

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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INTRODUCTION

The Hazlitt Society is delighted to present the first issue of *The Hazlitt Review*. The first journal internationally to be devoted solely to Hazlitt studies, the *Review* will, we believe, play an important part in maintaining and enhancing Hazlitt's standing in English letters. That it has been published is already a reflection of his increasing importance and interest, not only to scholars, but also to a wider community of readers.

The origins of the *Review* may be traced back to another landmark event, which first made manifest the extent of Hazlitt's enduring appeal. In 2001, *The Guardian* began its appeal to restore the memorial stone over Hazlitt's grave in St Anne's churchyard in Soho. The appeal brought in contributions amounting to £26,000 from over 700 readers, and a 400-strong gathering attended the unveiling of the new memorial on 10 April 2003. On that sunny spring afternoon, a brass ensemble played the *Marseillaise*, and Michael Foot spoke about Hazlitt to a rapt audience. The Hazlitt Society was established at the time, with Michael Foot as President, and a founding membership of contributors to the restored memorial. Continuing support from Hazlitt's most loyal admirers has in time enabled the inauguration of a new journal. The *Review* owes its existence, then, to the generosity of the donors and subscribers to the Hazlitt Society, and to the ongoing support of one Hazlittian in particular: Juan José Sánchez Arévalo.

Tom Paulin, Chair of the Society, writes, '*The Hazlitt Review* is a landmark in Hazlitt studies. Here, at last, is a forum where scholars and admirers of Hazlitt can meet in celebration of a critic who stands out foremost among English critics as a literary essayist, a theatre reviewer, art critic and political writer, as well as an original philosopher. Hazlitt is one of the greatest masters of English prose and his work needs to be constantly celebrated. *The Hazlitt Review*, I confidently predict, will become a central means of affirming his genius.'

HAZLITT ON SHAKESPEARE AND THE MOTIVES OF POWER

Hazlitt Society Annual Lecture, 2007

David Bromwich

In the second decade of the nineteenth century, Hazlitt wrote on poetry, drama, and painting with an originality and a vigour of mind unmatched by his contemporaries. These various subjects, in his mode of treating them, impinged on each other: his descriptions of Sarah Siddons as Lady Macbeth and John Kemble as Coriolanus, for example, show the eye of a painter for attitude and gesture; and his praise of the dignity that Kean displayed in the role of Shylock depends on his memory of long stretches of the verse of Shakespeare and Milton. What Hazlitt mastered through memory, he had also come to know inwardly through imagination. Yet, whatever his ostensible subject, his preoccupation was the use and abuse of power: a drive or appetite or craving that always draws upon imagination yet is commonly disguised by the language of reason, calculation, and prudential control.

It was in these same years – just after the end of the wars against Napoleon – that Hazlitt emerged as an original critic of Shakespeare – the first, alongside Coleridge, to appreciate with force and particularity the *poetic* genius of Shakespeare's writings. His book *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (1817) is misleadingly titled in one sense; though it contains unforgettable sketches of many individual characters, the larger concern of the book is power. More particularly, the absorbing concern of Hazlitt's discussions of Shakespeare's histories and tragedies proves to be Shakespeare's accuracy in portraying the love of power, which, when combined with the love of mischief, can commit wickedness almost unrestrained. 'Love of mischief' is Hazlitt's phrase; and he uses the word mischief in an old sense which may need explaining. By the love of mischief he means the human propensity – especially marked in strong-willed persons – to be always doing something, rather than thinking or doing nothing; to be always rousing oneself to action and doing something *to the world*, rather than letting oneself be and letting the world be.

Power, of course, loves to see its own effects in the world, and this fact suggests a reason why the love of power might be said to be allied to the love of mischief. The attachment to doing and witnessing the effects of our doing, without regard to right and wrong, Hazlitt in some moods would describe as the original sin of

human nature. And the related interest we often have in watching the effects for their own sake, without regard to how they are created or by whom, Hazlitt seems to have felt was the original sin of the arts.

Without moral restraint, and indeed a-morally, the aesthetic spectacle of sudden or violent and impressive action moves us to admire its effects for their own sake. This aesthetic emotion in response to a powerful spectacle occurs previous to thought and is often sufficient to prevent thought. That, according to Hazlitt in his character of Iago, is a main reason why we go to see tragedies performed. It is also a reason for the popularity of wars, so long as our country does not directly suffer the effects. And it is a reason, Hazlitt finally came to believe, for the perpetual and irrational attachment in most people to a society based on privilege and inequality, where doing and suffering are split: a few persons, remarkably, act and the majority unremarkably suffer or endure.

This complex observation seems to me the central intuition guiding much of Hazlitt's criticism of Shakespeare. I lay it down abstractly because you need it in order to grasp the whole thought behind one of his best-known critical pronouncements – the passage on the relationship between imagination, poetry, and power, which comes near the start of his essay on *Coriolanus*. 'The language of poetry,' Hazlitt says there, 'naturally falls in with the language of power,' and he goes on:

The principle of poetry is a very anti-levelling principle. It aims at effect, it exists by contrast. It admits of no medium. It is every thing by excess. It rises above the ordinary standard of sufferings and crimes. It presents a dazzling appearance. It shows its head turretted, crowned, and crested. Its front is gilt and blood-stained. Before it 'it carries noise, and behind it leaves tears.' It has its altars and its victims, sacrifices, human sacrifices. Kings, priests, nobles, are its train-bearers, tyrants and slaves its executioners. – 'Carnage is its daughter.' ... A lion hunting a flock of sheep or a herd of wild asses is a more poetical object than they; and we even take part with the lordly beast, because our vanity or some other feeling makes us disposed to place ourselves in the situation of the strongest party. ... There is nothing heroical in a multitude of miserable rogues not wishing to be starved, or complaining that they are like to be so: but when a single man comes forward to brave their cries and to make them submit to the last indignities, from mere pride and self-will, our admiration of his prowess is immediately converted into contempt for their pusillanimity. The insolence of power is stronger than the plea of necessity. The tame submission to usurped authority or even the natural resistance to it has nothing to excite or flatter the imagination: it is the assumption of a right to insult or oppress others that carries an imposing air of superiority with it. We had rather be the oppressor than the oppressed. The love of power in ourselves and the admiration of it in others are both natural to man: the one makes him a tyrant, the other a slave. (iv, 214–15)¹

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

There may be something in the physical presence and even the breath of the crowd, which an aristocratic sensibility finds repellent, as certain remarks by Casca in *Julius Caesar* remind us; but that reaction is a matter of temper and acquired antipathy.

