more cuddly, twinkly-eyed creatures have walked the planet. But there may be other reasons, too, connected with the survival in these less modernized regions of certain more customary, communal, kinship-based social forms, of moral economy and traditional affections. Adam Ferguson, for example, gloomily contrasts the solidarity of a tribal or clannish culture with what he calls the 'detached and solitary' individuals of modern commercial society, in which the 'bands of affection' are broken. Despite what he sees as the prevalence of malice, envy, and competition in social life, Ferguson is still able to believe that 'love and compassion are the most powerful principles in the human breast'.<sup>1</sup> For the Scottish *Aufklärer* in general, society is natural to

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1 Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Dublin: Boulter Grierson, 1767), 53.

men and women, and social relations on the colonial edges were rather less rationalized and bureaucratized than they were in the cosmopolitan centre. Besides, it was possible to see from the vantage-point of Cork or Glasgow just how culturally specific a certain English notion of possessive individualism, offered as a universal doctrine, actually was. It's from these Gaelic margins – from a preoccupation with the relations between culture, place, people, language and history – that a species of cultural materialism first arises in these islands, not least in the guise of the so-called national novel.

No figure is more vital to this intellectual formation than Francis Hutcheson, father of Scottish philosophy, who taught David Hume much of what he knew and deeply influenced the pre-critical writings of Immanuel Kant. In the hands of his pupil Adam Smith, his economic thought also helped to lay the foundations of the modern world. As a full-blooded Harringtonian republican, who took a radical Whig line on the right of the oppressed to overturn an unjust sovereignty, Hutcheson was a seminal influence on Thomas Jefferson, and as such a leading intellectual actor in the American Revolution. Some of these ideas were then re-imported into Hutcheson's native Ireland in the insurrectionary doctrines of the United Irishmen, with whom Hazlitt's father, a Tipperary man, was closely associated. Indeed, Hazlitt Senior may have been related to Henry Haslett, one of the United Irish movement's founders. He was certainly a friend of the United Irish leader William Drennan, who was tried for sedition, and whose father Hutcheson worked alongside when teaching in a Dublin academy.

As far as I know, there are only a couple of references to Hutcheson's work in Hazlitt; but Hazlitt Senior was taught in Glasgow by Hutcheson's most eminent pupil, Adam Smith. If Hutcheson helped to mould the mind of Jefferson, Hazlitt Senior knew Benjamin Franklin, and William himself was exposed as a small child to revolutionary America. Edmund Burke may also have absorbed some of Hutcheson's writings, which makes him a remote precursor of Romantic nationalism. Yet he was also one of the greatest luminaries of the Ulster Enlightenment, which with its heady blend of Lockean rationalism, classical republicanism, radical Presbyterian and political libertarianism represents the richest radical culture that Ireland has ever produced. Intellectually speaking, the lineage of Catholic nationalism can't hold a candle to it, an acknowledgement on my own part which is as disinterested as it is strikingly generous-spirited.

Hutcheson was a civic humanist of a traditional stamp, convinced that the public good is the highest moral end; yet one of his most innovative achievements was to translate the language of classical republicanism, with its talk of duty, public spirit and moral responsibility, into the very different discourse of eighteenth-century ethics and psychology. He championed the rights of women, children, servants, slaves, and animals, spoke up for marriage as an equal partnership, denounced patriarchal power, and revealed a remarkably enlightened attitude to non-Western cultures, searching as he did for traces of affection, decency and moral sense among natives previously identified as savages. No doubt he would also have been active in the UK Uncut and the anti-plastic bag campaign were he alive today. As a clergyman, his straitlaced Presbyterian congregations found his

New Light theological sermons rather too liberal for their taste: one disgruntled parishioner, cheated of his weekly dose of hell-fire, described him as a 'silly loon' who had 'babbled' to them for an hour about a good and benevolent God, without a word about 'the old comfortable doctrines of election, reprobation, original sin, and death'. He also wrote a treatise on laughter, not the most common of literary genres among Ulster Protestants. Rather surprisingly, it was not for this that he was tried for heresy in Glasgow.

The whole of Hutcheson's writings is a broadside against philosophical egoism. It's well known in this respect that in the wake of the Earl of Shaftesbury, he posits the existence of a so-called moral sense, one prior to all self-interest and rational calculation, by which we instinctively approve selfless actions and condemn self-seeking ones. The moral sense – that swift, keen, selfless pleasure we reap from the sight of a virtuous act – operates as a kind of Heideggerian pre-understanding – as that which we already find to be in place as soon as we come to reason, which as moral agents we can never dig beneath or get back behind. As the precondition of moral judgement, it can't itself be the object of it, and is in this sense transcendental. It's a faculty which involves a kind of imaginary mimicry or magnetism between selves, one which testifies in its spontaneity to the naturalness of human affection, as we rejoice without thinking in the prosperity of others and grieve for them in their misfortunes. The notion of *Schadenfreude*, so central to Nietzsche and Dostoevsky and not entirely alien to David Hume, can find no hold in this kindly, innocent ethics. It is also, as you may note, an oddly spectatorial form of moral thought, of a kind extremely rare in the history of moral philosophy. The moral sense is aroused by watching other people's virtuous actions rather than in the first place in the execution of one's own.

As an exponent of a venerable lineage of virtue ethics, Hutcheson believes that public good is the greatest happiness of which we're capable, and thus, in a striking gesture, links together the two realms – that of public duty and that of personal gratification – put asunder by Kant. It's just those forms of conduct which are socially fruitful which occasion our deepest delight. He understands, in short, that morality is about how to live most enjoyably and abundantly, that virtue is a matter of gusto, geniality and robust well-being, and is in this sense its own reward. It's a legacy that passes from Aristotle to Laurence Sterne and onwards, and one with a close bearing on comedy. Virtue is the sort of instant, intuitive communion with others epitomized in a good joke, a shared glass of port or shaft of wit. Humour is an earthly echo of the kingdom of God.

Rather less affirmatively, we are also speaking here of the clubbish, coffee-house ethics of an emergent class which is feeling rather satisfied with itself. Gentlemen, unlike Evangelical shopkeepers, don't need to spell out the basis of their morality. With a certain blithe Hellenic assurance, they simply know in their bones what is to be criticized or condoned, as they recognize the quality of a good Madeira. Consensus runs so deep that to need to spell it out is superfluous. Benevolence and sentimentalism are the feel-good factors of the eighteenth century – the former, as it were, centripetal, involving a spontaneous diffusion or decentring of the self, the latter centrifugal and secretly self-regarding, picking over one's finer feelings and

thrilling to one's own exquisite sensory vibrations like so much precious emotional booty. It is the difference, by and large, between Goldsmith and Steele.

Yet virtue, one might claim, had better be its own reward, since in this sort of social order it is unlikely to receive any other. There is, Fielding observes in *Tom Jones*, an honourable doctrine according to which the good will receive their reward in this world – a doctrine, he adds, which has only one defect, namely that it is not true. There is indeed a place in this world where the good are showered with blessings, handsome spouses, and landed estates, and the wicked receive their come-uppance; but it is known as the novel, and the semi-ironic way in which these deserts are distributed, not least in Fielding's own fiction, is a hint that we are not to mistake this for reality, where Jones would probably have been hanged and Blifil appointed prime minister. Can virtue now survive only in fictional form?

Viewed in this light, Hutcheson's generous-hearted notion of moral sense can also be seen as a kind of historical defeat. To claim that moral judgements can be justified by the testimony of some specialist moral sense, a kind of ghostly shadowing of our grosser physical organs, is really to claim that they cannot be rationally justified at all. There are, to be sure, genuine problems about rationally justifying moral judgements, since whenever we advance a reason for behaving well – duty, self-realization, the victory of the proletariat, the greater glory of God, the greatest good of the greatest number and so on – it always seems possible to retort 'and what's so good about that?' Aren't all such responses a kind of *petitio principii*, assuming what they set out to prove? Hutcheson's doctrine of moral sense seeks to outflank this difficulty, operating as it does as a kind of foundation. Even so, it would seem a kind of *locum tenens* for some more substantial kind of grounding, a mysterious X which marks an empty place in the argument, the spot where a classical foundationalism has now failed and we must turn instead to the interior recesses of the human subject to find our moral anchorage.

Lodging such judgements in the very pre-social, pre-rational instincts of men and women – in the body itself, one might almost say – is to lend them all the apodictic quality of the smell of a rose or taste of a peach; but by the same token it is to render them quite as opaque to reason as these things, and thus make them perilously elusive. It is tantamount to admitting that values can no longer be derived from facts, moral principles from social relations, affections and obligations from progressively reified, instrumentalized reason. Generosity, mutual cooperation and loving kindness certainly persist in this predatory social order, but it is no longer possible to say how or why. As Alasdair Macintyre (an Irish-speaker born in County Donegal and later transported to Glasgow) has argued, bourgeois society inherits from the past certain values of sympathy and solidarity of which, ideologically speaking, it has urgent need, but which make sense only in the context of social roles and relations which it itself is intent on dismantling. It is the key irony of modern morality. Once traditional social roles and obligations are dismantled, the moral values which made sense in that context now seem to hang in the air, bereft of any anchorage in the way the world is. And since ruling ideologies draw upon consensus, this is politically troublesome as well as intellectually dissatisfying.

If moral values can no longer be grounded in social relations – if, to put a political spin on the question, what bourgeois society says it does is scandalously at odds with what it actually does, the superstructure embarrassingly askew to the base – then such values must either be made autonomous and autotelic, as with Kant, psychologized (as with emotivism), justified in terms of their consequence (pragmatism, utilitarianism) or subjectivized, rooted, as with Rousseau and David Hume, in the sentiments alone. Hutcheson himself wishes to do none of these things: like his mentor Shaftesbury, he preserves a classical sense of a human nature divinely disposed to certain inherent ends. The moral sense for both men responds to a quality inherent in actions; it is in no sense simply subjective. It is just that this affirmative, anti-bourgeois version of humanity (that of a Whig aristocrat and an Ulster radical) is becoming increasingly harder to found in the social facts, so that moral judgements are floating dangerously close to the *je ne sais quoi* of aesthetic taste. It's this that eighteenth-century moral rationalists like Samuel Clark deplore in their more sentimentalist brethren.

Virtue as profitless, selfless, pleasurable, gratuitous, self-fulfilling, autotelic and beyond calculation – virtue as akin to the aesthetic, in a word – is bound to be something of an affront to a social order for which nothing can exist for its own self-delight. In this sense, a Hutchesonian ethics is also a political critique. Nothing is more scandalous to the market place than disinterestedness, whatever the postmodernists might imagine, rather as nothing is more natural to it than difference, plurality, hybridity, heterogeneity and the rest of those supposedly radical virtues.

Hutcheson's response to the crisis of morality in an empiricist, individualist age is, ironically, to *amplify* empiricism. We now have a sixth, rather spectral sense, the so-called moral sense, to accompany the other five. Hazlitt's response, by contrast (yes, I've come to the great man at last) isn't to extend empiricism but to turn it against itself, which is another kind of irony. Such is the argument of the *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, which claims that moral action is future-oriented; that I can have no sensory experience of my future self; that I can accordingly have no interest in it, interest being a matter of current sensation or memory of the past; and that this is sufficient to refute the philosophical egoists who claim that we always act out of self-interest. My future self is a kind of ghostly or vicarious being, akin in this sense to others in its distance from myself; and the imaginative power by which I project myself forward into it is the same faculty by which I project myself into the emotional innards of others. Indeed, only by virtue of doing the latter am I capable of accomplishing the former. I am interested in my own welfare in much the same way that I'm interested in that of others. Both modes are imaginative rather than sensory.

Hazlitt thus subscribes to the dubious empiricist case that interest is bound up with sensation, but in a way which pulls the carpet out from under the self-interested ethics to which it is generally coupled. Rarely have such lousy arguments been deployed in so honourable a cause. For one thing, as A C Grayling has pointed out, self-interest can be rational and enlightened (it's always a pleasure to find myself agreeing with the good Professor). Strikers behave self-interestedly,

and so they should. (At this point, the Professor and I are doomed to part company after our all-too-brief convergence.) For another thing, Hazlitt remains too much in thrall to the empiricism he is out to challenge. He assumes, for example, that to have an interest in something involves having a sensation or experience of it, whereas no particular sensation accompanies my interest in abolishing the public schools apart from a vague sense of nausea at the thought of them. His mistake is akin to the error of those straw men in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* who imagine that promising, expecting or intending are experiences – that, for example, when I say 'I'm expecting her to arrive tomorrow' I'm reporting on an inner state or sensation rather than describing a situation. Such is the fetishism of the inner of a post-Romantic culture. In his *Reason and Persons*, the contemporary philosophical expert on these matters, Roger Parfitt, does not regard our interest in our futures as an experience or sensation, and is also doubtful about how far into the future it extends.

The sympathetic or empathetic imagination is one of the great inventions of the eighteenth-century moralists and their Romantic inheritors. Among other things, it is a means by which, as the nineteenth century unfolds, the moral and aesthetic spheres between which Kant sternly forbade all conceptual intercourse begin stealthily to converge. To question this faculty of imagination, in many literary circles at least, is as unthinkable as declaring in a university prospectus for cultural studies that the aim of the discipline is to preserve the values of a spiritual elite from the grubby paws of the populace. Yet far too much has been invested in this absurdly inflated faculty of the imagination, which is far from the unblemished good literary types tend to assume. For one thing, as Goethe recognized, it is dangerously close to idle fantasy. For another thing, feeling how someone is feeling won't necessarily inspire you to treat them well. Think of a sadist, who is intensely preoccupied with how his victim is feeling. Serial killing requires a good deal of imagination, or so a friend tells me.

Besides, you do not need to recreate someone's inner emotional condition in your own mind in order to behave well towards them. Feeling *for* someone's situation doesn't mean feeling their situation. In any case, morality has precious little to do with feeling, as the Christian Gospel is well aware. Love or *agape* is a practice, not a sentiment, a matter of what you do rather than of what you feel, which is one reason why the paradigm of it for Judaeo-Christianity is the love of strangers. Anyone can love a friend. What you feel about the scabby vagrant to whom you chuck 10p is neither here nor there. 'Love is not a feeling' remarks Wittgenstein, no doubt with *agape* rather than *eros* in mind. It is only because the latter has tended to swamp the former in modern Western civilization that we greet such declarations with the suspicion that whoever makes them ought to get out a bit more.

The imagination starts life in the eighteenth century as a kind of corrective to sensuous empiricism and possessive individualism, a condition it disastrously takes for granted but then seeks rather wistfully to transcend. Like psychoanalysis in Karl Kraus's view, it is thus part of the problem to which it offers a solution. If all I can know of you is sense-data – if you figure as no more than a fat patch on my

eyeballs and a faintly unpleasant odour – how can I ever have access to your inner self? Wouldn't I need some special, elusive faculty – call it moral sense, empathy, intuition, or the imagination – in order to do so, a sense which can't be empirically grounded but which is nonetheless morally and ideologically essential? Mustn't empiricism be forced to undercut itself so that human value, and hence political legitimacy, can flourish?

'Our senses,' remarks Adam Smith in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 'never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are the other's sensations.'<sup>2</sup> It is as though our 'sense-data' of others, whatever that may mean, is entirely blank and neutral. It is in no sense expressive of subjectivity, so that to see your grief or euphoria just is to have access to you. The flesh is not grasped here as semiotic, as a sign of the subject. It is brute, inert, obstructive, Cartesian stuff.

The point, surely, is that one wouldn't need to posit these ghostly faculties if one had a better understanding of the body. On this empiricist reckoning, our fleshliness is what cuts us off from one another. All the real stuff goes on inside, so that we need to infer, imagine or second-guess someone's feelings from the sense-data we have of them. But I do not infer, deduce or imagine you are angry when you smash a flowerpot over my head, any more than I generally infer your meaning from your words. You can, of course, conceal your feelings from others, a sophisticated social practice which it takes some time and skill to acquire (would that toddlers had it), but this is a special, not a pragmatic case. You can keep quiet only if you can speak. Generally speaking, our feelings are no more hidden away than our eyebrows. When I grip you in a passionate embrace, which I intend to do as soon as this lecture is over, it isn't especially helpful to describe my affection for you as being 'inside' me, any more than it's helpful to describe the material world as external. External to what? The body itself, as a source of practice, a point from which a world is organized, a way of being pitched amidst things, a form of presence to others, a piece of signifying matter, a transformative traffic with the world, dismantles the distinction here between outer and inner.

In this sense, sensory mimesis, moral sense, or the empathetic imagination simply plug the gaps of defective epistemology. For the most part, one is present in one's body as the meaning is present in a sign – which is not to say always luminously and transparently, but not typically opaquely and inscrutably either. This is what Aquinas, for whom human beings are corporeal beings, means by describing the soul as the form of the body. If you want an image of the soul, as Wittgenstein remarks, look at the body. He means of course the body in action, the self conceived in the first place as agent, not as the passive recipient of so-called sense-data. The senses, as Marx recognized, are modes or aspects of human practice, not entities akin to colons and kidneys. A failure to grasp this lies at the source of much empiricist misunderstanding. Both Hazlitt and Hutcheson are searching for ways to break beyond the bodily senses, without realizing that the

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2 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, in Lewis Amherst Selby-Bigge, *British Moralists*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1897), I, 258.

body is a way of breaking beyond itself. As with a language, to be inside it simply is to be open to an outside.

It seems churlish to tick Hazlitt off for not being Merleau-Ponty. I don't want to underestimate the splendour of his campaign against self-interest. His essay 'What is the People?' (1817), for example, is one of the most magnificent pieces of political discourse ever penned in England. Unlike postmodernism, Hazlitt understands that disinterestedness is a form of engagement with others, not a lordly detachment from them. To be disinterested, in this pre-Arnoldian sense of the term, is to be carried out of oneself in passionate pursuit of some cause or in intense fellow-feeling with others. If Hazlitt's writing is both disinterested and partisan, a combination unintelligible to certain modern liberal minds, it is because in the police state of early nineteenth-century Britain, anti-egoism is a form of radical politics. Indeed, it is the motif of anti-egoism which links Hazlitt's philosophy, politics, ethics and aesthetics, one of the figures in the multicoloured carpet of his work. Another such figure is his extraordinary dual commitment to a radical-Enlightenment universalism on the one hand and a Romantic-humanist particularism on the other. It is the single most striking way in which he pre-empts the thought of Marx.

Partisanship, moreover, is for Hazlitt in no sense at odds with plurality, a case which always brings to my mind the work of my old comrade and teacher Raymond Williams, another Celtic communitarian, a man who as a teenager once cycled for many miles to visit one of Hazlitt's haunts, a thinker for whom 'diversity' was a keyword long before it became fashionable in mission statements, and who never seemed to feel the slightest tension between this and the necessary one-sidedness involved in being a socialist.

Much of what I have said, I fear, may already be familiar to many of you. In which case, I will tell you something that you almost certainly don't know, and which represents my sole contribution to Hazlitt scholarship. There are no Hazlitts listed in the Northern Irish telephone directory today, but there are 28 Hezlitts, most of them, I feel sure, of a markedly altruistic character.

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

# HAZLITT AND CRABB ROBINSON

## The Common Pursuit

*Philipp Hunnekuhl*

In a brief review of Edith Morley's biography, *The Life and Times of Henry Crabb Robinson* (1935), Hesketh Pearson (who in the previous year had published a biography of Hazlitt entitled *The Fool of Love* from which Crabb Robinson, apart from a few marginal remarks, is practically absent) accused Robinson of being precisely the kind of good-natured man that Hazlitt attacks in his 1816 *Examiner* essay 'On Good-Nature'.<sup>1</sup> Crabb Robinson (1775–1867, and thus three years Hazlitt's senior) 'was an eminently respectable citizen,' Pearson writes damningly, adding that 'Crabb's character may be summed up in the statement that he loved and admired Wordsworth'.<sup>2</sup> On top of this, Pearson asserts that Crabb Robinson 'also hated Hazlitt,' and that this places him 'among the mob of dons, critics and toadies who are shocked by intellectual honesty and horrified by emotional truth.' And finally, blurring the distinction between the author and the man Wordsworth, Pearson concludes that 'Crabb would not have been Robinson if he had not idolized the safest idol,'<sup>3</sup> implying that Crabb Robinson conducted his worship according to the smooth, hypocritical criteria of good nature as depicted by Hazlitt.