Hazlitt is describing a deeper tendency of our nature that allows us simply to ignore or neglect most representations of the actual sufferings of a large mass of people. It is hard to say why, but we can indeed come to know this about ourselves, that representations of general suffering or privation are an unattractive subject for dramatic depiction, and this is so no matter how well-attested the suffering, and no matter what our declared and conscious principles of action. We sooner sympathize with one than with many, and our natural affinity is with one who acts over one who suffers. If you try to refute Hazlitt's observation by searching for counter-examples in the history of the arts, you will find the search a long one. Among the major talents in poetry, painting, and drama, it is hard to call to mind a single full-scale appeal to the common good that proceeds by adequate representation of a common evil. Perhaps Géricault's *Le Radeau de la Méduse* gets as close as any individual work ever has to such a feeling; but there the evil, by the time we come to see it, is impersonal. A collective work such as the charity concert 'We Are the World' may seem to prove the possibility that Hazlitt denies; but the artistic shading, the figurative extravagance of the very words *we are the world* only makes his point again. What they meant was: 'The world will be better if it watches *us*; and—a corollary—it had better watch, because it can't be trusted to mind itself'. The intentions of 'We Are the World' were honourably unselfish, high-mindedly ethical, and universal, but the event took for granted the aesthetic premise that imagination is a very anti-levelling principle.

I want to use this critical preparation from Hazlitt's moral psychology to explore a perception that may possibly be more mine than Hazlitt's – a thought about the relationship between the love of power and political evil. I draw the evidence from two plays, though on this theme they are two of Shakespeare's greatest: *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*. But I must ask your leave a moment to summarize in broad and didactic terms two Shakespearean axioms which I believe the evidence of these plays bears out. The appetite for power engenders dreaming, and dreams in turn enhance and enlarge that appetite, so that its objects appear sublime. And the second premise: two persons or more, planning and acting together, are capable of things one person alone could not and would not imagine. That is to say, the love of power is itself a passion; but it leads away from human love; and, unlike love of one's friend or love of one's parent or child, it has no tendency to foster or teach, or to perpetuate any institution or moral force we take to be good. It is its own experience, without law. In the drive of Shakespearean action I am describing, want leads on to want and there is no end of appetite. There is something self-extinguishing, and self-humbling, about human love; but persons acting in corps are different.

How does the enormity of killing someone present itself to the conscience? The killing even of one person, for probably sound and certainly defensible

political ends – as in the case of a leader on the verge of becoming a tyrant who has done his share of killing and whose harm to his country may outweigh any possible benefit of his rule. The thought comes to Brutus in act II, scene 1 of *Julius Caesar*:

Between the acting of a dreadful deed
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasm, or a hideous dream.
The genius and the mortal instruments
Are then in council, and the state of man,
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection. (II.i.63–9)

Brutus is a man of reflection, like Hamlet, whom Shakespeare was probably working on the same year; and the lines I have quoted anticipate Hamlet's fear that, in the anxious and scrupulous,

the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought
And enterprises of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action. (III.i.84–8)

But where Hamlet anyway expresses a yearning for action, since action leaves a unique mark of the relation between oneself and the world, Brutus sees all action as penetrated by the threat of disorder and upheaval. The mind, as it contemplates a dreadful deed, suffers the nature of an insurrection; the man is overthrown by his desire to commit a usurpation. Follow Brutus a little further into self-doubt and it may appear that resolution is not the native temper of the mind, except in the innocent. The revenge on which Hamlet counsels himself is, in fact, a crime, as the possibly justified assassination by which Brutus is tempted is also a crime; whoever performs such actions, if he has a conscience, should not want to be rewarded by gaining power.

If we look further back in the plot of *Julius Caesar*, we see that at its opening, the thought of killing Caesar had hardly entered Brutus's mind; and yet, once it is broached, he treats the 'acting' of this dreadful deed (by which he means the mind's first excitement toward action) as a familiar and plausible dedication of high republican conscience in a situation like his. Cassius, you might say, gives him the idea; but that does not seem the right way of putting it, since, if you search their dialogue you will not find a precise point at which Cassius introduces the idea of conspiracy, or a point at which Brutus accepts it. A conspiracy should be thought of as a breathing-together for political ends, rather than a necessarily conscious collaboration between partners who have contracted for a purpose.

We see Brutus separately in soliloquy, metaphysical, reflective, and school-masterly as he is by temperament, thinking his way into political murder by logical steps:

It must be by his death; and for my part
 I know no personal cause to spurn at him
 But for the general. He would be crowned:
 How that might change his nature, there's the question.
 It is the bright day that brings forth the adder,
 And that craves wary walking. Crown him that,
 And then I grant we put a sting in him
 That at his will he may do danger with.
 The abuse of greatness is when it disjoins
 Remorse from power; and to speak of Caesar
 I have not known when his affections swayed
 More than his reason. But 'tis a common proof
 That lowliness is young ambition's ladder
 Whereto the climber upward turns his face;
 But when he once attains the upmost round
 He then unto the ladder turns his back,
 Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
 By which he did ascend. So Caesar may.
 Then, lest he may, prevent. And since the quarrel
 Will bear no colour for the thing it is,
 Fashion it thus: that what he is, augmented,
 Would run to these and these extremities.
 And therefore think him as a serpent's egg
 Which hatched, would as his kind grow mischievous,
 And kill him in the shell. (II.i.10–34)

No man under the sway of tormenting passion ever argued himself into dangerous action so logically. Caesar is not a menace to freedom yet. He may not even become a danger. Yet, he is interested in having the power that would allow him to act on ambition should he acquire it. And Brutus in his cool way has considerable insight into Caesar – Caesar who will say, outside Brutus's hearing but echoing precisely these fears of grandiosity: 'Danger knows full well/That Caesar is more dangerous than he:/We are two lions littered in one day,/And I the elder and more terrible' (II.ii.44–7). The man who thinks that thought is capable of mischief; and on Brutus's argument, the republic cannot stand if such a power is permitted to augment itself: 'The abuse of greatness is when it disjoins/Remorse from power'. Once Caesar turns serpent, by his very nature he will be unable to take instruction in remorse from those he has left behind.

This is a public conclusion about public facts concerning liberty and honour which Brutus must work out for himself. Paradoxically, the test of public conscience is that it should work thus unaided, privately interpreting the meaning of ideals whose bearings are more than private. The device that lures Brutus at last to a conspiracy, is his reception of a series of anonymous prayers or petitions, of which we are shown the latest: 'Brutus, thou sleep'st; awake, and see thyself./ Shall Rome, et cetera. Speak, strike, redress' (II.i.46–7). He repeats the suggestive coded and fugitive 'Shall Rome,

et cetera', and comments: 'Thus must I piece it out:/ Shall Rome stand under one man's awe? What Rome?/ My ancestors did from the streets of Rome/ The Tarquin drive, when he was called a king' (51–4). So Brutus's imperative action is deduced from an appeal he is sent by an unnamed person. We know that Brutus is aware that persuasion can happen, for later he will say of Caius Ligarius and the utility of drawing him into the conspiracy: 'He loves me well, and I have given him reasons./ Send him but hither and I'll fashion him' (II.i.220) – meaning by fashion, 'persuade in a way that suits his character and the role we will want him to play.' And yet, as Brutus will show in his oration to the crowd after the killing of Caesar, though he may know about persuasion, he has no idea how to raise a passion by the emergent rhetoric of crisis. He is defeated in a situation like that *because* he is incapable of being changed by the situation. He is not in the game from ambition; and, in him, remorse is not disjoined from power. Yet his moral principle, to call it that, in a setting of revolutionary action is fated to look like mere inertia or immobility.

On this same path of treachery and protective counter-plotting, Lady Macbeth travels much farther and faster than Macbeth: she gets to the point of murder in her mind while he is still is wondering about his next promotion by fate and the king's will. She differs from him in having made weaker preparations for her physical and mental endurance of the evil she means to do. Honour, loyalty, and hospitality are weighty virtues in the mind of Macbeth, and his killing of Duncan will be, in his view, a crime against all these goods, but it is Lady Macbeth who has in her some shade of natural piety; she is taken aback by Duncan's resemblance to her father, and will add later: 'Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?' She misjudges her power of indifference; whereas Macbeth wants to be deceived about his actual power as an agent: 'Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going' – his words to the apparition of the dagger mark the way that any political *cause* takes on the quality of an unavoidable prompting for the actor who would divide himself from feelings of remorse. ('I didn't do it; – there! – the knife led me on.') A halo of casuistry is cast by moments in all of Macbeth's soliloquies to cover the savagery of his motives. *Things happen* is the sentiment of a man who is morally dead; and though Macbeth never arrives at a perfect void of feeling, the events of assassination, usurpation, and the procuring the death of his rivals, are in his mind assimilated to acts of war, in which the responsibility of every soldier is diminished by the chaos of the strife. Macbeth does get free of remorse, and he does it by an act of abstraction similar to Casca's 'Speak, hands, for me!' – 'speak, sword, for me' is close to being Macbeth's creed.

By contrast, Lady Macbeth has to shroud herself from knowledge; for she knows what the deed will cost her if that knowledge comes.

Come, thick Night

And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of Hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor Heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry, 'Hold, hold!' (I.v.50–4)

Violent transgression is alluring to many who do not act on the wish, or who go part way and draw back. Why? They restrain themselves, not because their consciousness is spotless as Lady Macbeth's is not, but because at some point their eyes have seen what their hands did. She has this power of restraint herself, and here is praying to have it taken away. 'Make me blind to myself' is the force of her command. And for Lady Macbeth there is herself, and then a vast gulf, and across it all that seems to her unnatural, savage, and depraved. But, for Macbeth, there is always the warrior hierarchy: someone stands a rank above you to judge and rate the things you do. Murder of the king, in this ethic, is a dereliction of Macbeth's duty as a *host*; and he will be judged accordingly unless he can live to become the official estimator of all moral duties.

The onset of the violence turns on an exchange between this wife and this husband, in which their difference of awareness opens wide:

Macb. My dearest love,
Duncan comes here to-night.

Lady M. And when goes whence?

Macb. To-morrow, as he purposes.

Lady M. O! never

Shall sun that morrow see!
Your face, my Thane, is as a book, where men
May read strange matters. To beguile the time,
Look like the time; bear welcome in your eyes,
Your hand, your tongue: look like th'innocent flower,
But be the serpent under't. He that's coming
Must be provided for. (I.v.58-67)

So she is already decided, and ready with the counsel of deception, as with an understatement that deceives: 'provided for', like 'paid off' in a later idiom, means *kill* by so casually meaning *play host to*.

An extraordinary speech by Macbeth answers this advice. It is a speech, for all the differences of character, that nearly corresponds to the soliloquy of Brutus on the acting of a dreadful deed. We are here given to witness his mind at work as Macbeth pieces out a justification that does not justify. He considers wishfully how much would be solved if murder were a simple and self-contained act:

that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all – here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come. – But in these cases,
We still have judgment here; that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which being taught, return
To plague th'inventor: this even-handed Justice
Commends th'ingredience of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips. (I.vii.4-12)

So Macbeth recognizes that ‘judgment here,’ the knowledge of men who know one’s actions, marks a boundary of actions taken on earth, and it assures counteraction if not vengeance. Besides, even where it seems to triumph, the fame of the usurper will never be separable from the horror of his crime. For the king’s virtues

Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongu’d, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off;
And Pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven’s Cherubins, hors’d
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind. – I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which oerleaps itself
And falls on th’other – (I.vii.19–28)

He was going to say: on the other *side* (perhaps) – like a man never quite getting onto the horse, or crossing the river without the benefit of moving his troops across, or digging a grave only to find the soil kept sliding back. Vaulting ambition would go over or go past a judgment in the other life; but judgment ‘on this side’ is not to be scouted: judgment *here*; it says that there is a reality in the moral order, in accordance with which poisonous effects come to plague their inventor. It does so because the two inhabit the same world; but also more mysteriously because deeds are like children that want to claim their proper parentage. They bear the signature of the doer, and though cast adrift, they refuse to be orphaned. They have an interest in whoever commits them. They are the infallible messages of character, read by the angels who are God’s messengers.

On the difference in moral consciousness between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, Hazlitt has some extraordinary things to say. He finds Macbeth not merely the simpler but the weaker of the two. A creature of his warrior life, whom nothing has prepared for the ambition now planted in him, ‘he staggers,’ writes Hazlitt, ‘under the weight of his own purposes and the suggestions of others; he stands at bay with his situation’ (iv, 187). I take this to mean that the character is exactly equal to and is a traceable product of his circumstances, and of the sum of the accidents that form his predicament. But to Hazlitt this also suggests that Macbeth is not a protagonist in the fullest sense: ‘He is not equal to the struggle with fate and conscience’ (iv, 187). To clarify and expand Hazlitt’s intuition: Macbeth does not grasp the struggle between ambition and conscience which his words and the images of his mind reflect; that is why he recoils from the thought that his ambition comes from himself.