However, despite their falling out in the last days of the year 1816 – after Hazlitt, also in the *Examiner*, had charged Wordsworth with hating everything worth admiring except himself – Crabb Robinson continued to revere Hazlitt the writer and thinker, and quite critically so. More recent Hazlitt scholars and biographers have not failed to point out this fact, albeit briefly and in passing. The present essay hence aims to explore the manner in which William Hazlitt's literary achievements find strong support in Henry Crabb Robinson's critical judgement. Crabb Robinson's commentary on Hazlitt's works emerges as firm, committed to truth, and detached from whatever their personal relationship may have been at any given time. Both men were united in their striving for liberty and in their metaphysical approaches that stress the truth of disinterestedness. For Hazlitt,

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1 Hesketh Pearson, 'A Hazlitt-Hater,' *English Review* 60 (May 1935), 619–20; William Hazlitt, 'On Good-Nature,' reprinted in *The Round Table* (1817).

2 Pearson, 'A Hazlitt-Hater,' 619.

3 *Ibid.*, 619–20.

as Terry Eagleton explains elsewhere in this issue, the imagination's projections towards one's future self correspond to those towards another person, absolving the will from the self-absorption of sensory experience. For Crabb Robinson, 'love' as the mind's original power performs this task: situating love in what he calls the *'Law of moral Culture'*, Crabb Robinson, along the lines of Kant, saw in it the strongest indicator of God's existence. Going beyond Kant and towards Schelling, however, he saw the continuous expression of this divine impulse in art. What ultimately mattered, for both Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson, was the way in which such disinterestedness spreads within, and shapes, the community. For both, it is the other person who validates the self – whether through projections of the imagination towards the other person and back on to a future self, or as art, constantly addressing and re-negotiating a society's *'Law of moral Culture'*.

Nonetheless, an increasing tension developed between Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson concerning the materialization of this essential principle, or the changeover from sentiment to agency. The resulting unease emerges frequently, and in various nuances, as a major criterion of appreciation in Crabb Robinson's comments on Hazlitt's writings. Regard and rejection, agreement and discord, permeated their literary and personal relationships, in a manner captured by Crabb Robinson's comment on Hazlitt's *Table-Talk*: 'A delightful volume tho' it frequently annoys and disgusts me'.<sup>4</sup> And whilst their friendship deteriorated, it was never entirely lost, and against the backdrop of the common pursuit of truth and liberty, was all the more noteworthy.

### Reflections on a friendship

Crabb Robinson's anecdote about how he met Hazlitt, including the latter's response, is well known, and it has been referred to repeatedly by the biographers of both writers. On 9 September 1846, in the process of composing his *Reminiscences* for the year 1799, Crabb Robinson recalled his first encounter with Hazlitt in Bury St Edmunds, occasioned by their families' shared Dissenting allegiance. Hazlitt, Crabb Robinson writes, has since 'left a deservedly high reputation as a critic', but in 1799 'was struggling against a great difficulty of expression, which rendered him by no means a general favourite in company. His bashfulness, want of words, slovenliness in dress &c made him the object of ridicule'.<sup>5</sup> Crabb Robinson claims that he did not join in the mocking, and that he had the courage to resist the opinions of his peers by defending Hazlitt in a conversation with his sister-in-law

4 Henry Crabb Robinson (hereafter referred to as HCR) on *Table-Talk*, 'Diary' 9, 20 November 1821, Dr Williams's Library (hereafter DWL). I wish to thank the director of the library, Dr David Wykes, for his kind permission on behalf of the Trustees to publish from Henry Crabb Robinson's manuscripts in their keeping. I should also like to thank Ms Jane Giscombe, the Conservator, for her continual support in making these documents available to me. Scholarships from the Arts and Humanities Research Council and Queen Mary, University of London, for which I am very grateful, enabled me to carry out the work on this essay as part of my doctoral research.

5 HCR, 'Reminiscences' I (1799), 114, DWL.

as ‘the cleverest person I know.’ He also recollects how he met with incredulity in return.<sup>6</sup>

Apart from this entry in the *Reminiscences*, there is only one further clue, in Crabb Robinson’s correspondence of the period, that Hazlitt was not just another acquaintance. While preparing for what was to become a prolonged stay in Germany (1800–1805), Crabb Robinson reassured his brother and sister-in-law that he had passed a letter from her on to Hazlitt, and that subsequently ‘W. H. agreed with the sentiments & was by no means disposed to report it unfavourably.’<sup>7</sup> The subject matter of the letter referred to here remains open to speculation, but the comment indicates how Crabb Robinson attempted to overcome tensions by mediating between Hazlitt and others in his social and familial circle. The comment thus supports Crabb Robinson’s claims that he stuck to Hazlitt despite the prevailing opinion.

During Crabb Robinson’s time in Germany, there seems to have been no contact between him and Hazlitt. Not long after his return, though, their acquaintance grew into a friendship:

[Hazlitt] used frequently to breakfast with me And I rendered him a great service by introducing him to Anthony Robinson Who procured him his first job by inducing Johnson to publish his first work *The Eloquence of the British Senate* – This he never forgot. Late in life, years after I had refused to speak to him He said to Mary Lamb – Robinson cuts me but I shall never cease to have a regard for him, for he was the first person that ever found out there was any thing in me – But I was alone of this opinion then.<sup>8</sup>

Duncan Wu and Herschel Baker have demonstrated that Crabb Robinson’s recollections here are not quite accurate. He did in fact introduce Hazlitt to Anthony Robinson in order to assist in finding a publisher for the *Eloquence of the British Senate*, but Hazlitt’s contact with Johnson had been established through Godwin in 1804, while Crabb Robinson was in Germany.<sup>9</sup> But the above passage still contests Pearson’s claim that ‘Crabb had not the pluck, even if he had the wish, to brave opinion.’<sup>10</sup> The mutuality of gratitude also escapes Pearson, for Hazlitt (and this bare fact Pearson does not fail to highlight) was, in Crabb Robinson’s words, the ‘director of my taste’ inasmuch as it was ‘he who first made me acquainted with the *Lyrical Ballads*.’<sup>11</sup> And when, towards the end of February 1821, they spoke again, Hazlitt displayed remarkable ‘propriety & dignity’ while Crabb Robinson

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6 Ibid, 115.

7 HCR to Thomas Robinson (hereafter TR), June 1799, Correspondence 1725–1799, Letter 125, DWL.

8 HCR, ‘Reminiscences’ I, 115. This passage is based on Crabb Robinson’s immediate reflections after Landor had told him of Hazlitt’s death; see HCR, ‘Travel Diary’ 18, 2 October 1830, DWL.

9 Duncan Wu, ‘A bibliographical note’, *Metaphysical Hazlitt: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. by Uttara Natarajan, Tom Paulin, and Duncan Wu (London: Routledge, 2005), xv–xvi.

10 Pearson, ‘A Hazlitt-Hater’, 619.

11 HCR, ‘Reminiscences’ I, 115.

conceded that his attack on Hazlitt, ‘though warranted by [his] friendship with Wordsworth, was not justified according to the customs of society’.<sup>12</sup> These customs mattered profoundly to Crabb Robinson, not as rigid prescriptions by which life ought to be directed but as the social laws through which true, liberating sentiment may spread and gradual reform achieved.

### Elaborating other-centeredness

Although they were in different countries and out of touch in 1804, Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson were both trying to develop a system of metaphysics from their shared Godwinian origin. While in Germany, Crabb Robinson was dedicating great effort to the study of Kant and the resultant ‘New School’ of Post-Kantian Idealism. He related his newfound learning to England in a series of articles in the *Monthly Register* in 1802–1803 as well as in numerous private letters, and he instructed Madame de Staël in German philosophy and literature in 1804.<sup>13</sup> Crabb Robinson began to sum up the metaphysical approach he had developed towards the end of his studies in a letter of December 1804 to his childhood friend Catherine Clarkson (née Buck, who had married Thomas Clarkson in 1796) by asserting that ‘The one great Error of the modern Philosophy which sprung from Locke lies in this that *The Understanding alone has been cultivated – And the Sentiments totally neglected*’.<sup>14</sup> As a consequence, ‘high & lofty Sentiment & generous Feeling were held to be airy nothings because they could not be laid on the Anatomist’s bench or put under the mikroscope of the optician’, and thus it became ‘the fashion to laugh at the idea of a moral sense’.<sup>15</sup> The assertion of this ‘moral sense’ echoes the conversion from Humean scepticism to Kantianism that Vigus discerns in Crabb Robinson’s intellectual development,<sup>16</sup> reaffirming his faith at a time when it was in balance. But the letter to Catherine Clarkson then takes a characteristically Schellingian turn as Crabb Robinson stresses the ‘absolute existence’ of ‘Beauty & Truth Virtue’, merging Kant’s categorical imperative and Schelling’s aesthetics in a realm of speculative truth. The striking-through of this very term, ‘Truth’, in the manuscript can be accounted for thus: aesthetics and morals are, to Crabb Robinson, the two tokens of a transcendental truth whose ground, or first cause, eludes rational scrutiny. One cannot exist independent of the other, and only in their interplay in art do they express ‘absolute existence’. Where Kant asserted the detachment of art from morals

12 HCR, ‘Diary’ 8, 21 February 1821, DWL.

13 A comprehensive edition of Crabb Robinson’s writings related to his study of German philosophy has recently been published: James Vigus, (ed.), *Henry Crabb Robinson: Essays on Kant, Schelling, and German Aesthetics* (London: MHRA, 2010).

14 HCR to Catherine Clarkson (hereafter CC), December 1804, Correspondence 1804, Letter 75, DWL. A discussion of this letter in the wider context of Crabb Robinson’s intellectual development and commentary on literature can be found in Philipp Hunnekuhl, ‘Reconstructing the Voice of the Mediator: Henry Crabb Robinson’s Literary Criticism’, *Informal Romanticism*, ed. by James Vigus (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2012), 61–76.

15 HCR to CC, December 1804, DWL.

16 Vigus, *HCR*, 4.

and, ultimately, worldly motives, Crabb Robinson ascribed to art's exposition of beauty a moral inspiration.

Crabb Robinson thereafter subordinates the 'Laws of Association' to this realm, only to then pose and immediately answer the long-standing question of the 'real connection between Sentiment & Reason' anew:

I answer, they are brought together by *the Unity of human Nature & by the Law of moral Culture which requires us to cultivate all our powers harmoniously*. This is the watchword of my Philosophy. [...] I will not be deterred by any Creed whatever from following the sublime Speculations of Plato or Spinoza, nor will I be led to see the Universe in a gloomy light as a mass of Evil. [...] The *Moral Sense* is a fact as indisputable as the five Senses – The *Sense of beauty* too is equally real.<sup>17</sup>

The human relationships that 'moral Culture' encompasses constitute the 'Law' for the exercise of 'all our power'; or, the impulse towards the other person, that guarantees harmonious coexistence, emerges as the substance that binds together any subsequently operating laws of causality. For Crabb Robinson, this moral dimension finds its primary manifestation in works of art – a feature we can trace throughout his literary criticism, whether formal or informal. Art, for him, is the absolute merger of aesthetics and morals, particularized and reflected into existence thereafter in the shape of worldly experience. In this unfolding of truth from artistic creation, Crabb Robinson draws the link to the pantheism of Spinoza, albeit seeing in the will's quasi-divine play in art its liberation from necessity and the foundation of its freedom. The implication is that we actively make our world: exclusively abiding by the necessities imposed on one's own existence all too easily makes one ignore the 'Law' that 'cultivate[s] all our powers'. The error of self-interest is the result of such a fatalism, and so Crabb Robinson concludes that 'as all the animal functions unite in one vital principle – So all the affections of the Mind are centred in one power *Love*'.<sup>18</sup> Only thereafter does reason set in to further the unfolding of this moral sentiment.

In logical concept and moral essence, this notion is not at all far removed from Hazlitt's elaborations of other-centredness. Hazlitt too alludes frequently to Theseus's speech in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, stressing the poet's role of giving shape to what has a true existence in the mind.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, as Jon Cook observes, the power of the mind supplies, for Hazlitt, the causalities of experience.<sup>20</sup> Natarajan finds that this notion of 'power is the mind's formative ability', and that '[t]he emphasis on the concrete has led to our overlooking Hazlitt's commitment to an ideal, a "truth" that is contained in the symbiosis

17 HCR to CC, December 1804, DWL.

18 Ibid.

19 Uttara Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense: Criticism, Morals and the Metaphysics of Power* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), 32.

20 Jon Cook, 'Hazlitt and the Passions', *Hazlitt Review* 4 (2011), 43–58: 51.

of particular and abstract.<sup>21</sup> Where Crabb Robinson stresses the harmonious cultivation of powers, ‘Hazlitt rejects alike the merely particular and the merely abstract’<sup>22</sup> Where Crabb Robinson endorses speculation for the encompassing and advancement of beauty and virtue, Hazlitt’s ‘ideal is an “aggregate” of particulars, and abstraction is the process of aggregation, the bringing together of particulars into a unified whole.’<sup>23</sup> And where poetry for Hazlitt ‘is just such an ideal, a form of abstraction, embodying the symbiosis,’<sup>24</sup> art, for Crabb Robinson, mirrors the principle of truth in the world.

Despite all similarity, however, there is one crucial difference: Hazlitt, as Cook has convincingly shown, proposes through his concept of ‘gusto’ in art (as he does in his reflections on the past), the liberation of the passions from the potentially selfish motives of the will,<sup>25</sup> while Crabb Robinson considers art as the free speculative realm granted through, and mirroring, divine creation. Crabb Robinson’s moderate liberalism is forward-looking and quasi-Godwinian in its altered pursuit of future perfectibility gradually emerging from the historical, whereas Hazlitt’s sharply severs, as Eagleton convincingly argues in his lecture in this volume, the will, or the imagination of one’s future self, from the self-interest of past experience. Thus the ‘self-projecting tendency, underlying the impulse towards the other’ ensues, a power of the mind that Uttara Natarajan highlights as ‘the chief tenet of Hazlitt’s moral and metaphysical position,’<sup>26</sup> with its origins in the idea of natural disinterestedness first elaborated in his 1805 *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*. This difference on the relation between past and future notwithstanding, both Hazlitt’s and Crabb Robinson’s approaches hinge on the disinterested other-centredness of an independent, truth-generating mind.

### London conviviality

Given their shared precepts, Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson got on exceedingly well after the latter’s return from Germany in September 1805, at the time when Hazlitt’s authorial activity started to gain momentum. Crabb Robinson’s notebook for the period from 20 November 1805 to 31 December 1806, kept in German throughout, testifies to the intensity with which their friendship as well as Crabb Robinson’s admiration of Hazlitt the writer manifested themselves.<sup>27</sup> On Wednesday 28 May 1806, for instance, Crabb Robinson was visited by Hazlitt, and he found his

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21 Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense*, 2, 6.

22 *Ibid.*, 6.

23 *Ibid.*, 6–7.

24 *Ibid.*, 7.

25 Cook, ‘Hazlitt and the Passions’, 52.

26 Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense*, 176 (note 9).

27 HCR, Bundle 6.VIII, DWL. Throughout the notebook there are entries recording Crabb Robinson and Hazlitt visiting each other, several of which Duncan Wu cites, for the first time, in his *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (Oxford: OUP, 2008).

company 'as splendid as usual'.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, pages 1 and 2 of this notebook contain a list of the books Crabb Robinson read in 1806, broken down into months, and under June there is the entry 'Hazlitt's Essay on Princ[iples] of hum[an] Act[ion]'. In the corresponding section of the notebook, Crabb Robinson writes briefly on Friday 13 June that he 'read Hazlitt's book with delight'.<sup>29</sup> On Thursday 3 July, he records that he spent the evening with Anthony Robinson (not a relative but a long-term friend and correspondent of Crabb's), in the course of which Anthony Robinson promised to solicit the publication of Hazlitt's *Eloquence of the British Senate* and Crabb Robinson's translation of *Dr. Gall's New Theory of Physiognomy* – successfully in both cases.<sup>30</sup> A mere three days later, Crabb expressed his pleasure on learning from Anthony Robinson that Hazlitt had received an £80 advance from Joseph Johnson for the excerpt from his proposed work.<sup>31</sup> The frequent socializing of Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson, at times in the company of the Lambs and the Godwins, continued for the remainder of the year covered by the notebook. And since they were in such close personal contact at the time, Hazlitt's name is not among the addressees of Crabb Robinson's correspondence of the period.

On Tuesday 13 and Saturday 17 October 1807, Crabb Robinson met Hazlitt again after his first appointment as a war correspondent for the *Times* at Altona, but the brief entries in his 'Memoranda' reveal no details of the 'several' topics discussed or the overall atmosphere of the reunion.<sup>32</sup> Crabb Robinson soon after went on another visit home to Bury St Edmunds, during which he also found time to spend with some old friends, the Pattisson family at Witham.<sup>33</sup> He returned to London on Sunday 14 November. On the following Tuesday evening at the London Institution, his 'Memoranda' reveal, he 'read Hazlitt's Answer to Malthus', concluding that 'as an answer' it was 'a bad book', albeit with 'great acuteness in certain passages'.<sup>34</sup> Crabb Robinson's letter to William Pattisson, sent exactly one week later, provides a matching but more detailed account:

I have looked into W. Hazlitt's answer to Malthus. It is rich in good things without being itself a good thing. It is acute, but pert; argumentative, but the argument is directed more against unessential parts of the book he writes against than against the system itself. It has not changed my opinion in the least as to the great question, tho' it has given great force and clearness to a number of correcting and qualifying remarks which had before occurred to

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28 HCR, 6.VIII, 33, DWL. Here and *passim*, I give the English translation of HCR's German entries.

29 *Ibid.*, 36.

30 *Ibid.*, 40.

31 *Ibid.*, 42. See also Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 109 (and note, 464).

32 HCR, 'Memoranda', 21 January to 31 December 1807, 38–9, DWL.

33 HCR, 'Memoranda' 1807, 41, DWL, provides an account of a 'lively and interesting' evening (Wednesday 11 November) spent, with Crabb Robinson reading Wordsworth to the party.

34 HCR, 'Memoranda' 1807, 42, DWL.

me. There are many very light and censurable things in it, yet it is an amusing book. The concluding 2 pages is [sic] a piece of masterly eloquence.<sup>35</sup>

For the first time we can see here what would frequently recur in Crabb Robinson's criticism of Hazlitt: high praise of detail meets with overall disagreement. The achievement of metonymy (relying on direct semantic reference between two terms) is admired but the metaphor (saying something in terms semantically unrelated to the words used) deemed insufficient, so to speak, engendering an uneasy tension where we look for a claim to truth. The difference between metaphor and metonymy may also validly stand for the difference between speculation and observation (or between sentiment and reason), and for Crabb Robinson, Hazlitt frequently tended too much towards the latter.