About Lady Macbeth, by contrast, Hazlitt remarks: ‘The magnitude of her resolution almost covers the magnitude of her guilt’ (iv, 188). He means that it does so in the eyes of the audience. We almost pardon the magnitude of her wickedness in our astonishment at the display of her power. And this goes with his second paradoxical comment on our response to her character: ‘She is a great

bad woman, whom we hate, but whom we fear more than we hate' (iv, 188). Here we are brought very close to the peculiar naturalism of Hazlitt's thinking about the love of power and its relation to things and people that we admire in spite of ourselves. He pursues this thought with relentless daring and acuteness of mind, into corners where a common critic would never think to find its traces. In the character of the witches, for example, which has been turned into a metaphysical puzzle by some interpreters of Shakespeare – 'Did he believe in them?' we are supposed to ask with some urgency, 'and do they really bring about the events of the action which they prophesy?' – it is enough for Hazlitt that Macbeth evidently believes in their powers, and that his own destructive acts harmonize with his belief. But the analysis does not stop there. With an unsuperstitious and wholly secular curiosity, Hazlitt asks what kind or degree of evil the witches exemplify. 'They are hags of mischief, obscene panders to iniquity, malicious from their impotence of enjoyment, enamoured of destruction, because they are themselves unreal, abortive, half-existences' (iv, 189). Notice what an unexpected and original claim Hazlitt here is making. Compared to Lady Macbeth, the witches are inferior specimens of evil. They can only act as 'panders to iniquity' because, without mind and will, they cannot know the actual violation of conscience in which the darkest evil consists. They administer their promptings out of their resentment that they themselves are but half-real. They can attain the semblance of a sharper reality only by finding human agents to carry out their wicked intentions. But as human good (being voluntary) shows a triumph of virtue over temptation, so *human* evil, acted upon in defiance of remembered sources of good, warrants a damnation unknown to those who serve as mere panders or tools. This comment, by indirection, offers a fine commentary on the motive and meaning of Lady Macbeth's vow in the soliloquy that begins, 'Come, you Spirits,/ That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here/... Stop up the access and passage to remorse' (I.v.37–41). For in keeping with that prayer, she does so alienate herself from her own sympathies that, after the murder which she calls 'our great quell' (I.vii.72), she will be helpless to interpret the most elemental of her husband's fears.

They are a strange combination of souls, and they do worse together than either imaginably could do alone. Macbeth knows that reason and valour alike argue against murder; but there is never a moment at which he comes near possessing the strength not to surrender to the will of Lady Macbeth. A great and honoured warrior, he is not a man to initiate action on the largest scale; and of the two, he is the lieutenant, she the general. This division is played out in their exchanges after the murder at act II, scene ii. Macbeth thinks back on the deed, and Lady Macbeth urges him not to think.

- Macb.* List'ning their fear, I could not say, 'Amen,'
When they did say, 'God bless us.'
- Lady M.* Consider it not so deeply.
- Macb.* But wherefore could not I pronounce 'Amen'?
I had most need of blessing, and 'Amen'
Stuck in my throat.

- Lady M.* These deeds must not be thought
After these ways: so, it will make us mad.
- Macb.* Methought I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murther Sleep,' – the innocent sleep;
Sleep, that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great Nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast; –
- Lady M.* What do you mean? (II.ii.28-39)

His despair is metaphysical, but by the end it is also rhetorical; he is on the verge of one of those flights of elegiac consolation that make poetry out of his remorse and turn it safely impersonal ('Had I but died an hour before this chance./ I had lived a blessed time'; II.iii.89–90). Like Othello, another warrior and too-capable rhetorician, Macbeth cannot incriminate himself without trailing words so resonant that the performance makes a eulogy to himself. Yet the subject of the dialogue here is a reality of the moral world: trust, with its patterning of routine, allows each day to bury its dead; without trust, all life becomes an irruption of hidden appetites that yield no place of rest. Macbeth's fear, in short, teaches over the head of Macbeth; his words point to a wisdom more accurate than any possessed by his conscious mind. What then accounts for Lady Macbeth's incomprehension? For that is the meaning of her 'What do you mean?'

This literalness, or unconceivingness of hers, is related to a blindness of the will. I am drawing here upon Burke's great insight that revolutions or usurpations are not performed by people who have in mind a clear political goal and act to achieve it. They are made by persons in the grip of an idea of power, who take charge of an act called revolution, or who usurp power without giving a proper name to their act. They may defer to a stated aim like the establishment of the rights of man, or the securing of a new world order. Or they may have at heart a definitive re-action – resistance to an attack on racial purity or on civilization or freedom. (All these phrases from the rights of man onward should be read as if in quotation marks; it is the words, says Burke, not the things that work on the minds of revolutionists.) The cause may be a founding, a disruption, or a rejection of all that those who act behind the scenes, themselves think to be the marks of a metaphysical evil, 'incorporeal, pure, unmixed, dephlegmated, defecated evil' (*A Letter to a Noble Lord*). The point is only that revolution has its own momentum in the hands of those who want to govern without law, and for whom public exertions of power are necessary to an expansion of self-will. Those who seize power to augment power, at such a moment, are often in some sense maimed people: half-formed, stunted; failures in their own eyes, made new by ambition; or, as the case of Macbeth implies, conventional time-servers of high ability in a narrow walk of expertise (for battle is a *craft* analogous to politics but not the same).

Hazlitt's inventiveness, in his discussion of the love of power and the love of mischief – his break from critical decorum in suggesting an identity between the passions

of life and the emotions of art – involves a simplification so far from customary that we may be slow to recognize the implications of his analysis. A common sense of the division between art and life tells us that the viewer always remembers that he is watching a representation; and Dr. Johnson spoke for this common sense when he wrote in his *Preface to Shakespeare*: ‘The delight of tragedy proceeds from our consciousness of fiction; if we thought murders and treasons real, they would please no more.’ Hazlitt, in the train of thought we have been pursuing, surmised that people take *the same kind of pleasure* from the act of power in the theatre that they show in their admiration of the conquests of a nation at war. This admiration, to repeat, does not spring from a love of evil but rather from a non-moral love of *effects*. The maker of effects is the person who acts on others, the person who will not leave things alone. We watch, with fascination, the powerful heroic agent in art, from the same motives that would make us interested in the exploits of such a person in history. In this connection, it seems to me revealing that the grounds of Hazlitt’s praise of Napoleon bear a family resemblance to his wonder at the sublimity of Lady Macbeth. Napoleon, too, was singular in his defiance, while the allied sovereigns were a mass of men of conventional aims; and so it was possible to prefer him to them, as one prefers a tyrant to tyranny. But if, when we watch things done in the theatre, we come nearer than we suppose to our practical judgments at their most unwary, may something like the inverse be also true? Is it possible that, in lives like ours, which we spend more and more as voluntary spectators, we come to realities (including the reality of suffering) so fully equipped with aesthetic emotions that we forget that what is happening is not mainly something that we watch? There is a sense in which – to evoke the greatest and most intoxicating of spectacles – war itself is now put farther from us and aestheticized by the same means that bring it closer: the instant and gratifying reproduction of images, numbers, slogans, reasons of state. And is it possible that what is true of the spectacle of war, is becoming no less true of the very idea of experience: that we come to regard it increasingly as something we might watch as if the actual doing and suffering were not quite ours? I close with this speculation and no further thought, prompted in this again by Hazlitt, who found through the arts themselves a wisdom and a way of questioning beyond the reach of art.

YALE UNIVERSITY



George Clint, *Edmund Kean as Richard III* (Courtesy The Art Archive/Garrick Club)

HAZLITT AND KEAN

Uttara Natarajan

By one of those especially satisfying turns of fate, as a number of critics and biographers have noted,¹ Hazlitt's beginnings as a theatre reviewer, and the launch of his reputation as a writer, were very nearly coincident with the entrance of the great Shakespearean actor, Edmund Kean, on the London stage. Hazlitt had only been a few months employed as drama critic in the *Morning Chronicle*, when he turned up on a bitter winter's night to a performance of *The Merchant of Venice* at Drury Lane theatre. This was the legendary debut, on 26 January 1814, when Kean, then a little-known provincial actor, appeared to a London audience in the part of Shylock. As Hazlitt later described it:

Mr Kean (of whom report had spoken highly) last night made his appearance at Drury-Lane Theatre in the character of Shylock. For voice, eye, action, and expression, no actor has come out for many years at all equal to him. The applause, from the first scene to the last, was general, loud, and uninterrupted. (v, 179)²

Responding to the phenomenon of Kean, Hazlitt began to develop the critical positions that he went on to maintain in all of his subsequent writings on Shakespeare. His first series of reviews, published from January 1814 to March 1815, in the periodicals in which he worked in succession – the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Champion*, the *Examiner* – form a complete sequence, a cogent, stand-alone body of work. In this essay, my discussion will be of this sequence, as Hazlitt's first sustained exercise in Shakespeare criticism.

1 See for instance, P.P. Howe, *The Life of William Hazlitt* (1922; new edn. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1947), 143; Herschel Baker, *William Hazlitt* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 290ff; John Kinnaird, *William Hazlitt: Critic of Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 165ff; Stanley Jones, *Hazlitt: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 133ff.

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

The Shakespearean sublime

The very first of the reviews in the sequence, printed in the *Chronicle* on 27 January 1814, making it the first published response to the famous debut, puts Hazlitt at the heart of English romanticism. Celebrating Kean's virtuosity, he enters a proviso:

There was a lightness and vigour in his tread, a buoyancy and elasticity of spirit, a fire and animation, which would accord better with almost any other character than with the morose, sullen, inward, inveterate, inflexible malignity of Shylock. ... The fault of his acting was (if we may hazard the objection), an over-display of the resources of the art, which gave too much relief to the hard, impenetrable, dark groundwork of the character of Shylock. (v, 179)

This is a fine example of the way in which Hazlitt's text so often reproduces the characteristic figures of Shakespeare's (hendiadys, synonymia), but that is beside the point I am making here. In his exposure of the gap between conception and execution, between the character of Shylock and Kean's rendering of it, Hazlitt posits, not just a discrepancy, but a binary split, fundamental to romantic poetics: the split between the sublime (or ideal) and its representation. Shylock's sublimity is conveyed in the impression of magnitude or depth produced by Hazlitt's epithets ('inward', 'impenetrable', 'dark'); the sheer accumulation of those epithets expresses the overwhelming effect of the sublime. The aesthetic principle, that the sublime is diminished by representation, is contained in the contrast between the qualities of the representation ('lightness', 'elasticity', 'animation') and those of the original character ('hard', 'inflexible', 'sullen'). Kean's extraordinary power as an actor all the more makes the point, that the failings in his performances of Shakespeare are due, less to the actor's limitations, than to the unattainability of the ideal. Hazlitt confirms as much in his review of Kean's next part, as Richard III: 'Why do we try this actor by an ideal theory? Who is there that will stand the same test?' (v, 184).³

Nonetheless, the 'ideal theory' is present to Hazlitt in each of Kean's Shakespearean roles. Thus the character of Richard III 'should have a little more solidity, depth, sustained, and impassioned feeling, with somewhat less brilliancy, with fewer glancing lights, pointed transitions, and pantomimic evolutions' (v, 181). The relation of text to performance, as Hazlitt describes it here, is the antithetical relation of great to little, the substantial to the ephemeral. In Kean's second performance as Richard III, 'In pronouncing the words in Richard's soliloquy, "I am myself alone," Mr. Kean gave a quick and hurried movement to his voice, as if it was a thought that suddenly struck him, or which he wished to pass over; whereas it is the deep and rooted sentiment of his breast' (v, 183). Again, depth is

3 Failing in Shakespeare, Kean succeeds more completely in parts that are close enough to Shakespearean roles to bring out his skills, without exposing their shortcomings. Just outside the period of the review sequence under discussion, in the character of Zanga in Edward Young's *Revenge*, 'his general style of acting is ... completely adapted' to the part (v, 227). As Bajazet in Nicholas Rowe's *Tamerlane*, 'Mr. Kean did justice to his author, or went the whole length of the text' (xviii, 205).

reduced to surface, the permanent to the passing. In Hamlet, changeability itself, engrained in Hamlet's nature, becomes sublime: it 'never loses its continuity. It has the yielding flexibility of "a wave of the sea."' In this case, Kean's 'too strong and pointed' representation takes away from an infinitely fluid character, the infinitude and depth that make it sublime (v, 187).