Most importantly, though, the disagreement here is not whether Malthus was right or not – both Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson thought him wrong – but as to what the 'great question' was. It must have been, to Crabb Robinson, not the issue of the mind's disinterestedness that Hazlitt dwells on for much of his work,<sup>36</sup> but the Utilitarian one of the greatest extent of happiness engendered. This latter question Crabb Robinson rather ingeniously inverted in order to refute Malthus at the Athenian debating society on 4 March 1806, when he argued that Malthus's general apology for 'misery and poverty' as checks on overpopulation would have to apply with equal validity to any moment in history, but that the same logic could certainly not be applied to determine the state of happiness and culture.<sup>37</sup> In short, Crabb Robinson uses the 'flowering of Utilitarianism in its most pernicious form' that 'Hazlitt would worry away at [...] for years to come',<sup>38</sup> and discloses the incoherence of the presumed proportional causality underlying it. Wars and famines are not natural (let alone divine) counterpoises – they are not linked by proportional logic – to humanity's sadly paradoxical drive to minimize its greatest good in the pursuit of self-interest. Rather, humankind (through the generative powers of the mind, it will further emerge below) is as much the creator of these evils as it is of its own culture and happiness.

Later in his life, around 1831 if the document's date stamp speaks true, Crabb Robinson would accordingly argue in favour of free, other-centred agency as the material extension of the underlying original sentiment:

It is not enough to refer [...] to the thousand petty causes which concur in producing a change in the system of things. All these causes operate; [...] But still all these are inoperative without my cooperation [...]. Still on the other hand this remains the law of man's nature, that he acts for himself and from

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35 This letter is in the Pattison family collection, and is quoted here from Edith Morley, *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers*, 3 vols (London: Dent, 1938), III, 844.

36 John Whale, 'Hazlitt and the Selfishness of Passion', *Metaphysical Hazlitt*, 56-67.

37 HCR, Bundle 6.VIII, 17, DWL.

38 Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 75.

himself And in so far he is after all, the lord of his own destiny. At least that destiny waits on him.<sup>39</sup>

Individual agency comprises the responsibility arising from lordship over destiny – not merely for the individual, however, but for the ‘change in the system of things’. Crabb Robinson was as keen as Hazlitt was to disprove Malthus, not only on the grounds of sentiment, but just as much through reason. He discussed the topic with Mrs. Barbauld, and he afterwards remarked without disapprobation that she ‘seemed to argue more from feeling than Understand<sup>8</sup> against Malthus.’<sup>40</sup> Hazlitt, similarly, in the first letter of the volume, claims that ‘The poor, Sir, labour under a natural stigma; they are *naturally* despised.’<sup>41</sup> Thus, mistaking – or worse, ignoring – original moral choice for natural fate results in ‘indifference and apathy,’<sup>42</sup> in the toleration of wrong rather than the setting it right. Hazlitt attacks directly, personally, and with the full force of his ‘masterly eloquence’ the source from which the suppression of natural compassion has spread. Crabb Robinson shared Hazlitt’s faith in the importance of compassion, yet he favoured its gradual artistic dissemination. Hazlitt aims to expose and attack the source of the misled natural sentiment: the author Malthus who ‘engrafts the vices of a bad heart on a perverted understanding.’<sup>43</sup> Crabb Robinson, aiming to further collective happiness, approves of the rational discovery of error but primarily hopes to mend – by the restoration of sentiment through, above all, Wordsworth’s poetry – the harm that experience, permeated still by self-interest, inflicts on the individual.

The 1807 letter to Patisson cited earlier does nevertheless contain one outright recommendation which ought to clarify the discordant agreement, as it were, between Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson further. The latter writes:

I can at the same time recommend, however, another book of Hazlitt’s from which you will all [...] receive great pleasure. It is his Abridgement of Tucker’s *Light of Nature*, 1 vol. 8vo. The preface has some of the best remarks I have ever seen on Kant’s philosophy.<sup>44</sup>

Hazlitt’s dismissal of Locke, introducing his passage on Kant in the Preface, echoes Crabb Robinson’s in the Clarkson letter. Hazlitt writes that in Locke,

all those superadded feelings and ideas, all those operations and modifications which our impressions undergo from the active powers and independent

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39 HCR, ‘Freedom of the Will’, Bundle 2.X.12, DWL.

40 HCR to TR, 25 March 1806, Correspondence 1805-1808, Letter 44, DWL.

41 William Hazlitt, *Reply to the Essay on Population, by the Rev. T. R. Malthus* (London: Longman, 1807), 4.

42 *Ibid.*, 4.

43 *Ibid.*, 305.

44 Morley, *HCR on Books and their Writers*, 844–5.

nature of the mind itself, are treated as chimerical and visionary notions by the profound adepts in his clear-sighted philosophy.<sup>45</sup>

Kant, Hazlitt observes and Crabb Robinson agrees, aims to ‘explode this mechanical ignorance, to take the subject out of the hands of its present possessors, and to admit our own immediate perceptions to be some evidence of what passes in the human mind.’<sup>46</sup> And while both Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson speak of love and original disinterestedness of the mind, neither hesitates to put stress on the material ramifications of their idealism: the former roots the passions in physicality (as Cook argues) and uses largely empiricist terminology (according to Natarajan), the latter equates the vital principle of the body to the truth-principle of the mind.

Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson’s accord is perhaps best expressed in Tucker’s chapter entitled ‘The Vision’, containing his ‘visionary account of the ideal of moral and natural philosophy’ that Natarajan quotes at length.<sup>47</sup> This chapter, Crabb Robinson, in the letter to Patisson, finds ‘highly interesting’ despite certain unspecified ‘oddities.’<sup>48</sup> The individual mind, projecting its powers onto natural objects in ‘another language’ called ‘the sentient in distinction from the vocal’, is here integrated into the otherworld’s collective of minds (one of which is Locke’s) during a brief ‘stroke of death.’<sup>49</sup> Tucker offers a speculative account of how particular objects of experience elicit ties of sentiment in consciousness, and subsequently, the imagination ‘can raise passions and desires of any sort we find expedient’<sup>50</sup> – which explains how both Crabb Robinson and Hazlitt saw Kant’s notion of the formative mind elaborated in the work.

Crucially, in the Preface, Hazlitt proceeds to explain his appreciation of Tucker for his accidental and unrealized achievements:

The understanding here pays a proper deference to the other parts of our being, and knows its own place whereas our modern sophists, meddling, noisy, and self-sufficient, think that truth is only made to be disputed about; that it exists no where but in their experiments, demonstrations, and syllogisms; and leaving nothing to the silent operations of nature and common sense, believe that all our opinions, thoughts, and feelings, are of no value, till the understanding, like a pert commentator, comes forward to enforce and explain them; as if a book could be nothing without notes, or as if a picture had no meaning in it till it was pointed out by the connoisseur! Tucker was certainly an arrant truant from the system he pretends to adopt, and one of the

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45 William Hazlitt, *An Abridgement of the Light of Nature Pursued, by Abraham Tucker, Esq.* (London: Johnson, 1807), xvii.

46 *Ibid.*, xviii–xix.

47 Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense*, 149.

48 Morley, *HCR on Books and their Writers*, 845.

49 Hazlitt, *Tucker*, 254, 257.

50 *Ibid.*, 260.

common sense school. Thus he believed with professor Kant in the unity of consciousness, or 'that the mind alone is formative,' that fundamental article of the *transcendental* creed; in the immateriality of the soul, &c.<sup>51</sup>

Tucker, the 'arrant truant,' illustrates the independence of the mind whilst pronouncing his Lockean allegiance. And Hazlitt's claim validates his conclusions: the appreciation of literature emerges as a democratic process, liberated from the artist's or critic's strictures as it is handed over to the reader or spectator for the formation of truth. Hazlitt appreciates Tucker's achievement in the truth it reveals, disregarding claims about the intentionality of the author. This is what Natarajan – who overall places strong emphasis on the importance of Tucker's work for Hazlitt's development – claims to represent Hazlitt's 'colonization, even subversion,' of empiricist thinkers for his own 'idealistic emphases.'<sup>52</sup>

Subsequently, Hazlitt would – in the form of the essay, as Marilyn Butler has pointed out convincingly – find his own means of thus forestalling any authorial influences policing the meaning of a text.<sup>53</sup> Through his 'good hating,' for instance, Hazlitt intended and achieved just that: he directed the hating onto objects where he perceived any restricting ideological transfigurations of truth at play, meaning to expose them and thus prepare the ground for each individual's untainted engagement with literature. Truth is not imposed on the mind through the faculty of the understanding. Rather, it is subjected to the collective of individual minds, and here the sentiments encompassing other-centredness play the crucial role, for Hazlitt as well as for Crabb Robinson. The author's voice is, after the act of composing, denied superior authority, but it is still part of the collective of voices. In Tucker, this circumstance is perhaps best illustrated in the claim that 'consciousness is a thing that seems to belong equally to every individual, so it can hardly serve as a criterion to distinguish one individual from another; for in this respect we are all alike.'<sup>54</sup> From his treatment of the autonomy of the human mind, Hazlitt accordingly, along the lines of his 1805 *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (and even signing the Preface as the author of it), then proceeds to contest Tucker's 'wavering' assertion that 'sympathy is self-love in disguise.'<sup>55</sup> Crabb Robinson, delighted by Hazlitt's early philosophical treatise and equally a refuter of the idea of natural self-love, could not have agreed more with the ideas expounded here.

### Old sentiment, Winterslow, and Corunna

What with Crabb Robinson's continued engagement at the *Times*, the connection with Hazlitt did not quite flourish after his return from Altona in the manner that it had

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51 Ibid, xx.

52 Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense*, 147.

53 Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels & Reactionaries* (Oxford: OUP, 1981).

54 Hazlitt, *Tucker*, 166.

55 Ibid, 24.

in 1806. Crabb Robinson's pocket diary for the year 1808 contains only three entries relating to Hazlitt. The first one is dated 18 March, a Friday, when Crabb Robinson called at Hazlitt's and found a 'jolly' party there that consisted, amongst others, of the Godwins, John Hazlitt and his wife, as well as James Northcote, and Hazlitt's soon-to-be brother-in-law, John Stoddart.<sup>56</sup> On 8 May, Crabb Robinson unsuccessfully called on Hazlitt, and after a renewed attempt on 9 July, writes in his Memoranda that he 'visited Hazlitt whom [he] had not seen in a long time'.<sup>57</sup> During this meeting, they must have spoken about William Drennan, a leading figure of the United Irishmen, for Crabb Robinson appended, to the next letter to his brother, the postscript 'Do not forget to bring the pamphlet by Dr Drennan (which belongs) to Hazlitt. I ought to have had it long since'.<sup>58</sup> Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson may even have discussed their first encounter back in 1799 as the moment 'long since' (not only because Drennan's polemical *Letter to the Right Honourable William Pitt*, backing Irish independence and accusing Pitt of overseas warmongering in order to sustain domestic peace, was hot from the press at the time). Shortly after this encounter, Crabb Robinson labelled Drennan a writer of 'very superior merit', elaborating that his 'Letter to Pitt [...] is certainly an *admirable production* tho' *I think my friend* [sic] *the analytical reviewer*, has been a little *extravagant in his encomium*[.] *I hope you have it already* in the club at least'.<sup>59</sup> The reviewer of Drennan's pamphlet for Johnson's *Analytical Review* does indeed praise it so exceedingly that it counteracts the impression of a critical mind behind it. One reads here, for instance, that 'we have seldom, if ever, seen, in any human composition, so many beauties in so small extent'.<sup>60</sup> The 'club' mentioned is the Royston Book Club, for which Thomas Robinson regularly acquired books which his brother had recommended, and so Hazlitt's early opinions may well have had some influence there.

On the evening of Saturday 23 July 1808 the lugger *Black Joke* set sail from Falmouth, bound for Corunna and with Crabb Robinson on board. He was once more commissioned by the *Times*, in this case to report on the Peninsular War, and he was eventually forced to leave the area after the culmination of the tensions in the Battle of Corunna on 16 January 1809. Crabb Robinson quickly developed, as he described it in a voice echoing Hazlitt's morals in his essay 'On Good-nature', a 'Sympathy at the sufferings' and an 'admiration at the exertions of the Spaniards whose acts none but a Pedant can view as inferior to the famed examples of patriotism & self devotion of which ancient history is full'.<sup>61</sup> He viewed the support of the Spanish by the British forces as indispensable in the struggle for liberty and against the 'horrors of military slavery'. At the same time, Crabb Robinson still relished 'generous republican Sentiments' among the Spanish whenever

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56 HCR, Bundle 11.8, 18 March 1808, DWL.

57 HCR, Bundle 11.8, 8 May, 7 July 1807, DWL.

58 HCR to TR, 22 June 1808, Correspondence 1805–1808, Letter 142, DWL.

59 HCR to TR, 1799 (no exact date given), Correspondence 1725–1799, Letter 152, DWL.

60 [Anon.], 'Art. XII. A *Letter to the Right Hon. William Pitt*', *The Analytical Review* (January 1799), 154–8: 154.

61 HCR to TR, 27 December 1808, Correspondence 1805–1808, Letter 157/159, DWL.

he encountered them.<sup>62</sup> Having previously witnessed how the wounded from battles with the approaching French troops were brought into Corunna, Crabb Robinson also observed that 'In the late bloody engagements many here have lost their friends.'<sup>63</sup> To him, Napoleon was becoming not only the epitome of violent oppression and havoc, but also a turncoat and traitor to the cause of liberty, whilst patriotism and the love of humanity suggested themselves as perfectly compatible with the armed resistance against the 'Tyrant'. The fears thus affirmed and amplified – they had been engendered during Crabb Robinson's previous two visits to the continent – would come to stand irreconcilably between him and Hazlitt, despite their shared detestation of tyranny and mutual faith in true altruistic sentiment.

But for some time to come, the point of disagreement between Crabb Robinson and Hazlitt about what constituted tyranny remained negligible. Soon after his return from Corunna – he landed at Falmouth on 23 January 1809 – Crabb Robinson was back in London. His 1809 pocket diary reveals that he met Hazlitt, who had moved to Winterslow in the preceding autumn, at the Lambs' on 15 March. Six days later they visited Mrs. Godwin together, with whom Crabb Robinson discussed German literature.<sup>64</sup> In the diary's 'expenses' section for week 27 we then find the entry 'Hazlitt's *Spe* Eloquence of the British Senate', but without a related entry under any of the days. In fact, apart from the comments claiming that the *Eloquence* was the subject of his mediation with Johnson, there seems to be no surviving comment by Crabb Robinson on the work.

Now with the Fenchurch Street bookseller Samuel Tipper at the *London Review* and no longer at John Walter's *Times*, Crabb Robinson rendered Hazlitt another favour only a few months later, by recommending him for an assistant's position. On 1 December 1809 he wrote a letter to Hazlitt, now lost, which was answered immediately.<sup>65</sup> Hazlitt was overall not disinclined to accept, but had bigger plans. Aware of the possibility that his most recent authorial venture (the *Life* of Holcroft, who had died earlier that year) might offend the playwright Cumberland, Crabb Robinson's senior at the *London Review*, Hazlitt writes:

I am obliged to you for thinking of me for a coadjutor in the Review; & am willing to try what I can do in the way you proposed to the editor. I am only afraid I shall disgrace your recommendation, & shew that you have more good nature than discretion in your opinions of your friends. I shall have done Holcroft's *Life* in a fortnight when I shall bring it up to town, & it will then be time enough to talk of the book or books to be reviewed. [...] There is only one way in which the life of Holcroft can interfere with the review, which is that there are in a *Diary* of H.'s, which is to be put in as an Appendix, one or two most excellent stories about Cumberland, which I should be loth to

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62 Ibid, Letter 157/159.

63 HCR to TR, 27 November and 1 December 1808, Correspondence 1805–1808, Letter 156, DWL.

64 HCR, Bundle 11.9, 15 March 1809, DWL.

65 Ibid, 1 December 1809.

leave out, but which Cumberland, without being the most irritable man in the world, might be disposed to complain of.<sup>66</sup>

(Before Cumberland had the opportunity to be offended, however, it was Godwin's turn, when he read the passages concerning Mary Wollstonecraft and her lover Imlay after he had received Hazlitt's work on 9 January 1810.<sup>67</sup> Consequently, the publication of the *Life of Holcroft* was deferred until 1816.) In the passage above, Hazlitt implies, rather typically, that Crabb Robinson might want to avoid the impression of good nature succeeding over *truthful judgement* of character.<sup>68</sup> And he subsequently emphasizes his point by drawing on another meaning of the term 'discretion', namely that he himself is willing to surrender tactfulness to the significance of the anecdotes about Cumberland. Hazlitt thus splits 'discretion' into its opposing meanings of truth-enhancing and truth-blurring, making the former the aim and subject of his writing.

As far as Hazlitt's book is concerned, we find Crabb Robinson noting in his 1810 pocket diary under the acquisitions for week 34 (20 to 26 August) 'Holcrofts MS Memoir of his early youth & his journal'.<sup>69</sup> No other of Crabb Robinson's comments on this work from around that time survive, to my knowledge. On (re-)reading Hazlitt's *Memoirs of Thomas Holcroft*, however, just after its eventual publication, Crabb Robinson concluded in 1816 that 'the first part, by Holcroft himself, [was] very interesting from the vivacity and naïveté of the narrative of his early history', but that Hazlitt's was 'far less interesting'.<sup>70</sup> Whether or not this was the inevitable consequence of producing a more easily digestible biography despite the author's better knowledge of the facts it involved, Crabb Robinson missed what elsewhere he found so compelling in Hazlitt's works: the lively authenticity and the variety of effects it produced, even when he perceived these as disagreeable.

### Original talents and the struggle for a livelihood

Because of the failure of his recent labours to generate an income, Hazlitt's situation became increasingly precarious in 1810. The necessity not only to support himself but also his family imposed severe restrictions – most gravely, perhaps, on his confidence – as the material demands began to affect his psychological condition. Thus severely limited in his choice of composition, he turned to Crabb Robinson for advice on the demands of the book market. During a visit to London that year, he met Crabb Robinson on 25 February, and on the following day – back in Winterslow – wrote a short note that picks up on the matters discussed:

66 William Hazlitt to HCR, 4 December 1809, Correspondence 1809–1817, Letter 16, DWL. All of Hazlitt's letters to Crabb Robinson in this volume are printed in Percival Presland Howe, *The Life of William Hazlitt* (New York: Doran, 1922).

67 Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 130.

68 One definition of 'discretion', now obsolete, was the 'action of discerning or judging; judgement; decision, discrimination', according to the OED.

69 HCR, Bundle 11.10, DWL.

70 HCR, 'Diary' 5, 15 July 1816, DWL.

Mrs. Holcroft [...] was shewing me & praising a work called the Martyrs by the famous Chateau Briand, which I believe has not been translated. It was published 1809. [...] I was thinking that a translation may sell, & that it would possibly be in Tipper's way to engage in such a work. The subject is orthodox, & the style as fine as can be. If you could take the trouble to mention it to him, & he thought the plan feasible, I should be glad to attempt it at any rate you could pro[cure] for me, 2½ guineas, 2, or 1½ per sheet. One more push I must make, & then I hope to be afloat, at least for a good while to come. I had also before this last project started up, thought of turning the History of E. Philosophy into a volume of Essays on the subjects mentioned in the prospectus, making the history subservient to the philosophy, which I believe is what should do best, but I suspect that this is a subject to which Tipper would not very seriously incline his ear. I have in short many plots & projects in my head.<sup>71</sup>

Chateaubriand's stylistic finesse may have suggested itself to render the undertaking of such a translation as little tedious as possible, yet it would after all have been a rather mechanical 'push' beyond necessity and towards greater authorial freedom. The *London Review* was no longer in business,<sup>72</sup> and Hazlitt must have thought that the above-mentioned arrangement may also have sounded profitable to Tipper. But nothing came of it, and several years later, in 'his sour post-Waterloo mood', Hazlitt vented the antipathy towards Chateaubriand that had been building up despite any appreciation of his style, when he 'wrote a piece castigating' the 'royalist and politician' for 'shifting allegiance from Rousseau to Louis XVIII'.<sup>73</sup> Synchronizing truthfully his own steadfast Republicanism with Chateaubriand's orthodoxy (even if aided by the demands of a book market under the auspices of the Continental Blockade) would have been an unpromising venture from the start for Hazlitt – and a potential deterrent for his later work.

Crabb Robinson continued to comment on Hazlitt's struggle to make a living for many years to come – for instance on 10 March 1812, having received a letter from Hazlitt, when he noted that Hazlitt may be 'obliged to postpone his lectures'. Assuming that 'his debts oppress him so that he cannot proceed', Crabb Robinson wished he 'could afford him assistance, for I know no state of suffering more dreadful than that of indigent genius'.<sup>74</sup> Crabb Robinson, it ought to be remarked here, never claimed to possess any original talents himself. He did, however, have a sharp, unassuming ability to recognize such talents when he came across them. Hazlitt's, despite certain strictures on his writing, he never denied. And apart from the personal strains between them increasing almost proportionally to the military tensions on the Continent, he continued to support Hazlitt, if no longer unconditionally, then at least by those means he deemed sensible. On 28 September

71 William Hazlitt to HCR, Correspondence 1809-1817, Letter 20.b, DWL.

72 HCR, Bundle 11.10, 31 January 1810, DWL.

73 A. C. Grayling, *The Quarrel of the Age: The Life and Times of William Hazlitt* (London: Phoenix, 2000), 194.

74 HCR, 'Diary' 2, 10 March 1812, DWL.

1812, Crabb Robinson thus made 'A call on Dr. Stoddart to consult about Hazlitt & the getting him a Situation under Walter' at the *Times*, but two days later (aware now that Hazlitt had also contacted John Dyer Collier for a position at Perry's *Morning Chronicle*), Crabb Robinson refused to lend Hazlitt the £20 he had asked for, and some two weeks later, he questioned Hazlitt's 'power of acting prudently'.<sup>75</sup> He was nonetheless 'exceedingly glad to hear' that it was 'now in [Hazlitt's] power to live comfortably'.<sup>76</sup>

This arrangement, however, did not last, and on 17 November 1814 we find Crabb Robinson making further observations on the market's scorn for genius:

It is quite painful to witness the painful exertions for a livelyhood wch H. is condemned to make. And how strongly it shews that a modicum of mechanical marketable talent outweighs an ample endowment of original thought & the highest powers of intellect, when a man does not add to that endowment the other of making it turn to acco<sup>t</sup> How many men are there connected with Newspapers who live comfortably with not a tythe of H's powers as a writer.<sup>77</sup>

Crabb Robinson must have been all too painfully aware that previously, in his own activity as a 'literator', he may have been better predisposed than Hazlitt to make a living by writing, but that he would have become a second-rate writer at best.<sup>78</sup> Hazlitt, on the other hand, 'has a most powerful intellect & needs only encouragement to manifest this to the world by a work wch co<sup>d</sup> not be overlooked', Crabb Robinson notes on 29 April 1813.<sup>79</sup> He knew that Hazlitt had the talent that he lacked, a talent he would have desired to possess more than anything else. But that this power did not secure even a low level of subsistence, independent of the demands of the market, was hard to bear for Crabb Robinson. With an unsettling foresight, he thus noted, under 7 September 1815, that he feared to 'live

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75 Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 143–4; HCR 'Diary' 2, 10 October 1812, DWL.

76 HCR, 'Diary' 2, 10 October 1812, DWL.

77 HCR, 'Diary' 4, 17 November 1814, DWL.

78 HCR to TR, 27–28 November 1803, Bundle 3.A, Letter 35, DWL. It is in this earlier letter that Crabb Robinson most emphatically declares the absence of any 'spark of genius' in himself, and that he therefore intends to devote himself to continued study at Jena with the aim to 'compile some book of criticism or moral & metaphysical disquisition which, without making an epoch in literature, may serve to promote the good cause of Science and Truth'. Crabb Robinson relived the disappointment at his lesser original talents on 20 November 1821, while reading Hazlitt's essay 'On the Ignorance of the Learned', and he was not too proud to confront it: 'But it was with mere pain & with no disapprobation that I read a sentence this morning which goes home to my feelings: – "A loungeur who is ordinarily seen with a book in his hand, is (we may be almost sure) equally without the power or inclination to attend to what passes around him or in his own mind" – But having dismissed tho' with a struggle all hopes of reputation I can with tranquility read such a damning sentence – I find other truths equally striking and equally painful in the course of reading the volume' (HCR, 'Diary' 9, 20 November 1821, DWL).

79 HCR, 'Diary' 3, 29 April 1813, DWL.

to see [Hazlitt] reduced to want when he has exhausted the vendible produc<sup>s</sup> of his certainly very fine but not merchantable understand<sup>s</sup>.<sup>80</sup>

Crabb Robinson met Tipper regularly throughout the year 1810, buying books for him and submitting reviews to him.<sup>81</sup> The despondency at his own difficulty in supporting himself through writing alternated with hope whenever an opportunity to do so arose – even, and only briefly, at the *Quarterly Review*, whose unjustified attacks on Hazlitt he recognized and criticized as such despite their friendship being at its nadir.<sup>82</sup> Meanwhile, Crabb Robinson's backup plan – a career at the Bar – gradually consolidated. The last literary 'push' he made to keep afloat was the publication of his translation of Christian Lebrecht Heyne's contrived Persian tale *Amatonda*, with an introduction to the work of the Schlegels and with translations appended of select passages from Jean Paul.<sup>83</sup> The fable itself, whose 'moral excellence' Crabb Robinson cherished,<sup>84</sup> rebuts the promises of happiness made by third parties on the basis of exclusive social prestige: those of the sons of the impoverished Basra merchant, Bator, who pursue their own will, instead of the paths to military, religious, or artistic leadership designed for them by the magician Algol, find happiness. *Amatonda* thus endorses the 'pluck' (to borrow Pearson's term once more) to resist such promises in favour of a simpler truth in the happiness of equitable communal life. On Tuesday 6 November 1810 Crabb Robinson left the manuscript for Tipper to review.<sup>85</sup> It was published by Longman in the following year – and became a commercial failure.

Nor was Hazlitt's 'History of E[nglish] Philosophy' published in the manner outlined in the letter cited previously. Rather, after Hazlitt returned to London in 1811, he sent Crabb Robinson a short summary of the series of lectures he would commence in January 1812.<sup>86</sup> The year 1811 was moreover the year in which Crabb Robinson started to keep his main Diary, a landmark denoting his change from a fellow campaigner in letters to informal critical commentator. Hazlitt appears frequently from the start, and under 14 January 1812 Crabb Robinson records how he 'Went to Hazlitt's first lecture on the History of English Philosophy', in which

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80 HCR, 'Diary' 4, 7 September 1815, DWL.

81 HCR, Bundle 11.10, 17 April 1810, DWL. The accounts section of week 52 lists several books bought for Tipper.

82 Ibid, 28 March. HCR, 'Diary' 6, 24 October 1817, DWL: 'I lounged at the Surrey [sic] Institution and read a very bitter and scornful review of Hazlitt's Round Table. [...] The severity of the criticism has defeated its object in a great measure I have no doubt. The Quarterly exceeds the Edinburgh in acrimony and vulgarity'. HCR, 'Diary' 6, 10 June 1818, DWL (quoted from Morley, *HCR on Books and their Writers*, 223): 'lounged for an hour at the Surrey Institution reading the *Quarterly Review*, in which Hazlitt's lectures on Shakespeare are most unjustifiably abused, though he himself merits every reproach that can be made'. HCR, 'Diary' 7, 11 December 1819, DWL: 'I spent the latter part of the Evening at home reading the new Quarterly Review – a dull number – Hazlitt is scurvily treated, but it is mere retaliation and what he merits'.

83 Christian Lebrecht Heyne [Anton Wall], *Amatonda: A Tale, from the German of Anton Wall*, transl. by Henry Crabb Robinson (London: Longman, 1811).

84 HCR, *Amatonda*, xiv.

85 HCR, Bundle 11.10, 6 November 1810, DWL.

86 William Hazlitt to HCR, Correspondence 1809–1817, Letter 57, 29 October 1811, DWL.

'He read a sensible & excellent introduction on philosophy and on Hobbes,'<sup>87</sup> Crabb Robinson then gives a truthful account of the manner in which Hazlitt hurried through his first lecture without looking up at his audience. Both men's shared faith in the truth of compassion, however, explains why Crabb Robinson approved of Hazlitt's treatment of Hobbes, stressing that 'With all these exceptions to his lectures, as such, the matter was in general, as far as I could force my attention to comprehend very excellent.'<sup>88</sup>

### Concord, hatred, and fears

Crabb Robinson also went to Hazlitt's second lecture, delivered on 21 January 1812. In his Diary entry of the same day, he notes the much-improved presentation of the lecture, as well as the ovation Hazlitt received from his audience. The lecture's topic was Locke, and, in the light of the Preface to Tucker, it is not surprising that Kant and the formative power of the mind recur in Crabb Robinson's account. According to him, Hazlitt evidently meant to spread the 'important truth' that 'if the mind did not connect & bind to unity the variety of individuals presented to the Senses, there could be no whole no complex *One* in nature' – this 'the lecturer seemed to think could not be repeated too often.'<sup>89</sup> In the mind's active synthesis lies its power to generate truths that are inherently abstract, not in the concrete taking in of a multitude of individual fragments of experience. Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson agree that in that very space between the concrete yet unattainable object and its abstraction, bridged by the mind's active projections, the altruistic impulse towards the other person comes to pass. Presuming the immediate correspondence of the object and its mental image would not grant this altercentric impulse the space to occur.

But against the backdrop of the question about the very nature of this impulse, their friendship cooled down – and Napoleon came to stand as a symbol for the schism. On 16 December 1813 Crabb Robinson found Hazlitt at the Lambs', allegedly 'over bearing & rude.'<sup>90</sup> An argument on politics ensued, and Crabb Robinson subsequently reflected that Hazlitt, in an unrivalled manner, 'mixes passion & ill humour & personal feelings in his judgments on public events & characters.' Thus, 'He always vindicates Buonap[arte] not because he is insensible to his enormous crimes, but out of spight to the Tories of this country And the friends of the War of 1792' – to which Crabb Robinson could not refrain from adding that only fools run into the opposite direction when trying to avoid a mistake.<sup>91</sup> This contrast sums up their differing stances towards truth and sentiment: for Hazlitt, the old monarchies, as the cause of the inequality that led to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, needed to be rooted out for the effects of altruism to unfold. For Crabb Robinson, the unjustifiable evils institutionalized in the old monarchies

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87 HCR, 'Diary' 2, 14 January 1812, DWL.

88 Ibid, 14 January 1812.

89 Ibid, 21 January 1812.

90 HCR, 'Diary' 3, 16 December 1813, DWL.

91 Ibid, 16 December 1813.

were outweighed by Napoleon's usurpation of a people's self-governance and the subsequent devastation of large parts of Europe. Crabb Robinson put his faith into the ability of natural altruism to grow and do away gradually with the evils of old, once Napoleon had been defeated. Hazlitt's method for truth in sentiment to unfold is the uncompromising erasure of old ideological appropriation, whereas Crabb Robinson's is the accommodating, gradual overgrowth of ideological ruins for the same end. Hazlitt is thus truly radical, but this does not simply render Crabb Robinson conservative: both strive to see social progress and the overcoming of the evils of old inequality, and they base this shared aspiration on a like metaphysical footing.

That art too plays a similar, predominant role in the advancement of sentiment emerges from Crabb Robinson's remarks of 20 October 1814. During a ride to Newmarket on a rainy day, he 'could read nothing but the *Champion*', in which he 'found some interesting articles by *Hazlitt* – Especially one to show the insignificance of Academies in the improvement of the arts.'<sup>92</sup> Convinced of Hazlitt's argument, Crabb Robinson reasons that 'The arts are not like the Sciences susceptible of infinite improvement[.] The great masters studied nature, & it is by the study of nature only & not of the great masters themselves that other masters are to be produced.'<sup>93</sup> Art, rather strikingly, and departing from Kant, is a realm detached only from the necessity of the individual, not of the collective. By its recourse to the truth of sentiment, it originates in the ancients but at the same time, it is also always tied in with the novelty arising from the ever-recurring study of nature. Art may therefore not be 'susceptible to infinite improvement', but it possesses profound moral relevance in the revolving study of the human condition. When, for example, not long after Hazlitt's death Crabb Robinson read his *Conversations of Northcote*, he did 'not believe that Boswell gives so much good talk in an equal quantity of any part of his *Life of Johnson*'.<sup>94</sup> He gauged that most people in his time would think this an 'outrageous proof of bad taste on [his] part', but was relieved that he himself could 'relish novelty' and was 'not yet a *laudator temporis acti*'.<sup>95</sup>

On 15 February and 15 April 1815 Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson carried forward their dispute on Napoleon, both times at dinner parties held by their mutual friend, Thomas Alsager. On the latter date, two months before the Battle of Waterloo, the atmosphere had become increasingly heated, and the disputants' positions more entrenched. The most telling passage in Crabb Robinson's *Diary* on his and Hazlitt's divergent feelings on political matters was written under these circumstances. The entry begins and ends thus:

When pressed, [Hazlitt] does not deny what is bad in the *Char*<sup>r</sup> of Buon: & yet he triumphs & rejoices in the late events. H. & myself once felt alike on politics & now our hopes & fears are directly opposed. [...] Not that either I am indiff

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92 HCR, 'Diary' 4, 20 October 1814, DWL.

93 *Ibid.*, 20 October 1814.

94 Quoted from Morley, *HCR on Books and their Writers*, 397.

95 *Ibid.*, 397.

to the gov<sup>t</sup> wch the successful Kings of Europe may establish Or that H has lost all love for liberty – But his *hatred*, & my *fears* [predominate] & absorb all weaker impressions – This I believe to be the great difference bet<sup>n</sup> us.<sup>96</sup>

The passions of hatred (of past evils) and fear (of future ones), revolving around a shared longing for liberty, override Hazlitt's and Crabb Robinson's equally shared faith in the truth of edifying moral sentiment. As the sheer observation of events proves inconclusive, projections of truth diverge and manifest themselves in a 'great difference' on common ground. The 'old governors' are still the 'common foe' to both, yet whether Napoleon imitates them in order to eradicate or duplicate them remains open to debate.

Nevertheless, Crabb Robinson's appreciation of Hazlitt's work persisted. Nine days after this dispute, he read Hazlitt's article on Frances Burney's *The Wanderer* in the *Edinburgh Review*, praising his 'discrimination between Fielding and Le Sage' as 'par[ticu]larly excellent', and his remarks on Cervantes, Richardson, and Smollett as 'also very capital'.<sup>97</sup> On 9 May 1815, Crabb Robinson then followed Wordsworth's recommendation that he read his 'Yew Trees' and 'A Night-piece', although without discerning the imaginative power the poet claimed to have displayed in them. Crabb Robinson invokes Hazlitt for an explanation:

W. himself as Hazlitt has well observed has a pride in deriv<sup>g</sup> no aid from his subject – It is the mere power which he is conscious of exerting, in which he delights not the production of a work in which men rejoice on acco<sup>t</sup> of the sympathies & sensibilities it excites in them.<sup>98</sup>

Crabb Robinson, very much like Hazlitt, admired Wordsworth's exceptional ability to generate 'sympathies and sensibilities' or truth in disinterested sentiment, an achievement outweighing, as he saw it, any underlying vanity on the poet's part. This effect of Wordsworth's poetry on the reading public mattered more than anything else to Crabb Robinson, and he thought that it should stand detached from, and untainted by, any egocentric traits of its creator. On 29 May 1818 Crabb Robinson hence remarked that Hazlitt, in his 'lecture on the Poets,' 'Praises Wordsworth warmly but in a sentence or two, while he dwells with malignity on his real & imputed faults'.<sup>99</sup> From Crabb Robinson's point of view, such severe criticism was inappropriate since it missed what really mattered, namely the predominant effect on the reader. Hazlitt also denied the policing sway of the author's intention over her or his compositions, yet at the same time did not absolve the author from the moral discourse of the work.

This circumstance, rather than the charge of uncritical grovelling to Wordsworth, explains why Crabb Robinson reacted with such vigour to Hazlitt's

96 HCR, 'Diary' 4, 15 April 1815, DWL.

97 Ibid, 24 April 1815.

98 Ibid, 9 May 1815.

99 HCR, 'Diary' 6, 29 May 1818, DWL.

renewed attack on the poet, published in the *Examiner* on 22 December 1816. Before (and in fact just as much as after) reaching this watershed in their personal relationship, Crabb Robinson, on 27 December 1820, observed on his habit of reading Hazlitt's work that 'as it is, I read all he writes with zest'.<sup>100</sup> On 12 May 1816, for instance, he perused 'Hazlitt's review of Schlegel's lectures on the drama,' declaring it 'a capital article' and discerning that 'H's own share of the excellent matter is by no means small'.<sup>101</sup> On 14 October 1816, at Norwich, he introduced William Taylor, the German scholar and radical, to Hazlitt's writings, eliciting the verdict that they were 'masterpieces of banter' from Taylor.<sup>102</sup> This followed the altercation between Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson at Basil Montagu's on the night Hazlitt's *Examiner* article on Wordsworth was published, during which Hazlitt, supported by Montagu, defended his actions by stating that he thought it 'useful to expose people who otherwise would gain credit by canting and hypocrisy'.<sup>103</sup> Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson did not speak (apart from a few cool greetings when they were inevitable) for a little over four years to come, and even thereafter things were never quite the same as they once were.

But Crabb Robinson continued to relish Hazlitt's wit and discernment, for instance, when, with silent approbation, on 4 December 1817, he 'recollected hearing Hazlitt say that W[ordsworth] would not forgive a single censure mingled with however great a mass of eulogy'.<sup>104</sup> He also went to Hazlitt's 1818 lectures at the Surrey Institution, where the dispute on Wordsworth was continued. On 24 February, he 'lost [his] temper and hissed' at the contempt with which Hazlitt treated Wordsworth,<sup>105</sup> scolding Hazlitt on his way out of the lecture theatre for what he perceived as his indecency. Soon afterwards he regretted the impetuosity of his reaction, but still could not help feeling that he had 'uttered nothing but the truth,' and that Hazlitt had 'abused Wordsworth in a vulgar style, imputing to him the mere desire of representing himself as a superior man'.<sup>106</sup> Again, Hazlitt critiques the appropriation of poetry where it contravenes altercentricity, whereas Crabb Robinson believes that Hazlitt's criticism subordinates the overall effect of Wordsworth's poetry to irrelevant, and not necessarily actual, qualities of Wordsworth's character. When, however, Crabb Robinson read the *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* on 16 September 1819, Hazlitt's 'treatment of Johnson' made him 'forget his unamiable qualities,' and he deemed these passages 'the finest parts of this work'.<sup>107</sup> And on 20 November 1821, Crabb Robinson 'Read Hazlitt's *Table Talk*,' finding it 'a delightful volume' which nonetheless 'frequently annoys & disgusts me'.<sup>108</sup> Between such love

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100 HCR, 'Diary' 8, 27 December 1820, DWL.

101 HCR, 'Diary' 5, 12 May 1816, DWL.

102 HCR, 'Travel Diary' 4, DWL. Quoted from Morley, *HCR on Books and their Writers*, 196.

103 HCR, 'Diary' 5, DWL.

104 HCR, 'Diary' 6, 4 December 1817, DWL.

105 *Ibid.*, 24 February 1818.

106 *Ibid.*, 24 February 1818.

107 HCR, 'Diary' 7, 16 September 1819, DWL.

108 HCR, 'Diary' 9, 20 November 1821, DWL.

and hatred, delight and disgust, Crabb Robinson and Hazlitt struggle to distinguish the truth in sentiment in which both had unremitting faith.