Being infinite, the sublime is also indivisible. Hazlitt finds that the unity of Shakespeare's sublime characterizations is too frequently undermined by the variety of Kean's dramatic resources. As Shylock, 'The fault of his acting was ... an over-display of the resources of the art, which gave too much relief to the hard, impenetrable, dark groundwork of the character of Shylock' (v, 179). In Kean's first appearance as Richard III, similarly, he 'dissipated the impression of the character by the variety of his resources' (v. 181), in his second, 'The extreme elaboration of the parts injures the broad and massy effect' (v. 184). Participating in contemporary romantic aesthetics, at the same time, Hazlitt brings to his understanding of Shakespeare's characterization, his own philosophical commitments. The unity of thought and action (all thought and action originate in a single mind or imagination), and the innate power of the mind are present in his earliest theoretical formulations. In these comments on Kean, likewise, 'hard ... groundwork', 'impression', 'massy', indicate not only the unity of character, but also its force.

As well as singleness, moreover, Shakespeare's tragic figures exhibit the singularity of mind or character. Character is not only one, it is peculiarly and uniquely so. The tenet of 'ruling character', in Shakespeare's creations, as well as in art and literature more generally, is well established by the time of Hazlitt's reviews. Both Coleridge and Lamb make use of this tenet, in lectures and essays that predate the reviews.⁴ Absorbed into romantic aesthetics, especially in relation to Shakespeare, 'ruling character' asserts an inner principle of unity, the unity of character, that supersedes and negates the neo-classical unities, dismissed by the romantics as artificial and externally-imposed. For Hazlitt, beyond this, the notion has a larger significance. The idea of a pronounced and distinct individuality, encapsulated in one dominant attitude or purpose, an idea central to the view of human nature set out in Hazlitt's familiar essays, begins to be developed in his Shakespeare criticism. Shylock's 'one unalterable purpose' (v, 179), Hamlet's 'natural bias of ... character' (v, 186), Iago's 'incorrigible love of mischief' (v, 215), all support a notion of engrained character that pertains, in turn, to the emphases on individuality and innateness in Hazlitt's philosophy of mind. The singularity of Shakespeare's characters is treated at length in Hazlitt's review of Kean's Macbeth in the *Champion*, where the different traits of Macbeth and Richard III, two individuals in similar circumstances, as Hazlitt sees

4 For instance, Lecture 12 of Coleridge's 1811-12 lectures on Shakespeare and Milton, some or all of which Hazlitt attended, begins with the 'ruling impulse' or 'reigning impulse' in Shakespeare's characters. See S.T. Coleridge, *Lectures 1808-1819 on Literature*, ed. R.A. Foakes, vol v of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen series 75, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), I, 377. In his 1811 essay, 'On the Genius and Character of Hogarth', Lamb also refers to the 'ruling character' of Hogarth's works, immediately before he goes on to compare Hogarth with Shakespeare. See *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E.V. Lucas (London: Methuen, 1903-5), I, 70.

them, show Shakespeare's separation of one creation from another by 'the leading principle of the character' or 'peculiar trait of character' (v, 205).⁵

In his review of Kean's Hamlet, Hazlitt identifies the only exception to the rule of singular or biased human nature: Shakespeare himself. The mind or genius that imagines a variety of biased minds, must itself be free of bias:

The poet appears for the time being, to be identified with the character he wishes to represent, and to pass from one to the other, like the same soul, successively animating different bodies. By an art like that of the ventriloquist, he throws his imagination out of himself, and makes every word appear to proceed from the very mouth of the person whose name it bears. His plays alone are properly expressions of the passions, not descriptions of them. (v, 185)

Behind Hazlitt's observations is the established tradition of Shakespeare as the universal genius, the mirror of nature; Hazlitt explicitly draws on that tradition when he goes on to observe that 'Each object and circumstance seems to exist in his mind as it existed in nature' (v, 185). The related premise, that Shakespeare transformed himself into each of his characters, was favoured by both Coleridge and Lamb, as Hazlitt knew.⁶ For Hazlitt, however, this Protean quality has a particular relation to a theory of 'bias' that is distinctly his own, and that emerges most fully in his last and best collection of miscellaneous essays, *The Plain Speaker*. In these great moral essays, the development of character is directed by a natural and innate bias, with which we are each uniquely endowed, and which gives each of us a partial and uniquely blinkered take on the world.⁷ Already in the Kean reviews, Shakespeare's freedom from bias makes him the exception to the ordinary norms of humanity. In Hazlitt's subsequent expositions, whether of creative genius

5 Pope, in a passage from his Preface to Shakespeare that Hazlitt quotes at the opening of *Characters of Shakespear's Plays*, is probably Hazlitt's source here: 'every single character in Shakespear, is as much an individual, as those in life itself; it is as impossible to find any two alike; and such, as from their relation or affinity in any respect appear most to be twins, will upon comparison, be found remarkably distinct' – see *The Prose Works of Alexander Pope, Vol II: The Major Works, 1725–1744*, ed. R. Cowler (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 13–14. In Lecture 12 of the 1811–12 series, Coleridge also draws on this passage, when he makes it a ground of Shakespeare's superiority to other dramatists, 'that this great man could take two characters which seem to be the same (at first sight) and yet when minutely examined are totally distinct' (Coleridge, *Lectures 1808–1819 on Literature*, I, 378).

6 Shakespeare's Protean ability is posited by Coleridge in his 1808 lectures at the Royal Institution, as well as throughout the 1811–12 lectures at the London Philosophical Society, including Lecture 3, at which Hazlitt was certainly present. See Coleridge, *Lectures 1808–1819 on Literature*, I, 69, 225; Hazlitt's attendance at Lecture 3 of the 1811–12 series is confirmed by J.P. Collier's records (*ibid.*, 232–3). Lamb's version of the premise can be found in a note to his selections from Chapman, in *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who lived about the time of Shakespeare* (1808), as well as in his 1811 essay, 'On the Genius and Character of Hogarth' (Lamb, *Works*, IV, 83 and I, 78).

7 For a detailed explanation of Hazlitt's notion of 'bias', see my *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense: Criticism, Morals, and the Metaphysics of Power* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 93–6.

or everyday human behaviour, he locates Shakespeare always outside of his general view of the mind and its workings.

Performing Shakespeare

My effort so far has been to outline, in Hazlitt's early responses to Kean, an approach to Shakespeare that is both characteristically romantic and distinctively Hazlitt's. Prizing the textual and conceptual (that the two are interchangeable in Shakespeare's characters all the more confirms their ideal standing), this approach is nonetheless firmly grounded in Hazlitt's spontaneous reactions to actual performances. Far from being unresponsive, he is, on the contrary, intensely responsive to the experience of theatre. Side by side with his construction of an unrepresentable ideal, we must set his close engagement with performance, and his awareness that a great actor could, and did, succeed in realizing, sometimes newly illuminating, Shakespeare's text.