One 'real' fault of Wordsworth's was, for Crabb Robinson, the egocentricity mentioned above, yet this still did not mean that Wordsworth 'hated' anything that may have posed a threat to his greatness. Hence, after reading the *Spirit of the Age* on 11 July 1825, Crabb Robinson perceived and appreciated the 'amende honorable' made by Hazlitt that did away with one of the faults 'imputed' to Wordsworth in the lecture 'On the Living Poets' in 1816. In his chapter on Wordsworth in *The Spirit of the Age*, Hazlitt publicly retracted his former accusation that 'Mr W: hates the Venus de Medici, hates etc etc', which Crabb Robinson, taking his cue from Hazlitt, hoped was 'a mere jeu d'esprit [of Hazlitt's] for it is not true'.<sup>109</sup> Even on Napoleon, so far respectively the object of idolatry and disdain to Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson, there was a conciliatory tendency between the two towards the end of Hazlitt's life, as Crabb Robinson's Diary entry for 24 May 1828, reflects:

I spent the forenoon as several others in reading Hazlitt's *Napoleon*. As a narrative writer he is worthless, but his powers of thought are admirable. His remarks, for instance, on the death of Louis XVI, on Robespierre and his ferocity, on Buonaparte's adoption of the Concordat and his conduct towards the Catholic religion are excellent. I have had infinitely more pleasure in this book than in Walter Scott's *Life of Napoleon*.<sup>110</sup>

For once, we find Crabb Robinson objecting to the technicalities and style of Hazlitt's writing. The first two volumes of Hazlitt's biography of Napoleon had appeared in print at the time of Crabb Robinson's comment, and his remarks on the *terreur* and regicide explain themselves in the light of the points on other-centeredness made so far. Moreover, though, towards the end of the second volume it becomes clear why Crabb Robinson so unmistakably preferred Hazlitt's work over Scott's depiction, published in the preceding year, of Bonaparte as the gentle, philanthropic patriot: granting Napoleon 'some latent feelings of religion', Hazlitt here argues that he nevertheless exploited Catholicism, through the Concordat of 1801, 'as an engine of power' and popular appeasement.<sup>111</sup> Hazlitt allows enough space for the religious sentiment Crabb Robinson held on to ever after his conversion through Kantianism, and at the same time criticizes the ideological appropriation of it. In this outlook, Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson stood united one last time.

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109 HCR, 'Diary' 11, 11 July 1825, DWL.

110 Quoted from Morley, *HCR on Books and their Writers*, 356. Hazlitt's original comment in the lecture 'On the Living Poets', begins 'He hates all science and all art', and ends with 'he hates the Venus of Medicis' – See *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe 21 vols (London: J.M. Dent, 1930–4), V. 164. For Hazlitt's retraction, see *The Spirit of the Age in Complete Works*, XI, 93–4.

111 William Hazlitt, *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte*, 4 vols (London: Hunt and Clarke, 1828), II, 415.

## 1828 AND ALL THAT

### Hazlitt, Godwin, and the Legacies of Dissent

*James Grande*

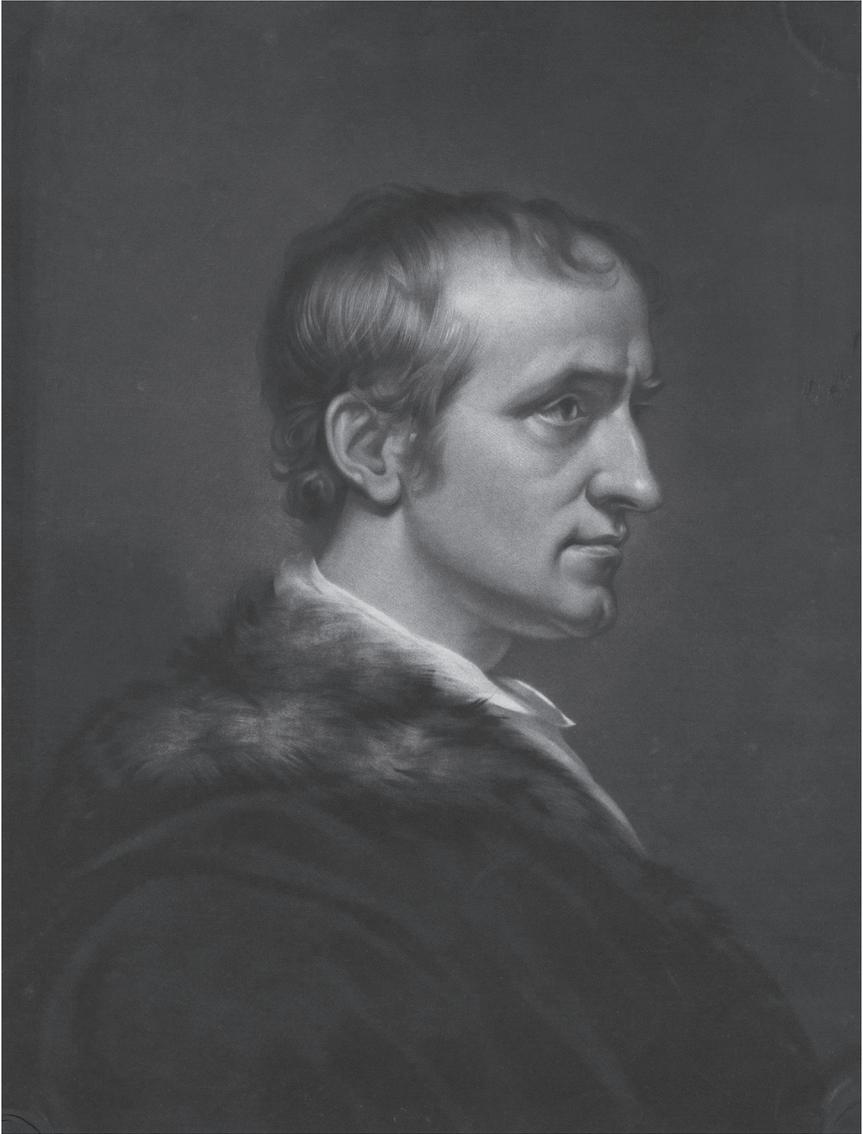
Hazlitt and William Godwin shared a background in the religious and intellectual milieu of eighteenth-century Dissent.<sup>1</sup> Their fathers each had a turn ministering to the Dissenting congregation at Wisbech in Cambridgeshire, Hazlitt's mother remembered Godwin as a child in Wisbech, and the connection between the two families stretched back a further two generations. Godwin and Hazlitt were educated at London's Dissenting academies – Hoxton, and New College, Hackney, respectively – and both disappointed their families by failing to discover a vocation in the ministry.<sup>2</sup> Their first meeting in 1794, when Hazlitt was just fifteen years old and Godwin basking in the fame of *Political Justice*, and about to publish *Caleb Williams*, was the beginning of a thirty-year friendship. But it was also in many ways an unlikely friendship: as well as the twenty-two years that separated them in age, there was a gulf in literary and political temperament between them.

In this essay, I want to use their friendship – and, in particular, the end of this friendship – to think about religious history and Dissenting culture from the late 1810s to the early 1830s. In these years, Reformation historiography had an important bearing on debates about Catholic emancipation, while the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 both extended civil liberties to Dissenters and altered the self-image of Dissent as a largely independent community, defined by its opposition to the Anglican establishment. Religious history became a tool for understanding and revising religious and political freedoms, which in turn carried important implications for the literary culture associated with Rational

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1 My understanding of Hazlitt and Godwin owes a great deal to reading and talking to Stephen Burley, Kevin Gilmartin, Josephine McDonagh, Jon Mee, David O'Shaughnessy, Mark Philp and Duncan Wu. I am especially grateful to Greg Dart, David Higgins, Uttara Natarajan, and James Whitehead for their comments on an earlier version of this essay, presented at the 2012 Hazlitt Day-School, and to the British Academy, which made the writing of this paper possible.

2 Stephen Burley's research on Hazlitt and New College, Hackney, has emphasized the 'profound significance of his early years within the tightly-knit networks of radical Protestant Dissent' – "A Slaughter-House of Christianity": A Short History of New College, Hackney, *The Hazlitt Review*, 5 (2012), 55–9: 55. On the early years of the Hazlitt-Godwin relationship, see Burley, 'First Acquaintances: Hazlitt, Godwin, and the Trials of Authorship', *Bodleian Library Record*, 24.1 (April 2011), 66–72.



William Godwin by George Dawe, after James Northcote, mezzotint (1802) © National Portrait Gallery, London

Dissent. The transitions of these years are felt in Hazlitt and Godwin's writings and across a wide range of genres, including histories, lectures, essays and diaries. I am particularly interested in the evidence of Godwin's recently published diary, which presents an assiduous record of everyone he met, all that he read and wrote, every play and exhibition he saw and, often obliquely, more personal events. While the early years – corresponding to Godwin's brief period of fame in the 1790s – have been most extensively mined by literary historians, the latter parts of the diary are just as detailed and interesting. As a literary genre, the diary carries a strong Dissenting history, embodying a Puritan practice of continual self-examination in search of signs of divine election. The residual Puritanism of Godwin's diary makes it an invaluable record of Dissenting culture, while the elegiac mode of Hazlitt's late essays represents a different kind of autobiographical writing, offering an alternative perspective on Dissent.

Godwin's and Hazlitt's friendship came to an abrupt end in the mid-1820s. Hazlitt's biographers once believed this was due to his decidedly ambivalent portrayal of Godwin in *The Spirit of the Age*, passing from 'the very zenith of a sultry and unwholesome popularity' to 'the serene twilight of a doubtful immortality' (xi, 16).<sup>3</sup> In this portrait, Hazlitt describes *Political Justice* as 'a metaphysical and logical commentary on some of the most beautiful and striking texts of Scripture', a wilfully quixotic reading of Godwin's emphasis on moral duty (xi, 19). Hazlitt writes that, 'in private, the author of *Political Justice* at one time reminded those who knew him of the metaphysician engrafted on the Dissenting Minister', but also goes on to criticize Godwin's elevation of reason over sense, custom, habit, and local attachment (xi, 27).

However, as Duncan Wu has shown, the rift in fact began in July 1826 when Godwin read another, much more hostile essay in *The Plain Speaker*. 'On the Qualifications Necessary to Success in Life' had first been published six years earlier, with some words redacted, but Godwin still easily identifiable, in *The London Magazine*.<sup>4</sup> In the revised version, the section on Godwin begins:

The well known author of the 'Enquiry concerning Political Justice,' in conversation has not a word to throw at a dog [...] He says little, and that little were better left alone, being both dull and nonsensical; his talk is as flat as a pancake, there is no leaven in it, he has not dough enough to make a loaf and a cake; he has no idea of any thing till he is wound up, like a clock, not to speak, but to write, and then he seems like a person risen from sleep or from the dead. (xii, 198)

As Wu observes, the most that can be said for this is that it appears in a volume dedicated to plain speaking and both writers had inherited 'a dissenting creed that

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

4 This persuasive version of events is given by Duncan Wu in *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 383–5, and, more fully, in Wu, 'Godwin and Hazlitt Estranged', *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, ns 129 (January 2005), 2–8.

placed a premium on honesty and forthrightness.<sup>5</sup> However, Godwin and Hazlitt's Dissenting education also set great store by conversation, as a dynamic, dialectical pursuit of truth. Godwin had written in *Political Justice*, 'if there be such a thing as truth, it must infallibly be struck out by the collision of mind with mind', a process enshrined in reading but even more immediately in conversational exchange.<sup>6</sup> It was no use Hazlitt saying that Godwin was a tedious talker, but a great writer: Godwin's life had been as dedicated to conversation – with writers, artists, scientists and politicians – as it had been to writing.<sup>7</sup> Coming in his seventieth year, the slur was unforgiveable.

Wu reads the episode as evidence of Hazlitt's 'self-destructive instinct', which led him to sacrifice a thirty-year friendship for a good joke.<sup>8</sup> From this point on, Hazlitt and Godwin would continue to read each other's work, move in the same circles but avoid direct contact. There were only two further meetings between them, accidental, and presumably frosty, encounters in 1829 when they happened to visit James Northcote's studio at the same time. Godwin glosses these in his diary as 'adv. Hazlit [sic]', using his Latin abbreviation for an unexpected, and no doubt embarrassing and unwelcome, encounter.<sup>9</sup>

### Reformation histories

Hazlitt and Godwin can be closely aligned as historians of the Protestant Reformation, which they both interpret as the beginning of modernity. In the first of his eight-part series, *On the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth*, delivered at the end of 1819 at the Surrey Institution, Blackfriars, and published in early 1820, Hazlitt explores how the late sixteenth century produced such 'a bold, vigorous, independent race of thinkers' (vi, 175). Shakespeare is just 'one of a race of giants', who were the product of a particular time, place, and spirit: 'the mind of their country was great in them, and it prevailed' (vi, 180, 175). The biblical, pulpit cadences build to a crescendo as Hazlitt describes the 'first cause' of this unrivalled period in English literature as the 'Reformation, which had just then taken place':

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5 Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 385.

6 William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 2 vols (London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1793), I, 21.

7 See, for discussion of conversation in relation to both writers, Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community, 1762–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Chapter 3, 'Critical Conversation in the 1790s: Godwin, Hays, and Wollstonecraft', and Chapter 6, 'Hazlitt, Hunt, and Cockney Conversability'. Mee argues that the culture of Rational Dissent advocated a model of 'conversation as a form of strenuous intellectual exchange', one that 'privileged candour and sincerity over polish and politeness' (140).

8 Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 385.

9 *The Diary of William Godwin*, ed. by Victoria Myers, David O'Shaughnessy and Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford Digital Library, 2010), 4 February 1829 and 25 October 1829, <http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>. Subsequent references to this edition will be given by bracketed dates in the main body of the text. I am grateful to the editors and to the Leverhulme Trust for the studentship I held on this project between 2007 and 2010.

This event gave a mighty impulse and increased activity to thought and inquiry, and agitated the inert mass of accumulated prejudices throughout Europe. It toppled down the full-grown, intolerable abuses of centuries at a blow; heaved the ground from under the feet of bigoted faith and slavish obedience; and the roar and dashing of opinions, loosened from their accustomed hold, might be heard like the noise of an angry sea, and has never yet subsided [...] public opinion was in a state of projection. Liberty was held out to all to think and speak the truth. (vi, 181-2)

Hazlitt's rhetoric here reaches into hyperbole and he is of course playing to the gallery: this is the first lecture of eight, and he wanted his audience to come back the next week. But there is no reason to doubt his sincerity as he argues, 'the translation of the Bible was the chief engine in the great work [...] It gave a *mind* to the people, by giving them common subjects of thought and feeling [...] it created endless diversity and collision of opinion' (vi, 181-2). These lines contain key words in Hazlitt's cultural and political vocabulary: the vernacular Bible is valued for democratizing religion, opening it up to the people as a source of both 'common subjects' and 'collision of opinion'. While the lecture is sympathetic to Christianity – though with repeated parenthetical asides about 'leaving religious faith quite out of the question' – the main advantage of a vernacular Bible seems to be that it gives people something in common to argue about. The lecture moves on to the translations of classical literature and the 'unusual *impetus*' given by 'the discovery of the New World, and the reading of voyages and travels' (vi, 187). The grit in the oyster is the survival of superstition, savagery and chivalry, remnants of an old order that was still palpable for Elizabethan writers. Overall, however, this is a progressive, even Whiggish, narrative of print, liberty, and English Protestantism.

Godwin's diary shows that he heard Hazlitt make the connection between the Protestant Reformation and Elizabethan drama: he attended the first lecture at the Surrey Institution on 5 November 1819, as well as the second and eighth lectures in the series. By comparison, he had attended seven out of eight of Hazlitt's series on the English poets, and three out of eight on the English comic writers in 1818. In the latter series, he had listened to Hazlitt pay extravagant tribute to him at the end of his sixth lecture, including a description of *Caleb Williams* as 'utterly unlike any thing else that ever was written [...] one of the most original as well as powerful productions in the English language' (vi, 131).

Two years after Hazlitt's death, Godwin echoed his Reformation narrative in an eight-page manuscript, entitled 'Prospectus of a History of the Protestant Reformation in England', and dated, 'Sep. 22, 1832'. His diary shows him steadily writing the 'Prospectus', designed to interest a publisher in the project, over six consecutive days, carefully recording the number of pages he had written at the beginning of each day's entry. The 'Prospectus' begins:

The grand characteristic of the Protestant Reformation is that it was the dawn of intellectual liberty to man. The human mind had been lethargised for ages. Not that it had been wholly without activity: it was ingenious, persevering &

indefatigable within certain limits; but its faculties were in fetters; a mighty & powerful circle was drawn round them, & beyond that circle they were not permitted to expatriate. This is in direct contradiction to the wholesome condition of mind. Thought should be free as air; it should have no limit to its flights; the grand characteristic of a sound intellect is a sober & deliberate daring; that it should fearlessly open new veins of enquiry.<sup>10</sup>

Such enquiry, Godwin writes, leads to progressive improvement over the generations, a prospect opened up by the Protestant Reformation and consistent with the argument he had laid out in *Political Justice* four decades earlier. He describes ‘ingenuousness, sincerity, & freedom of communication & speech’ as ‘the genuine element of man; & without them we can never become the noble & glorious beings which our nature has fitted us to be’. With echoes of Milton’s *Areopagitica*, these qualities are also ‘the requisite preliminaries to give value to the freedom of the press. If we have not sound & energetic thoughts to communicate, it is of little use that we should possess the prerogative to print them.’ In outlining the scope of the history, Godwin writes, it will ‘be incumbent on the philosophical historian’ to ‘make a sound estimate of the wisdom or folly, the benefits or injury that accrued to society at large’ from monastic institutions, a question which ‘will include that of celibacy considered as a religious principle’. His philosophical history will also consider religious martyrdom and ‘the characters & motives of the persons who took a leading part in the question’:

When however we have laid it down as a principle, that the Protestant Reformation is the most important revolution & the greatest benefit that has been imparted to man since the commencement of the Christian era, it is by this concession rendered tenfold interesting to us to enquire by what means this revolution was brought about, & what sort of men they were by whose instrumentality it was effected. ‘The web of our life,’ as our great poet says, ‘is of a mingled yarn, good & ill together; our virtues would be proud, if our faults whipped them not; & our crimes would despair, if they were not cherished by our virtues.’ Great & glaring errors were no doubt committed in the commencement & progress of the Protestant Reformation; atrocious crimes were perpetrated, & unspeakable calamity was inflicted on many; & it not infrequently happened that the persons who were the instruments of securing to us the most inestimable benefit, were stained with vice, & actuated by motives the most sordid & base.<sup>11</sup>

A few days after he had finished the proposal, his daughter visited and Godwin’s diary records, ‘MWS [Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley] calls (read Reformation)’ (28 September). Two days later, Mary Shelley dined at his house and he read her

10 William Godwin, ‘Prospectus of a History of the Reformation in England. Sept. 22, 1832’, MS. Abinger c. 29, fols. 86–89, Bodleian Library, Oxford. I am grateful to the Bodleian Library for permission to quote from this manuscript.

11 Ibid.

another prospectus, this time for a new edition of *Political Justice*. He twice called on the publisher Charles Ollier on the subject of 'Prospectuses' (9 October and 14 December), but neither the 'History of the Protestant Reformation in England' nor the projected fourth edition of *Political Justice* was ever completed. However, I do not want to suggest that Godwin's proposed *Reformation* is any great loss to the historiography of the Reformation. Posterity has generally regarded Godwin as a better philosopher and novelist than historian: as Hazlitt wrote of Godwin's *History of the Commonwealth*, 'his style creeps, and hitches in dates and authorities' (xvi, 408). The first volume of Pamela Clemit's edition of Godwin's correspondence includes a letter Godwin wrote to try and interest the bookseller George Robinson in a history of the Roman republic, as a follow-up to *Political Justice*. Fortunately, Robinson declined, and Godwin started work on *Caleb Williams*.<sup>12</sup>

However, Godwin's projected history is interesting for the way it echoes the narrative he had heard Hazlitt invoke in his lectures on Elizabethan drama. Godwin and Hazlitt both held a classic Dissenting view of the Reformation as the beginning of free speech, free thought, and the free press. However, Godwin's diary also suggests that he was responding much more directly to another, antagonistic and bestselling, narrative of the Reformation in William Cobbett's *History of the Protestant 'Reformation' in England and Ireland*. Godwin read Cobbett's *Protestant 'Reformation'* in 1829, as the bill for Catholic emancipation was being debated in parliament. He re-read it over four days in September 1832, finished it on 16 September, and began planning his own, rival history the following day.

Cobbett's *Protestant 'Reformation'* strongly contests progressive narratives of the English Reformation, presenting it instead as the beginning of a process of inexorable decline. For Cobbett, medieval England was not only more populous, but in every way a more prosperous and more benevolent country. 'Reformation' is in inverted commas because for Cobbett what began in the sixteenth century was the very antithesis of reform: instead, it signalled the beginning of a relentless system of degradation, replacing monastic charity with the Elizabethan Poor Laws, benevolent communities with a fraudulent idea of individual freedom, local autonomy with central government, and eventually producing such modern evils as the national debt, political economy, paper money, and potatoes. 'That Protestant Religion,' Cobbett writes, 'which has about forty different sects, each at open war with all the rest [...] this new religion began in beastly lust, and was, 'established by plunder, by tyranny, by axes, by gallowses, by gibbets and by racks.'<sup>13</sup> In Cobbett's revisionist history, Mary I is 'the honest, the virtuous, the patriotic [...] Mary!' and Elizabeth I 'a gross, libidinous, nasty, shameless old woman.'<sup>14</sup> As the Unitarian *Monthly Repository* wrote in its review of the first letters, they 'are in the writer's usual style; English, forcible, vulgar, droll, violent and abusive.'<sup>15</sup>

12 William Godwin to George Robinson, 29 March 1793 in Pamela Clemit (ed), *The Letters of William Godwin: Volume 1, 1778–1797* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 80–2.

13 William Cobbett, *A History of the Protestant 'Reformation'* in *William Cobbett: Selected Writings*, ed. by Leonora Natrass, 6 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), V, 236.

14 Ibid, 191, 199.

15 *Monthly Repository*, 2 January 1825.

Cobbett's history was first published in sixteen monthly, threepenny numbers, between 1824 to 1826 and then as a single volume. By the beginning of the 1830s Cobbett boasted that it had sold 700,000 copies, to become 'unquestionably the book of greatest circulation in the whole world, the Bible only excepted'.<sup>16</sup> The narrative it popularized is the antithesis of Hazlitt's and Godwin's historiography, and, having re-read Cobbett's history over the preceding days, Godwin no doubt had Cobbett firmly in his sights as he wrote:

The history of the Protestant Reformation has hitherto been written ~~for the most part~~ altogether in a spirit of party: the authors who have treated of it have looked only on one side of the picture, & have seen every event that occurred, & every person concerned in the events, through a false medium, & it in exact agreement with the distorted preconceptions with which they sat down to write.

It is undoubtedly much to be desired that an author should be found, qualified to judge of & to represent these things truly, who should be enlisted in no party, & who, at the same time that he was not/ unimpressed with a sense of the inestimable good [^ benefit] that was effected [^ obtained] (for, if he were, he would be unworthy of [^ incompetent to] the task devolved on him), should yet impartially weigh the good & the ill means which were in turn employed, the calamities which attended this revolution, & their extent, & should duly estimate the characters of the principal actors, the vices & ~~the~~ profligacy of some, & the heroism & self-devotion of others, mixed, as heroism is too apt to be, with grievous weaknesses & gross inconsistency.

The hesitations, deletions, and interlineations show Godwin trying to retain a position of impartiality as he describes the ideal historian of the period. However, the manuscript suggests that Godwin would have written an account that was antithetical to, but just as partisan as, Cobbett's *Protestant Reformation*. Where Cobbett identified the end of an idealized, harmonious medieval society, Godwin, like Hazlitt, found the beginnings of an increasingly egalitarian and secular modernity. In his *Life of Napoleon*, Hazlitt had described the French Revolution 'as a remote but inevitable result of the invention of the art of printing' (xiii, 38). Both he and Godwin viewed the Reformation as the beginning of an epoch they were still living through, a long revolutionary era that began with print and Protestantism.

### Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts

A disinterested account of the Reformation was especially unlikely in the 1820s and 1830s, when interpretations of the Reformation had a strong bearing on contemporary politics. Cobbett's figures for his own sales should be treated with

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16 William Cobbett, *Advice to Young Men and (Incidentally) to Young Women in the Middle and Higher Ranks of Life* (London: H. Frowde, 1829), paragraph 4.

some caution, although the *Protestant 'Reformation'* was undoubtedly a widely circulated text, often credited with helping to sway public opinion towards Catholic emancipation and even, by Raymond Williams, with 'that idealization of the Middle Ages which is so characteristic of nineteenth-century social criticism'.<sup>17</sup> Godwin's first reading of this history during the progress of Catholic emancipation through parliament reinforces the sense of its currency at this particular moment. However, while the link between Cobbett's history and Catholic emancipation has often been made, the relationship between Hazlitt's and Godwin's progressive view of the Reformation and the 1828 Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts is much less clear.

The Corporation Act (1661) and Test Act (1673) had long prohibited anyone who refused Anglican communion from holding municipal, civil, or military office or taking degrees at the universities, effectively making Dissenters second-class citizens. The campaign for repeal had been a unifying cause for Dissenters in the late eighteenth century: on 13 February 1790, Godwin entered 'Dine with the Anti-tests' and recorded a long list of people who attended a public dinner held at the London Tavern by the Friends to the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, addressed by Charles James Fox. The following month, Fox's motion for Repeal was defeated in Parliament. A few years later, when Hazlitt 'was about fourteen,' he listened to 'a dispute one day after meeting, between my father and an old lady of the congregation, respecting the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts and the limits of religious toleration,' which he later identified as 'the first time I ever attempted to think' (xix, 302). Writing about his father in 'My First Acquaintance with Poets,' he described 'the only converse that he loved' as 'the talk about disputed texts of Scripture and the cause of civil and religious liberty' – a kind of conversation all too rare at Wem (xvii, 110). For Hazlitt, as Stanley Jones writes, 'civil and religious liberty were to be the watchwords of his public hopes'.<sup>18</sup>

On 26 February 1828, Lord John Russell ambushed Wellington's new government by introducing a bill to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts, following a vigorous public campaign orchestrated by the Unitarian MP for Norwich, William Smith, leader of the Protestant Dissenting Deputies. It is clear that Godwin, who maintained close links with the Norwich Dissenters, knew William Smith, and he appears over twenty times in the diary, including an exchange of correspondence in 1808 and 1809. However, despite this connection with Smith, and his long-standing commitment to Repeal, Godwin fails to record Russell's bill in his diary. He also fails to note any of the subsequent parliamentary debates on the issue over the next few months, which finally delivered the Corporation and Test Acts Repeal Bill. This landmark victory for Dissenters attracted relatively little attention at the time: as Boyd Hilton observes, Russell had caught Wellington and Peel, Home Secretary and leader of the government in the Commons, 'entirely

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17 Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (1958; London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), 19.

18 Stanley Jones, *Hazlitt: A Life, From Winterslow to Frith Street* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 88.

off their balance.<sup>19</sup> Eldon ‘cursed and raged’ in the House of Lords, but the government grudgingly, and with ill grace, capitulated, granting Repeal almost ‘in a fit of absence of mind.’<sup>20</sup> It only became apparent much later that this was the beginning of the end for the Anglican establishment, paving the way for Catholic emancipation in 1829 and parliamentary reform in 1832.

While the true significance of Repeal was not yet clear, the silence in Godwin’s diary is deafening. He would record the progress of Catholic emancipation in great detail, and often noted relatively minor pieces of legislation and even routine matters of parliamentary procedure. Hazlitt similarly underplayed the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, treating the event with some irony in ‘The Spirit of Controversy’ (1830), written in the final year of his life and published in *The Atlas*:

When a thing ceases to be a subject of controversy, it ceases to be a subject of interest. Why need we regret the various hardships and persecutions for conscience-sake, when men only clung closer to their opinions in consequence? They loved their religion in proportion as they paid dear for it. Nothing could keep the Dissenters from going to a conventicle while it was declared an unlawful assembly, and was the highroad to a prison or the plantations – take away tests and fines, and make the road open and easy, and the sect dwindles gradually into insignificance. (xx, 309)

Kevin Gilmartin has drawn attention to this passage as part of Hazlitt’s elegiac portrayal of the late-eighteenth-century, transatlantic community of Rational Dissent, a tradition he always identified with his father. However, Gilmartin also suggests that we read the ‘Character of Cobbett’ as Hazlitt’s reflection on the limitations of his own critical style.<sup>21</sup> In that essay, Hazlitt describes how Cobbett ‘naturally butts at all obstacles, as unicorns are attracted to oak trees [...] His principle is repulsion, his nature contradiction: he is made up of mere antipathies’ (*Table-Talk*; viii, 54-5). This self-criticism is felt much more directly in Hazlitt’s essays on Godwin: as Jon Mee argues, the portrait of Godwin in *The Spirit of the Age* ‘both acknowledges Godwin’s indebtedness to the culture of Dissent, and also raises what for Hazlitt remained one of its potential problems, its inflexible sense of its own peculiar virtue in opposition.’<sup>22</sup>

Despite his estrangement from Godwin, Hazlitt’s reviews of his penultimate novel *Cloudesley* (1830) continue his dialogue with Godwin and interrogation of their shared heritage. His final article for the *Edinburgh Review* repeats many of his

19 Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People: England, 1783–1846* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 381.

20 *Ibid.*, 383.

21 Kevin Gilmartin, ‘Hazlitt and the Memory of Radical Culture’, lecture delivered at the International Conference of the British Association for Romantic Studies, held at the University of Roehampton, July 2009. John Whale takes Gilmartin’s lecture as his inspiration for investigating ‘the recalcitrant presence of religious sentiment and a residual sense of the sacred in Hazlitt’s writing’ in ‘Hazlitt, Modernity, and the Workings of Spirit’, *Hazlitt Review* 5 (2012), 41–54: 43.

22 Mee, *Conversable Worlds*, 266.

old lines on Godwin: the importance of knowing that he ‘commenced his career as a dissenting clergyman,’ the astounding originality of *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams*, his separation of reason from ‘senses, passions, prejudices’ and the fate of the modern writer, who ‘runs the everlasting gauntlet of public opinion’ (xvi, 408, 405, 395). However, as Duncan Wu has shown, in this case, and somewhat unusually, Hazlitt also reviewed the novel for *The Atlas*, and Godwin recorded the publication of both reviews in his diary (4 April and 18 May 1830).<sup>23</sup> In the review for *The Atlas*, Hazlitt vividly describes how *Cloudesley* at once preserves the legacy of *Caleb Williams* and reveals a further deterioration of Godwin’s powers: ‘it must be observed that we cannot, in perusing *Cloudesley*, dismiss from our memory the first great work from which, through a series of filtering volumes, its master spirit descends to us’<sup>24</sup> He concludes by distinguishing the work from the mass of contemporary literary culture with the Godwinian compliment, ‘it contains more philosophy than all the novels of the season.’<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, the notice in the *Edinburgh Review* closes by drawing attention to Hazlitt’s own sincerity, a characteristically Dissenting virtue: ‘We cannot tell whether Mr. Godwin will have reason to be pleased with our opinion of him; at least, he may depend on our sincerity, and will know what it is’ (xvi, 408). This is not quite an apology, either for the criticisms in the review, or for offending Godwin several years earlier. But it does represent a moment of affinity, recognizing that Godwin had, like Hazlitt, remained committed to sincerity.

However, in contrast to Hazlitt’s elegiac portrayal of Dissenting culture, the latter years of Godwin’s diary suggest not rupture but broad continuity. While there might have been, as Hazlitt often reminds his readers, a falling off in the quality of Godwin’s work, it is striking that the routine Godwin had kept up for fifty years continued until his death: seven days a week, his life consisted of a few pages writing, diligent reading, calls on his friends, paternal encouragement to younger writers, and attendance at Drury Lane and Covent Garden. The final years record the same combination of intellectual sociability and methodical commitment to his writing that is present throughout the diary. As Hazlitt himself had written in the *Edinburgh Review*, ‘Mr. Godwin is by way of distinction and emphasis an author; he is so not only by habit, but by nature, and by the whole turn of his mind’ (xvi, 403). The elegiac tone of many of Hazlitt’s late essays convey a sense of an era ending, in both literary and wider cultural terms. These autobiographical late essays represent, in Stanley Jones’s phrase, ‘a kind of prose-elegy,’ even ‘the true prose-poems of English romanticism.’<sup>26</sup> In spite of the progressive, Dissenting view of history that he shared with Godwin, personal and political disappointments are fused until Hazlitt’s elegiac tone comes close to Cobbett’s lament for a lost world, which Cobbett variously located in childhood memory or in an idealized vision

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23 *New Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. by Duncan Wu, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), II, 359–64.

24 *Ibid.*, 363.

25 *Ibid.*, 364.

26 Stanley Jones, ‘Two Hazlitt Quotations,’ *Notes and Queries* 23 (1976), 455–7: 456.

of medieval England. By contrast, Godwin's diary suggests the continuation of an intellectual culture in which Dissent continued to play an important role.

In the years after 1828, Godwin developed close friendships with the painter and free-thinker John Martin, and re-established contact with Robert Owen. He met Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill and, towards the end of 1831, Leigh Hunt brought John Forster to meet him. Forster, a Newcastle Unitarian, who would become the close friend and eventual biographer of Charles Dickens, appears in the diary on approximately twenty further occasions. There are other Dickensian connections in the 1830s through George Cruikshank, John Macrone (Dickens's first publisher), and William Ainsworth. The Unitarian MP for Wakefield, Daniel Gaskell, and his wife, Mary, appear almost fifty times in the last years of the diary. Through the Gaskells, Godwin was introduced to Harriet Martineau, part of a prominent Unitarian family in Norwich, who had tea with Godwin on several occasions. There are some more unlikely names in the final years, including nine entries for the mathematician and computer pioneer Charles Babbage, whom he met at the aristocratic salons that he began to be invited to in the 1830s, held by Lady Mary Shepherd, Lady Catherine Stepney, and the Countess of Blessington. He records Michael Faraday's presence at a Royal Institution lecture by Charles Wheatstone on 'speaking machines' – prototype telephones – and, as a committed Dissenter, attended the laying of the first stone of what would become University College London in 1827. He returned to the new London University the following year for both the opening of the medical school and the inaugural lecture by the professor of German.<sup>27</sup>

The nature of these connections is often obscure: unlike the 1790s, Godwin rarely records the topic of conversations in the latter years of the diary. However, many of the people listed were at least two generations younger than Godwin, and these contacts suggest that our periodization of early nineteenth-century literary and intellectual culture – one which Hazlitt helped to create – might in itself be limiting. Hazlitt and Godwin both describe a characteristically Dissenting view of the Reformation as the first chapter in a progressive narrative of modernity. However, Hazlitt's ironic account of 1828 and the elegiac tone of his last essays presents a break in this narrative and reveals a pessimistic belief in the perversity of the passions undermining human advancement. It even places him close to Cobbett's view of modernity as a process of inexorable decline. By contrast, Godwin's diary shows his adherence to a Dissenting view of progress, however hard-won, and a defiant faith in human perfectibility.

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27 David O'Shaughnessy similarly reads Godwin's 'interest in the foundation and early years of the London University' as evidence that he 'remained invested in and important to London's intellectual milieu' through to the 1830s. See 'Things as They Became; or, The Later Adventures of William Godwin' in *Informal Romanticism*, ed. by James Vigus (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2012), 161–72 (162).

## HAZLITT, THE LIVING POETS, AND EPHEMERALITY

*David Stewart*

Thomas Campbell, said Hazlitt in his Surrey Institution lecture 'On the Living Poets' (1818), 'always seems to me to be thinking how his poetry will look when it comes to be hot-pressed on superfine wove paper, to have a disproportionate eye to points and commas, and dread of errors of the press' (v, 149).<sup>1</sup> Hazlitt's sharp identification of Campbell's nervous self-consciousness about the way his books will look in the shops sounds like a cut at a poet on whom Hazlitt could be tough. Books matter more to Campbell as objects than for the ideas they contain. It's the kind of comment that tends to place Hazlitt as an acidic antagonist of an ephemeral culture dominated by fashion rather than taste. Poets like Campbell, it seems, have lost their status as artists by pandering to a 'reading public' which desires only the latest shining thing. Works of art, Hazlitt worries, are ephemeral because they have become like lemon-coloured kid gloves: they are produced quickly on a semi-industrial scale for large numbers of consumers, look attractive, but are forgotten as soon as the gaze of fashion has moved on.

Elsewhere, though, Hazlitt's comments suggest he understands the pleasures to be found in superfine wove paper. In 'On Reading Old Books' (1821) and 'On Reading New Books' (1827), his preference seems to be for the established old as a counterweight to the ephemeral new, but with Hazlitt no perception remains unqualified. He describes 'the wet sheets of the last new novel from the Ballantyne press' (xii, 222) in the first essay, and in the second, offers this scene of reception, in which readers are

quite on the alert for the next new work, teeming hot from the press, which we shall be the first to read, criticise, and pass an opinion on. Oh, delightful! To cut open the leaves, to inhale the fragrance of the scarcely dry paper, to examine the type, to see who is the printer. (xvii, 200-1)

Hazlitt knows this delight from the inside, even if he is also troubled by its consequences. He was drawn throughout his career as a reviewer and an essayist not just to heroes like Milton and Raphael, but also to the productions of what

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

seemed to many an ephemeral age in which new works teemed hot from the press, and readers consumed them before they cooled. For Hazlitt any pleasure to be found in the present day's culture is always qualified by his consciousness of its being new. The peculiarly thorough way in which he understands the relationship between culture and the moment of its creation and consumption allows Hazlitt to describe especially insightfully an age troubled by a sense of its own immediacy.

My quotations are all examples of Hazlitt's careful, if not precisely loving, attention to the quotidian details of his cultural world. Like the Cockney he describes in 'On Londoners and Country People', he has a keen eye for what is going on about him. One suspects that when he inhales 'the fragrance of the scarcely dry paper' he relishes that world's busy commerce and his and his readers' place within it. He need not explain the reference to the Ballantyne press in 'On Reading Old Books': the allusion to the author of *Waverley's* printers is deemed sufficiently clear for readers who, like him, are eager for the next novel. But unlike the Cockney who sees, as Hazlitt puts it, 'every thing near, superficial, little, in hasty succession', Hazlitt is not, we suspect, 'confined to one spot, and to the present moment' (xii, 67). He knows a lot about a popular culture that is tied to the moment of its creation, but he seems the more ready to value forms of culture which aspire to escape that atmosphere and descend to posterity. Where, for the Cockney 'nothing is contemplated sufficiently at a distance to excite curiosity or wonder' (xii, 67), attentive contemplation (registered most memorably in Hazlitt's accounts of his intensive, enraptured explorations of Titian's portraits) is often precisely what he presents as the mark of his own critical distinction. Similarly, his descriptions of superfine wove paper and scarcely dry ink are all contained in accounts of which the primary purpose is to condemn writing that ties itself in a cockneyfied manner to 'one spot, and to the present moment'.