Hazlitt's delight in Kean's acting bursts out all over the *Chronicle* reviews, making even blame look like praise. The fault of Kean's Shylock is 'a lightness and vigour in his tread, a buoyancy and elasticity of spirit, a fire and animation' (v, 179); of his Richard III, 'an exuberance of talent' (v, 181); of his Iago, 'extreme grace, alacrity, and rapidity' (v, 190). Such judgements can only barely be seen to be critical. On the other hand, Hazlitt's admiration for Kean is expressed in superlatives. 'His style of acting is, if we may use the expression, more significant, more pregnant with meaning, more varied and alive in every part, than any we have almost ever witnessed' (in Shylock; v, 180); 'we cannot imagine any character represented with greater distinctness and precision, more perfectly *articulated* in every part' (in Richard III; v, 181). 'Mr. Kean's representation of the character had the most brilliant success' (in Hamlet; v, 187). 'There were ... repeated bursts of feeling and energy which we have never seen surpassed' (in Othello; v, 189). Each time Hazlitt reiterates Kean's failure to realize Shakespeare's conceptions completely, he attests, at the same time and more emphatically, the extent of Kean's success.

In fact Hazlitt is peculiarly alert to the symbiotic possibilities of text and performance. Thus, in his report of Kean's second performance as Richard III, he shows how the text can direct the actor, quoting Hastings' description of Richard in act 3, scene 4 (beginning 'His grace looks cheerfully and smooth this morning') as 'a perfect study for the actor' (v, 181). In the same review, he then shows the converse, how the actor can enhance the text. Kean's enactment of the courtship of Richard and Anne brings out the text's literary genealogy, by turning the scene into a reworking of the original temptation myth: 'He seemed, like the first tempter, to approach his prey, certain of the event, and as if success had smoothed the way before him' (v, 182). Another instance, of acting that enriches the text, is in the last scene of the play, 'The attitude in which he stands with his hands stretched out, after his sword is taken from him, had a preternatural and terrific grandeur, as if his will could not be disarmed, and the very phantoms of his despair had a withering power' (v, 182). Sublimity is manifest here, not only in Shakespeare's character, but in Kean's rendering of it. Hazlitt's report of the performance becomes

indistinguishable from his interpretation of the character, or, more simply, his description of Kean becomes a reading of Shakespeare.

Elsewhere, Hazlitt recognizes how the actor's (extra-textual) movements or gestures – what he elsewhere calls 'bye-play' (v, 202) – can alter interpretation. In the part of Hamlet,

Mr. Kean has introduced in this part a *new reading*, as it is called, which we think perfectly correct. In the scene where he breaks from his friends to obey the command of his father, he keeps his sword pointed behind him, to prevent them from following him, instead of holding it before him to protect him from the Ghost. (v, 188)

Kean's choice of gesture becomes an interpretation of Hamlet's state of mind. Similarly, 'the manner of his coming back after he has gone to the extremity of the stage, from a pang of parting tenderness to press his lips to Ophelia's hand. ... was the finest commentary that was ever made on Shakespear' (v, 188). Hazlitt goes further still in the review of Kean's *Iago*, where he actually praises the licence of Kean's interpretation, 'preferring his liberal and spirited dramatic versions, to the dull, literal, common-place monotony of his competitors' (v, 190). A successful performance excuses liberties with Shakespeare's text, and Hazlitt acknowledges, 'Besides, after all, in the conception of the part, he may be right, and we may be wrong' (v, 190).

All this must surely establish that the critical commonplace, that the romantic stance is against the performance of Shakespeare's plays, hardly works for Hazlitt. His reputation and Kean's were made together. The new theatre critic of the *Chronicle* attracted wide public notice with the impassioned prose in which he celebrated a rising star, and in so doing, played no small part in promoting and cementing the reputation of that star. Hazlitt's enthusiasm for Kean's performances was so strong initially that the rumour arose, with no other foundation, that he had been bribed £1500 to secure the failing fortunes of the Drury Lane theatre.⁸ As familiarity bred censure, in the reviews from October 1814 onwards, Hazlitt's awareness of the discrepancy between text and performance became more pronounced. But although he was ready to declare, in his March 1815 review of Kean's *Richard II* for the *Examiner*, 'that the reader of the plays of Shakespear is almost always disappointed in seeing them acted; and, for our own parts, we should never go to see them acted if we could help it', he was still careful to except 'Mrs. Siddons and Mr. Kean – the former of whom in one or two characters, and the latter, not certainly in any one character, but in very many passages, have raised our imagination of the part they acted' (v, 222).

⁸ According to A.G. L'Estrange, in an annotation to a reference by Mary Russell Mitford to Hazlitt's reviews of Kean in the *Chronicle*: 'The belief of the time was, that Hazlitt received 1500*l.* from the management of Drury Lane for those articles. They made Kean's reputation and saved the theatre'. A.G. L'Estrange (ed.), *The Life of Mary Russell Mitford, Related in a Selection from her Letters to her Friends*, 3 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1870), II, 47n.

Coleridge and Lamb

The subject of performance is a convenient basis for a comparison between Hazlitt and his nearest contemporaries in Shakespeare criticism, Coleridge and Lamb. Hazlitt attended Coleridge's 1811–12 lectures on Shakespeare and Milton at the London Philosophical Society, before he himself began to write on Shakespeare. He had also read and admired Lamb's commentary on Shakespeare in *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets* (1808), and in the two *Reflector* essays of 1811, 'On the Genius and Character of Hogarth' and 'On the Tragedies of Shakespeare'. In more than a few details, the coincidence of Hazlitt's readings of Shakespeare with those of Coleridge and Lamb is manifest. I have mentioned already the principle of 'ruling character', as well as the contention that Shakespeare becomes the character he represents, a shared premise to which I will return more fully in due course. Numerous other indications, whether of influence or simply concurrence, can also be shown. On performance, however, Hazlitt departs considerably from his immediate precursors.