Yet the most Hazlittian element of the essay on Cockneys is, as Gregory Dart has argued, that by its end irritation has developed into a sympathetic, if partial, identification with the Cockney's way of seeing.<sup>2</sup> Scholars of the years following Waterloo have recently developed an increasingly sophisticated picture of an age marked and also troubled by spectacular phenomena, from metropolitan street spectacles, to fashions in clothes to, perhaps most pertinently for Hazlitt, bibliomania and the rise of a 'reading public'. The identification of the age as one dominated by such vivid and rapidly-changing attractions prompted excitement in some, but also anxiety in many, especially artists who worried about the fate of their own productions.<sup>3</sup> The spectacular quality that many Romanticists have been

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2 See Dart's brilliant discussion of the essay's shifts of attitude in Chapter 2 of *Metropolitan Art and Literature 1810-1840: Cockney Adventures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

3 William H. Galperin's *The Return of the Visible in British Romanticism* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) offers a thoughtful early example of such criticism. On bibliomania in particular, see, for example, Philip Connell, 'Bibliomania: Book Collecting, Cultural Politics, and the Rise of Literary Heritage in Romantic Britain', *Representations* 70 (2000), 24-47 and Deirdre Lynch, "'Wedded to Books": Bibliomania and the Romantic Essayists', *Romantic Circles Praxis Series* (2004) <<http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/libraries/lynch/lynch.html>> (22 paras, accessed 17 January 2013). For two especially

drawn to also prompted, as Richard Cronin and others have shown, a newly intense concern about the potential longevity of art, in which Hazlitt clearly participated.<sup>4</sup> His comments on the printed quality of poetry seem to suggest that he saw the age's literature as damagingly associated with a culture that would prove ephemeral by offering an enchanting, glimmering surface likely to attract consumers in a crowded marketplace, but which, for that reason, was unlikely to have any more permanent appeal. The reason his comments are so characteristic of him, however, and offer so telling an account of the culture they describe, is that they balance contempt or irritation with a sympathetic appreciation of ephemeral culture. Hazlitt offers an especially important reflection on his age's anxieties because he takes so seriously and investigates so thoroughly the pleasures, the problems, and the uncertainties of a period in which the relation between contemporary culture and its own contemporaneity seemed especially vexed.

This ability to see both sides simultaneously has long been recognized as Hazlitt's virtue. David Bromwich provides the fullest account, and recently Jon Mee has claimed that the fact that 'Hazlitt tends to interrogate the grounds of his own judgments, as if he remains in restless and conflicted conversation with himself' suggests the way in which he conceived of culture and taste as constructs which exist only in and through conversational exchange, not as immutable structures.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Kevin Gilmartin has cautioned against a tendency to celebrate Hazlitt's contradictoriness too readily. In an account of his politics, Gilmartin claims that 'Hazlitt's contradictions are not his alone.' His combination of 'hope and despair' provides a powerful insight into 'the complex organization of British political culture in the early nineteenth century'.<sup>6</sup> Hope mingled with despair might equally characterize Hazlitt's attitude to contemporary literary culture, and this allows him, I'd suggest, to become one of the most insightful critics of an unusually self-aware age. He accounts for a literary culture which desired to project itself towards posterity (looking forward to the status of being an 'old book'), yet was equally conscious of the difficulties and opportunities produced by being a part of the literary present tense.

Hazlitt's aside about Campbell's 'dread of errors of the press' appeared in his eighth of his *Lectures on the English Poets*, 'On the Living Poets.' It was a very common topic. In *Don Juan*, Byron describes a scene in a London drawing room: 'He saw ten thousand living authors pass, / That being about their average numeral; / Also the eighty "greatest living poets", / As every paltry magazine can show it's' (canto xi, stanza 54). One such magazine, rather anxious not to be thought paltry,

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suggestive accounts of the period's culture and its conflicts see Richard Cronin, *Paper Pellets: British Literary Culture after Waterloo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) and Dart, *Metropolitan Literature*.

4 Cronin, *Paper Pellets*, especially pp. 229–44.

5 See David Bromwich, *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic*, revised edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 23 and Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 278.

6 Kevin Gilmartin, 'Hazlitt's Visionary London' in *Repossessing the Romantic Past*, ed. Heather Glen and Paul Hamilton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 40–62 (58).

was the *London Magazine*, and Hazlitt contributed an essay on Crabbe to its series on the living poets.<sup>7</sup> But, as Byron suggests, the classification had become something of a cliché. The 'living poets' became in this period a kind of cultural category, something like a canon (it did not include all poets), but equally something much less settled, or capable of being settled.<sup>8</sup> In the period following the end of the Napoleonic wars much poetry was published, but poetry's status as the highest form of cultural expression seemed in a new way questionable. The reason every 'paltry magazine' drew up lists was because poets and critics became especially conscious that the poets living now could not all 'live' in posterity.<sup>9</sup> Identifying what might live is dependent on identifying the converse, the type of writing that will not. A poetics of posterity is mirrored by a poetics of ephemerality, and the list of living poets is not a secure canon but a prediction shadowed by the possibility of error. The period's hesitancy can be felt in Hazlitt's lecture: 'I cannot be absolutely certain that any body, twenty years hence, will think any thing about them; but we may be pretty sure that Milton and Shakespeare will be remembered twenty years hence' ('On the Living Poets'; v, 145).

The years following Waterloo were characterized, as Richard Cronin has argued, by those forms of writing (especially, for Cronin, Byron's *Don Juan*, Scott's Waverley novels, and the literary magazines) that were avowedly engaged with 'the current press'.<sup>10</sup> Cronin's discussion points, in particular, to the combination of creativity and anxiety that this self-consciously 'current' status prompted, because being current tended to conflict with the aspiration to become permanent. The very appeal that the age's culture made to the 'reading public' seemed to figure that culture as ephemeral, because the forms of culture and the modes of consumption they encouraged seemed, in Gregory Dart's phrase, to be 'obsessed with [their] own surface novelty, luxuriating in [their] status as a commodity'.<sup>11</sup> Dart describes the increased rapidity of change in fashions in this period, and with it the emergence of 'an identifiably modern fashion industry'.<sup>12</sup> Fashions in clothes are, by their nature, a matter of surfaces, and Hazlitt was not alone in finding the culture of the age as a whole marked by an unsettlingly unstable superficial quality. Any age produces poetry that is subsequently forgotten, and all produce other forms of culture (newspapers, magazine essays, printed lectures, fashionable hats) that are forgotten. But this curious concern with the poised category of the 'living poets' is characteristic of a period which distinguished poetry as something emphatically

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7 *London Magazine*, May 1821; the series was curtailed following the death of the editor, John Scott.

8 See William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 210–16, for an account of the growth of this category.

9 For the best account of this impulse, see Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Bennett provides a thoughtful account of Hazlitt's ambivalence about this culture which has influenced me here (see, especially, 60–4).

10 Cronin, *Paper Pellets*, 10–12.

11 Dart, *Metropolitan Art*, 69.

12 *Ibid*, 121.

not, as Hazlitt put it in the first lecture in the series, a ‘trifling amusement of a few idle readers’ (‘On Poetry in General’; v, 1) but which also worried about poetry’s proximity to trifling amusements and idle readers. Studying the living poets was compelling because the very status of poetry seemed living, not concluded.

Hazlitt identifies a nervous, tentative quality in Campbell, but his lecture ‘On the Living Poets’ often participates in the same feelings. He worries that his selection of poets may be determined, not by the superior quality of Moore, Scott, Rogers, Campbell and others, but rather by their fashionableness. Fashion and merit seem mutually exclusive: ‘Fame is not popularity, the shout of the multitude, the idle buzz of fashion, the venal puff, the soothing flattery of favour or of friendship; but it is the spirit of a man surviving himself in the minds and thoughts of other men, undying and imperishable’ (v, 144). This is a common theme in Hazlitt’s work. In a late piece on ‘Poetry’ (1829), he claims that his subject is divided between two kinds,

one that is a description of objects to those who have never seen or but slightly studied them; the other is a description of objects addressed to those who have seen and are intimately acquainted with them, and expressing the feeling which is the result of such knowledge. It is needless to add that the first kind of poetry is comparatively superficial and commonplace; the last profound, lofty, nay often divine’ (xx, 209).

The way to deal with an over-crowded literary market is to divide it between categories. The deep survives, and the superficial is ephemeral.

It was a crucial debate in a period so anxiously aware of itself as over-stocked with forms of culture, and Hazlitt’s response to it seems clear enough. But he is so important a critic of this topic because he does not assume an absolute distinction between types of poetry, or types of culture. Claire Brock has claimed recently that Hazlitt, who as a periodical writer wrote very much for his age, was in fact opposed to the idea that art should seek posthumous fame.<sup>13</sup> It is an attractive position. Hazlitt’s work for periodicals could often and self-consciously acknowledge its own unfitness for posterity’s reward, as indeed did many magazine writers in places like the *London Magazine* and *Blackwood’s Magazine*. Tom Paulin’s fine account of the way the ‘performative nature of Hazlitt’s criticism plunges us into living, moving, interpretative action as it happens here and now’ might well lead us to suspect he would reject as staid the notion of writing for an audience not ‘here and now’.<sup>14</sup> But Brock is, I think, only half right, because Hazlitt’s account of posterity is not one-sided. As David Bromwich argues, in Hazlitt there are always two voices: ‘The first voice [...] seeks to restore values that were in danger of slipping into total eclipse, while the second, antithetical and observant, remains aware of all that qualifies

13 Claire Brock, *The Feminization of Fame, 1750–1830* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 169–93.

14 Tom Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt’s Radical Style* (London: Faber, 1998), 151.

the truth of those values.<sup>15</sup> This perception has been explored in excellent recent work on Hazlitt's accounts of Regency popular culture. Gregory Dart's discussion of the way Hazlitt's writing registers its position in a Cockney periodical realm in between the 'polite' and the 'plebeian' has been extended by many others, including, most recently, James Mulvihill, John Whale, Mark McCutcheon and Richard Cronin.<sup>16</sup> For them the most characteristic element of Hazlitt's response to an age which had commercialized literature is its ambivalence. His involvement in the periodical press, while it opened to him a sense of the opportunities inherent in writing to the moment, also enhanced his awareness of the alternative.

The idea of writing for posterity often depends on imagining that the writer might simply escape his age and reach an untroubled scene of reception. This often expresses contempt for a contemporary audience and idealizes an audience that is not so much a future audience composed of living beings as an audience outside of time altogether. Hazlitt's view is much more complicated. In the essay, 'On Living to One's Self' in *Table-Talk* (1821), he denies the logic: 'Posterity is no better (not a bit more enlightened or more liberal), except that you are no longer in their power, and that the voice of common fame saves them the trouble of deciding on your claims. The public now are the posterity of Milton and Shakespear. Our posterity will be the living public of a future generation' (viii, 100). The word 'common' is often, as John Whale has argued, a tense one for Hazlitt, and here too it sits uneasily between the common good and a common whore.<sup>17</sup> The living public is a fickle beast, and the 'common fame' which overrules common opinion is not a matter of universal suffrage, a principle which, as Hazlitt informs us in an earlier (1814) essay on the fine arts, he is happy to apply to government, but not to 'matters of taste' (xviii, 46). In 'Why the Arts are not Progressive' (1814), Milton is again the measure: 'Is Milton more popular now than when the *Paradise Lost* was first published? Or does he not rather owe his reputation to the judgment of a few persons in every successive period, accumulating in his favour, and overpowering by its weight the public indifference?' (iv, 164). Hazlitt does not abstract reception from history, but rather considers the importance of a cumulative opinion that builds up over several generations of critics all of whom were, at one point, living. Taste is formed through the long historical stretch of a writer's posthumous life in dynamic, if not wholly free, debate. When he says we 'may be pretty sure that Milton and Shakespear will be remembered twenty years hence' ('On the Living Poets'; v, 145), his uncertainty is genuine. It is an important idea for Hazlitt about which more might be said. But I want to focus here on a complementary

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15 Bromwich, *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic*, 145.

16 Dart, *Metropolitan Art*, 62. See also Gregory Dart, 'Romantic Cockneyism: Hazlitt and the Periodical Press', *Romanticism* 6.2 (2000), 143–62; James Mulvihill, 'Hazlitt's "Essayism"', *Nineteenth-Century Prose* 31.1 (2004), 28–52; John Whale, 'Liber Amoris: Unmanning the Man of Letters', *Nineteenth-Century Prose* 36.1 (2009), 55–76; Mark McCutcheon, 'On "Vulgar Exhibition": Hazlitt, "The Fight", and the Pornography of Popularity', *Nineteenth-Century Prose* 36.1 (2009), 77–100; Cronin, *Paper Pellets*, especially 137–8 and 242–3.

17 See Whale, 'Liber Amoris', 59 and Jon Cook, 'Hazlitt, Speech and Writing' in *Journalism, Literature and Modernity: From Hazlitt to Modernism*, ed. Kate Campbell (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 15–37, 26–7.

perception: that judging writers who are still living depends on a different form of appreciation.

In the essay 'On Living to One's Self', Hazlitt tells an anecdote of a Scotsman who says 'that if the poet [Burns] were to come to life again, he would treat him just as he was treated in fact'. He would sooner give twenty pounds for a monument to the dead writer than twenty pounds to the living man. Hazlitt remarks 'What he said, the rest would do' (viii, 100). At this time (1821) Hazlitt had little affection for Scotsmen (the comment has a certain anti-*Blackwood's* ring), but the point is less judgmental than this might suggest. 'On Reading Old Books,' first published in the same year, suggests that he himself might do precisely the same: 'One candidate for literary fame, who happens to be of our acquaintance, writes finely, and like a man of genius; but unfortunately has a foolish face, which spoils a delicate passage' (xii, 220). Writing about living poets is difficult precisely because they are living:

All these contradictions and petty details interrupt the calm current of our reflections. If you want to know what any of the authors were who lived before our time, and are still objects of anxious inquiry, you have only to look into their works. But the dust and smoke and noise of modern literature have nothing in common with the pure, silent air of immortality. (xii, 220-1)

This seems to value the 'pure, silent air' above the 'dust and smoke', but Hazlitt's point is that judging a living writer is a different category of activity altogether. The essay was published in the February number of the *London Magazine*, and the 'Lion's Head' leader column in that issue remarks: 'these are days of exertion, – of patronage, – of popularity, – of liberality, – and every fine quality besides! The LONDON MAGAZINE, therefore, must play its part, as occupying a distinguished place amongst the noise and bustle.'<sup>18</sup> The noise and bustle, dust and smoke, had its metropolitan pleasures, but the point for both Hazlitt and his editor is that criticism in such an atmosphere must change its tenor. It's this perception which causes Hazlitt to stop his *Spirit of the Age* piece on Byron because Byron has died, or why he thinks Godwin has achieved a 'sort of posthumous fame' because 'Mr Godwin's person is not known, he is not pointed out in the street' (xi, 16). It's also the reason why he would rather not meet Shakespeare ('On the Living Poets'; v, 146): what if the Bard had a foolish face?

Old books make possible the perception that art is an abstraction. This is from the essay 'On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth' (1827):

It is one of the beauties and advantages of literature, that it is the means of abstracting the mind from the narrowness of local and personal prejudices, and of enabling us to judge of truth and excellence by their inherent merits alone. Woe be to the pen that would undo this fine illusion (the only reality), and teach us to regulate our notions of genius and virtue by the circumstances in which they are placed! (xvii, 193)

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18 'Lion's Head', *London Magazine* 3 (February 1821), 124.

This sounds fine, but the problem is that so often it is Hazlitt's pen that undoes the illusion by placing writing in contact with the circumstances of its production. He tells awkward anecdotes about Wordsworth and Coleridge, or happier ones about Lamb and Hunt by the fireside; he sees Lord Eldon 'plodding along with an umbrella under his arm' (*The Spirit of the Age*; xi, 145). Duncan Wu has defended very ably Hazlitt's use of personal details in his critical accounts of his contemporaries, but it was for Hazlitt an unavoidable aspect of writing about a living poet that we do not only encounter them as books.<sup>19</sup> As James Mulvihill puts it, Hazlitt offers 'a necessarily provisional and hybrid form of inquiry into the circumstances constituting social existence.'<sup>20</sup> The circumstantial nature of reality is always undoing the fine illusions we weave. But for Hazlitt this has its benefits.

When Hazlitt writes about culture which engages directly with the dust and smoke and noise of the age he worries about its ephemerality while also sensing its opportunities. The *Table-Talk* essay 'The Indian Jugglers', for instance, begins with a celebration of physicality, moves to a grander celebration of high art, but ends with Hazlitt's wonderful account of John Cavanagh, the fives player, that is most characteristic for being, as he describes it himself, 'between jest and earnest' (viii, 86). For Cavanagh 'the noisy shout of the ring happily stood him in stead of the unheard voice of posterity!' (viii, 89). This is only partly a joke: for Hazlitt achieving a more immediate acclaim has its pleasures. In another essay in this collection, he begins by critiquing coffee-house politicians for the 'suddenness and fugitiveness of the interest' ('On Coffee-House Politicians'; viii, 190) they take in the topics of the day. But his meditations acquire a typically ambivalent note: 'It sometimes gives one a melancholy but mixed sensation to see one of the better sort of this class of politicians, not without talents or learning, absorbed for fifty years together in the all-engrossing topic of the day' (viii, 191). Much of what Hazlitt has to say about his age is 'melancholy but mixed'. It will be forgotten, and yet this type of activity gathers its energy from its insistent immediacy. The essay 'On the Aristocracy of Letters' combines condemnation of superficial or fashionable literature with appreciation of the opportunities that fashion permits: 'The best wits, like the handsomest faces *upon the town*, lead a harassing, precarious life – are taken up as the bud and promise of talent, which they no sooner fulfil than they are thrown aside like an old fashion' (viii, 211). The harassing, precarious nature of their existence suggests that their status as poets is, like the Cockney, tied to the present moment.

The perception is cultural but it has its roots in Hazlitt's metaphysics. In his *Letter to William Gifford* (1819), Hazlitt restates his early metaphysical discovery. The point is partly about time. 'The present moment stands on the brink of nothing' because our conception of futurity is merely an idea: 'The next year, the next hour, the next moment, is but a creation of the mind' (ix, 58). By the same token, as he puts it in another essay, 'There is no such thing as Antiquity [...]

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19 Duncan Wu, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 200–1, 237–8.

20 Mulvihill, 'Hazlitt's "Essayism"', 49.

Whatever is or has been, while it is passing, must be modern' ('On Antiquity', *The Plain Speaker*; xii, 252). The restless and ever-shifting consciousness of the present moment is important to Hazlitt because it is only in that moment that the art work (or anything else) can be perceived.

Hazlitt's account of personal identity mirrors his account of cultural works. In his lecture 'On the Living Poets', he makes the link in describing Thomas Moore:

his pen, as it is rapid and fanciful, wants momentum and passion. It requires the same principle to make us thoroughly like poetry, that makes us like ourselves so well, the feeling of continued identity. The impressions of Mr Moore's poetry are detached, desultory, and physical. (v, 151)

The modernity that Hazlitt identifies in Moore is not so much an anticipation of metropolitan fragmentariness as a disorientating evocation of ever-shifting presentism. Moore's poetry exists only now, and its 'physical' quality (sensual, but also garishly typographical) suggests that 'it is passing.' These comments, and others like them, are not compliments, but they possess a keen sympathy for writing that ties itself so thoroughly to the present moment. Hazlitt found in the culture of his age an acknowledgment of the same difficulties that, in the essay 'On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth', causes a young man to find 'something revolting and incredible' (xvii, 193) in the notion that he and all of his age exist only 'in such a point of time, and in such a corner of space', 'in a moment to be nothing' (xvii, 192-3).

Although it is far from ideal, Hazlitt clearly finds value in a certain type of ephemeral productivity, partly because he finds in Cavanagh and the Southampton's coffee-house wits a mirror for it. So many of the *Table-Talk* essays published in the *London Magazine* contain observations on the essays' own potential ephemerality and invite reflections on the essays' relationship with their subject matter. They comment on ephemeral topics like the conversation of authors or parliamentary eloquence, or reflect on the claims of the likes of Wordsworth who believed, Hazlitt tells us in his first 'Table Talk' in the *London*, that 'no poet, who deserved the name of one, was ever popular in his life-time, or scarcely after death' ('On the Qualifications Necessary to Success in Life'; xii, 201). At the end of 'On Reading Old Books' he remarks 'Whether these observations will survive me, I neither know nor do I much care' (xii, 229), but given the essay's subject, it is clearly on his mind. The magazine essay is like the performance of a juggler in that it seems to invite the perception that it cannot be extricated from the present moment of its creation. Like Campbell's typographical poetry, the essays are concerned intimately with their effect on an immediate audience. But, like Beau Brummell, whose witticisms are 'so attenuated' 'they hover on the very brink of vacancy, and are in their shadowy composition next of kin to nonentities' ('Brummelliana' [1828]; xx, 152), poets, politicians, sportsmen, and periodical writers must engage in 'the art of making something out of nothing' (xx, 153). These are forms which bear the conscious burden of being 'like a bubble, at one minute reflecting the universe, and

the next, shook to air!' ('On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth'; xvii, 192). They are all engaged in a poetics of ephemerality that is vividly immediate but that is troubled by its proximity to nothing too.

Such a manner of productivity, which depends upon 'the noisy shout of the ring' of contemporary spectators, engages culture with popular or fashionable acclaim. Hazlitt does not often seem keen on fashion. Fashion, he brilliantly says, 'constantly begins and ends in the two things it abhors most, singularity and vulgarity' ('On Fashion', [1818]; xvii, 52). Fashion is both despotic (it must always change because if it is common then it is outmoded), and also servile (because what is fashionable depends on the perceived approbation of a select group). Because it must always change it is also the most ephemeral of cultural modes. Predictably, then, Hazlitt does not like it. So it is all the more surprising to come across the same phrasing in an essay concerned to define art by its superiority to fashion. Hazlitt's late essay 'Originality' (1830) considers the paradox that a work of art must be both true (an accurate account of nature) and new (not a slavish imitation). He concludes: 'Enough has been said to vindicate both conditions of originality, which distinguish it from singularity on the one hand and from vulgarity on the other; or to show how a thing may at the same time be both true and new' (xx, 298-9). Originality in works of art is precisely like fashion in that it is engaged in a continual balancing between two contradictory states.

Hazlitt's answer to the originality paradox is to confound surface and depth: 'We do not look beyond the surface; or rather we do not see into the surface, which contains a labyrinth of difficulties and distinctions' (xx, 297). This is why, he says, quoting a favourite phrase from a hero, 'Titian wrote on his pictures, *faciebat* – as much as to say that he was about them, but that it was an endless task' (xx, 298). The work of art is endless because it is multiple: it requires in viewers an intensive, restless, investigative activity such as Hazlitt describes in the *Table-Talk* essay 'On the Pleasure of Painting', one that delves into surface perceptions. Art is not translated to a pure or perfected realm. Instead, for artist and viewer, appreciation depends upon a continual effort of reconstruction. Hazlitt does not conceive naively of art abstracted from history, but such a vivid account seems nonetheless to distinguish art from commerce and fashion. Yet the echo of the phrasing of the essay 'On Fashion' suggests the subterranean connection between art and fashion in Hazlitt's thinking. There is a restless quality to both, just as there is in coffee-house politics or aristocratic poetry. In both the surface need not be superficial. Titian's *Young Man with a Glove* in the Louvre, just as much as an actual young man with a glove in Piccadilly, '[hovers] on the very brink of vacancy' ('Brummelliana'; xx, 152). But this quality gives them, for Hazlitt, their power to attract a sympathetic gaze.

This is why, in the two essays on reading that seem to value canonical old books over fashionable new books, Hazlitt is also able to describe so vividly the pleasures of the new. In part this is because all books are, in a way, like Titian's paintings, new, because a reader has not explored them fully. But it also emerges from his recognition that judging 'living poets' depends on a much less fixed mode of appreciation. The 'wet sheets of the last new novel from the Ballantyne press' are

such a pleasure because their reputation is not dry: we do not know quite what to make of them. He ends his *Round Table* essay on Wordsworth's *Excursion*, a poem that places at its heart the idea that poetry should aspire to permanence, by commenting modestly 'it would be presumptuous in us to determine' (iv, 125) its ultimate merit. 'Presumptuous' is chosen with care: for Hazlitt the merit of a poem is not ultimate but consists precisely in what is made of it by a range of readers over time.<sup>21</sup> It is not just hard to consider its permanent status, but a kind of category mistake. No one, as he puts it elsewhere, 'can anticipate the suffrages of posterity' ('Whether Genius is Conscious of its Powers?', *The Plain Speaker*; xii, 117). When judging our contemporaries we judge them as contemporaries, 'at once spectators and a part of the moving scene' ('On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth'; xvii, 192).

When Hazlitt discusses the living poets, he often seems disappointed. Walter Scott has achieved merely 'drawing room success' (v, 155); Samuel Rogers is 'elegant, but feeble' (v, 148); in Thomas Moore's poetry 'every thing lives, moves, and sparkles', but then again this 'exhibition of fireworks' 'surprises for the moment, and leaves no trace of light or warmth behind' (v, 151). He ends his lecture 'On the Living Poets' by remarking: 'I have felt my subject gradually sinking from under me as I advanced, and have been afraid of ending in nothing' (v, 168). The living poets may be as ephemeral as a coffee-house spouter or a juggler. Contemporary culture seems like an airy nothing, an ephemeral bubble, not worthy of serious attention. But this lack of fixity also occasions Hazlitt's appreciation. Duncan Wu praises Hazlitt's 'generosity of spirit' that allowed him to give even those who had fallen out with him their due, and the same might be said of his attitude to an ephemeral age.<sup>22</sup> Hazlitt clearly values posthumous fame and the claims of high art, but this does not prevent him taking enjoyment in forms of culture which have not yet, and might not ever, achieve that status.

The same mixture of sympathy and uncertainty drives *The Spirit of the Age*. The age's spirit is for Hazlitt defined, as James Chandler points out, by a multiplicity that refuses clear definition, and Hazlitt's book is so wholly implicated in the age it describes precisely in its mobility.<sup>23</sup> As Tom Paulin writes of the essays, 'The expression [...] is always taken "en passant"', and this is appropriate in one for whom criticism 'must aim never to be fixed or finished'.<sup>24</sup> This lack of fixity can be observed especially in the way he describes the link between culture and commerce and the effect this might have on those cultural objects' ability to become fixed, or canonical. Poetry by the likes of Moore and Scott seems to Hazlitt, to use one

21 It is intriguing that this phrase occurs only in the revised version of the review (printed in *The Round Table* in 1817) and not the original three-part review in *The Examiner* (1814), especially given that the original review is, generally, more generous. See Duncan Wu's discussion in *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, 8 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), II, 321–4.

22 Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 201.

23 James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 181.

24 Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty*, 256, 291.

of his favourite words, 'meretricious': a glittering, but ultimately empty, physical object for sale. In *The Spirit of the Age*, Scott (xi, 59), Byron (xi, 70), Canning (xi, 150) and Moore (xi, 170) are all associated with the quality, though Wordsworth, tellingly, is deemed to shun it (xi, 87). In 'My First Acquaintance with Poets,' Hazlitt remembers Coleridge exclaiming 'That is true fame!' on seeing a tattered copy of Thomson's *Seasons* in a window seat. Wordsworth replies that Thomson was 'a good poet, rather than a great one; his style was as meretricious as his thoughts were natural' (xvii, 120). That the word, so frequently used to slight fashionable writing, calls to mind prostitution suggests that femininity as much as commerce may be an aspect of Hazlitt's ambivalent suspicion of his age's print culture, a point discussed very eloquently by Richard de Ritter.<sup>25</sup> But the very obsession with the concept in *The Spirit of the Age* suggests for him meretriciousness was central to the age's spirit while also marking his fascination with the opportunities that such a quality permits.

The essays in *The Spirit of the Age* share with many of Hazlitt's accounts of his age's culture a habit of shuttling between delight and aversion. This habit is perhaps most remarkable for its mirroring of the rapidly shifting cultural scene he at times critiques. Gregory Dart, describing the essay 'On Londoners and Country People,' claims that 'the meaning of the essay is to be found less in its final resting place than in the sum of the various positions it has seen fit to adopt.'<sup>26</sup> It is, likewise, a failure to rest that prompts both Hazlitt's uncertainty and his interest in the age's miscellaneous spirit. The fluidity of this perception positions Hazlitt as an unusually acute critic of a period in which the potential for writers to '[fill] permanently a station...in the Literature of our Country,' as Wordsworth put it in 1819, was debated the more urgently because the possibility seemed in doubt.<sup>27</sup> The age demands some decision about whether it deserves or is likely to achieve a permanent station, but Hazlitt also sees that the age makes its most striking appeal to contemporaries by suggesting a lack of fixity that makes any such decision uncertain.

Hazlitt's brilliant description of Thomas Campbell as one with an eye in his poetry on its appearance, 'hot-pressed on superfine wove paper, [with] a disproportionate eye to points and commas, and dread of errors of the press' (v, 149), is typical because the relish he takes in describing such a culture of writing suggests his sympathy with it. Campbell's poetry's insistently typographical quality attaches it to the printer's shop, and in doing so to a culture in the act of becoming, one in which errors of the press may be made, and subsequently corrected. Taste is circumstantial, subject to change: the pages are still wet. In 'On Reading New Books' Hazlitt points to a 'natural or habitual sympathy between us and the literature of the day' (xvii, 208) because it exists as we do 'on the brink of nothing.' Hazlitt's sympathy with Campbell's typographical anxieties might have been prompted by

25 Richard de Ritter, "'In Their Newest Gloss": Hazlitt on Reading, Gender, and the Problems of Print Culture,' *Hazlitt Review* 3 (2010), 25–37. See also Mee, *Conversable Worlds*, 275, Whale, 'Liber Amoris' and Cook, 'Hazlitt, Speech and Writing,' 33–4.

26 Dart, *Metropolitan Art*, 77.

27 'Preface' to *Peter Bell*, ed. John E. Jordan (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 41.

the fact that, as Duncan Wu tells us, before he gave the last lecture in the series he was already correcting proofs of the book version.<sup>28</sup> But such sympathy was constitutional. The very seriousness with which Hazlitt understands the way in which writing might reach audiences in posterity encourages him to take more seriously the way in which writing reaches us now. 'On Reading Old Books' draws to a conclusion by considering all the potential pleasures that await him in the literature of the past. But it ends with a final exclamation: 'I should also like to read the last new novel (if I could be sure it was so) by the author of *Waverley*: – no one would be more glad than I to find it the best!' (xii, 229). But of course he does not yet know if it will be his best, and the possibility is part of the pleasure. In the wet sheets from Mr Ballantyne, the clenched fist of John Cavanagh, the attenuated wit of Beau Brummell, the jostling spirits at the Southampton Tavern, the novels of the ever-productive Scott, or the poetry of Moore, Rogers, Hunt or Campbell, Hazlitt takes pleasure in and develops a sense of mixed wonder for a world poised, restlessly, on the brink of nothing.

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28 Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 240.



## BOOK REVIEW

**David Stewart, *Romantic Magazines and Metropolitan  
Literary Culture.***

pp. x + 248. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Cloth, £50.00.

‘Of the *Magazines*,’ Hazlitt wrote in 1823, ‘we would wish to speak with tenderness and respect.’<sup>1</sup> It was not a wish he could entirely fulfil. ‘If all their names were to be written down,’ he continued, ‘one Article or one Number would hardly contain them – so many of them there are, and such antipathy do they hold to each other!’ The antipathy was not just between titles. Within a few months of the publication of Hazlitt’s review of reviews, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* responded with one of its most violent and personal attacks on Hazlitt as ‘an old newspaper-monger’, ‘a mere ulcer, a sore from head to foot [...] an overgrown pimple, sore to the touch’<sup>2</sup> Whilst the periodical market was booming, tenderness and respect were clearly in short supply.

The periodicals of the Romantic period were read for a long time principally as the interlocutors and sometime grand inquisitors of Romantic poetry and poets, with *Blackwood’s* first among the tormentors-in-chief. The reader of Hazlitt may have a different perspective. Periodicals were after all one of the principal outlets for his writing during his lifetime, and journalism was a professional and social world in which he was an adept and sometimes dangerous operator, certainly capable of giving at least as good as he got. David Stewart’s wide-ranging book attempts to understand the form and character of writing from this fractious world. It follows critical studies in recent years by Mark Parker, Kim Wheatley, and others, which have sought to recuperate the periodical culture of the early nineteenth century as an object of study in its own right, particularly in the wake of groundbreaking work in the 1980s by Jon Klancher; Klancher suggested that periodicals not only reflected but created the tastes of a new mass market. Stewart’s own contribution to this scholarship is twofold. On the one hand, like Parker, he looks past the prestigious quarterly reviews – the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* have attracted much of the scholarly attention – to the newer monthly or weekly

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1 ‘The Periodical Press,’ *Edinburgh Review*, 33 (May 1823), 349–78: 369.

2 ‘Letters of Timothy Tickler, Esq. to Eminent Literary Characters, No. XVIII,’ *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (1824), 212–35: 221. ‘Tickler’ was at this point co-written by John Gibson Lockhart and William Maginn.

general magazines which sought to outmanoeuvre their slower-moving peers. (Regrettably few connections have been made to the history of daily or weekly newspaper journalism, on the other side.) *Blackwood's* (launched in 1817) remains absolutely central to his account, as, to a lesser extent, do the *London Magazine* under John Scott (1820), Leigh Hunt's *Examiner* (1808), and Henry Colburn's *New Monthly Magazine* (1814). These operated, Stewart argues in his first two chapters, on a 'principle of miscellaneity' (*passim*) and a logic of inter-dependent attack and counter-attack that reflected respectively the mixed, hybrid nature and the anxieties of contagion or collapse felt in urban life.

This second theme – the wider 'metropolitan atmosphere' – is the weaker postulate of the book; here Stewart's work (in particular his third chapter, on 'Reading the Magazines with a Cockney's Eye') should be read alongside work such as Gregory Dart's recent account of 'Cockneyism'.<sup>3</sup> *Romantic Magazines and Metropolitan Literary Culture*, by contrast, provides little sense of what 'metropolitan' might mean outside the rhetorical universe of the magazine text, for example in the social interactions or institutional and intellectual affiliations of proprietors, editors, other personnel, and contributors. (One reason may be that Stewart relies wholly on published texts rather than private papers or archives.) Consequently the book lacks a sense of the importance of differing physical or cultural geographies. Edinburgh especially required fuller delineation; I also wondered how Stewart's arguments might differ for magazines produced in an industrial centre such as Manchester, or radical Bristol. As Raymond Williams noted some time ago, London was the 'capital centre of trades and distribution [...] of all the work connected with shipping and the market' but this was not the only flavour of urban modernity in the early nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> When it discusses the urban or metropolitan, the book also leans heavily towards celebrating these as 'exhilarating' and 'vivid'; and implies that any baulking from city life represented anxiety. The example of Leigh Hunt's discussion of magazine writing and reading as '*rus in urbe* [...] a still and green spot suddenly come upon in the thick of city noise' (p. 37; Stewart glosses this quickly as a 'combination of styles' and moves on) suggests a rather more complicated dynamic at work.

Stewart is an ingenious close reader and the attention given to the magazines' style and rhetoric is largely fruitful. The variety of examples presented are never less than pertinent and interesting, although the range of magazine titles discussed can seem limited, and the final two chapters of the book, on the figuration of intimacy and distance in magazine writing, and the negotiation of the category of 'literature' within a language of commerce, are genuinely original and ambitious. Other criticisms emerge largely from limitations in his mode of argument. A great theme of the book is 'distinction under threat' (p. 119): for Stewart there is no boundary that is unblurred, no order that is not 'destabilized', no balance that is not 'unsettled'. This line of thinking has undoubted traction on its subject,

3 Gregory Dart, *Metropolitan Art and Literature 1810–1840: Cockney Adventures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Readers of this journal will be particularly interested in the chapter on 'Hazlitt and the Periodical Press', 61–84.

4 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 147.

magazine writing sitting as it does somewhere between categories of art and commerce, authority and anonymity, intimate familiarity and national broadcast, an imperative to police cultural borders and 'a desire to suspend definition' (p. 205).

Unfortunately, the book elevates this theme to a principle of argument, and repeatedly collapses or finesses distinction and difference into similarity, 'even as' – a repeated tic, along with the strategic use of 'precisely' at its most forced or rhetorical moments – examples under discussion represent explicitly opposed positions. This habit is particularly problematic in Chapter 2, on the 'fighting style' of the aggressively partisan political slanging matches between magazines. These are fundamentally empty contests for Stewart, as the combatants, 'in the *very act* of asserting their differences from one another, recognize that they are implicated in the same cultural world' (p. 62; emphasis added). The logic here is rather odd: no differences are possible in argument, as both sides must agree to the act of arguing. The eliding of real political difference that this sort of logical side-step effects – Tory and Radical magazines were both magazines, and so 'different in degree, but not in kind' (p. 51) – weakens the reader's confidence in stronger related arguments, such as Stewart's suggestion that 'politics was simply one of the many ways in which magazines attempted to establish a place for themselves within the magazine market' (p. 80); or that *Blackwood's* was indebted to or even depended on Hunt and Hazlitt just so much as it attacked them. His method of uniting 'all shades of opinion in mutual juxtaposition' (p. 8) has decided the matter in advance; no falsifiability is allowed in. The book also drifts too easily into generalizing. From the opening pages, claims are advanced about 'every magazine' and 'all magazines, and all writing' (p. 4) even; but the half-dozen titles read in detail are simply too limited a set to justify reference to 'a single system of periodical production' (p. 62). Neither does the book present, nor attempt to find, the kind of new empirical data on sales, circulation, or readers that would be needed to substantiate a convincing model of such a 'magazine system.' Some of the book's most categorical pronouncements are also directly contradicted. Stewart states that 'magazines were produced not for "publics" or "readerships", but for a marketplace' (p. 69), only for the argument to turn two pages later on 'a readership which clearly relished [...] spectacle' and 'the demands of a factional readership', then at a later point on the assertion that *Blackwood's* was 'written not for a group, a sect, or a coterie, but for a public' (p. 136).

These criticisms aside (and as Hazlitt wrote in his piece on the periodical press, 'let us be critical, or we shall be nothing'), Stewart's book is a worthwhile contribution to the secondary literature on the Romantic periodical, and has suggestive readings of writing both by and about Hazlitt. The writing is generally clear and sometimes well-turned and sharp, even as the argument can be opaque. *Romantic Magazines and Metropolitan Literary Culture* draws a picture of a culture that was at once ephemeral and extremely enduring in its legacy. Subsequent generations often found the semi-anonymous scurrility and political vehemence of the Romantic magazine distasteful (one more stricture: a few more words of comment on the relationship of significant later nineteenth-century monthlies such as the *Cornhill* or *Athenaeum* to the earlier trends would have been useful).

Within Hazlitt's lifetime it came and went, Stewart suggests, under pressure from new rules of taste, agreeing with Klancher (and Habermas behind him) that a distinct public sphere had slipped away. But his book suggests that contemporary calls to return to Hazlitt as 'the original blogger' may be overlooking the fact that the fractured, pseudonymous, partisan, echo chamber of the press and blogosphere in the digital age now has more in common with the world of the periodical in the 1810s and 1820s generally than Hazlitt's singular, remarkable, voice alone.

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