Coleridge's attitude to performance in the 1811–12 lectures belongs to an idea of Shakespeare to which is central the romantic claim that Shakespeare's creations are the products of an inner faculty, the imagination, rather than the senses, which are controlled by the external world. The poet's creativity attests to the human ability to surpass empirical response. In poetic creation, the mind is constitutive, not merely receptive. Hence Coleridge's distinction between copy and imitation, the latter being 'not the mere copy of things, but the contemplation of mind upon things', and the related distinction, between observation and meditation: 'Mere observation might be able to produce an accurate copy of a thing ... : Meditation looked at every character ... only as it contains something generally true.'⁹

In turn, Shakespeare's creations stimulate a reader's imagination, not a spectator's senses. By addressing the reader rather than the spectator of Shakespeare's plays, throughout the 1811–12 lectures, Coleridge promotes a standard romantic aesthetics that sets imagination against the senses.¹⁰ As he perceived it, the conditions of the stage in Shakespeare's day 'left Sh. to rely on his own imagination, & to speak not to the senses as was now done, but to the mind. He found the stage as near as possible a closet, & in the closet only could it be fully & completely enjoyed.'¹¹ The reader in the closet actively engages with Shakespeare's text; his imagination, free of sensory stimuli, fully participates in the act of reading. By contrast, the spectator in the modern theatre, his senses besieged by the physical paraphernalia of production, becomes passive, his scope for intellectual activity altogether

9 Coleridge, *Lectures 1808–1819 on Literature*, I, 225, 289. Coleridge draws the distinction between copy and imitation in his 1808 lecture series (*ibid.*, I, 83), and repeatedly in the 1811–12 series (*ibid.*, I, 223, 289, 349).

10 Janet Ruth Heller's *Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt, and the Reader of Drama* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1990), offers an overview of the way in which the distrust of the senses informs the romantic critics' attitude to drama, and the intellectual origins of that distrust from the aesthetics of Plato and Aristotle onwards.

11 Coleridge, *Lectures 1808–1819 on Literature*, I, 254.

curtailed. The 'mere passivity of our nature,' Coleridge explains in Lecture 5, must diminish in proportion as our intellectual faculties become active.¹²

Coleridge's treatment of Shakespearean composition and characterization in the 1811–12 lectures belongs to the model of imagination afterwards outlined in *Biographia Literaria*. His antipathy to performance is anchored in a Shakespeare criticism that is primarily theoretical, forming the basis for what is later set out as theory in *Biographia*. In the whole course of the 1811–12 lectures, no reference is made to any actual performance or production, and indeed, if we are to believe Crabb Robinson's description of Coleridge's preparation for these lectures, 'C. can't be induced to read Shakespear.'¹³ Certainly from the title of the series, 'A Course of Lectures on Shakespear and Milton, in illustration of the Principles of Poetry,'¹⁴ and from the records that survive, Coleridge's method is not to draw a general principle from a textual example, but to adduce the example to illustrate a stated principle. In this respect, the kind of observation that he praises in Shakespeare, 'the observation of that mind which having formed a theory & a system in its own nature has remarked all things as examples of the truth and confirming him in that truth,'¹⁵ might justly be attributed to Coleridge himself.

Stage representation, on which Coleridge touches in passing and in the abstract, is the main focus, as its full title announces, of Lamb's great essay of 1811, 'On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, considered with reference to their Fitness for Stage Representation.' Unlike Coleridge, Lamb is an inveterate playgoer and, like Hazlitt's, his comments on performing Shakespeare are based on long experience. Yet for Lamb, the sheer pleasure of the theatre alerts him all the more to its danger, that of momentarily indulging the senses to the more lasting detriment of the imagination. In his attitude to Shakespearean performance, Lamb shares with Coleridge the fear that the stimulation of the senses curbs the freedom of mind, 'operates upon the mind, to have its free conceptions ... cramped and pressed down to the measure of a strait-lacing actuality.'¹⁶ The inwardness of Shakespeare's characters is perceptible only to the reader whose imagination is unhindered by the senses: 'What we see upon a stage is body and bodily action; what we are conscious of in reading is almost exclusively the mind, and its movements.'¹⁷ Shakespeare's characters 'have ... something in them which appeals too exclusively to the imagination, to admit of their being made objects to the senses without suffering a change and a diminution.'¹⁸

For Lamb, as for Coleridge, performance and text constitute an antithesis, that of the senses and the imagination, or surface and depth. But beyond the anxiety that Coleridge expresses, about the overpowering paraphernalia of the modern stage,

12 Ibid., I, 270.

13 Ibid., I, 410.

14 Ibid., I, 179.

15 Ibid., I, 306.

16 Lamb, *Works*, I, 99.

17 Ibid., I, 108.

18 Ibid., I, 108.

Lamb derogates the very nature of acting itself. Shakespeare's delineation is of the inner character; the actor portrays an exterior that has little or nothing to do with that inwardness. If Coleridge's distinction is between imitation and copy, Lamb's is between the authentic and the counterfeit, between the genius who understands the internal workings of the mind, and the actor who is no more than a mimic of its outward expressions. 'To know the internal workings and movements of a great mind, of an Othello or a Hamlet for instance, ... seems to demand a reach of intellect of a vastly different extent from that which is employed upon the bare imitation of the signs of these passions in the countenance or gesture;¹⁹ Lamb's 'bare imitation' is lesser even than Coleridge's 'copy'. Such is the instantaneous effect of the senses, however, compared to the slowness of the intellect, that this 'bare imitation' easily supplants the ideal original. Not as a theorist, like Coleridge, but as an ardent and lifelong theatregoer, Lamb warns, not only that the experience of the spectator is lower than that of the reader, but also that the pressure (and pleasure) of the actual destroys the reader's pleasure in, and appreciation of, the ideal.

Romantic performance

Hazlitt's commitment, from his first publication, the 1805 *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* onwards, is also to the romantic subordination of the senses to the mind or imagination. But where for Coleridge and Lamb, such a commitment translates directly to a dichotomy of text and performance, Hazlitt does not make this particular translation. To him, the text stimulates the actor's imagination, as it does the reader's. Uniquely in Hazlitt's case, the actor gains rather than loses from the romantic relation between text and performance in Shakespearean drama. This is nowhere more manifest than in the *Examiner* review which I have cited, where, having expressed his disenchantment with the acting of Shakespeare's plays, Hazlitt goes on to theorize the dynamic of actor and author. Shakespeare, he argues, demands a greater effort from an actor than any other dramatist, because Shakespeare

stimulates the faculties of the actor more he [the actor] perceives how much he has to do, the inequalities he has to contend with, and he exerts himself accordingly; he puts himself at full speed, and lays all his resources under contribution; he attempts more, and makes a greater number of brilliant failures; ... (v, 222)

Attempting to realize Shakespeare's conceptions, the great actor strains at the limit of his own potential; his failure is 'brilliant', because it arises from the magnitude of his aspiration. Describing such a failure or partial realization, Hazlitt turns, ultimately, from one kind of romantic figuration, the antithesis, to another, the remnant or residue: 'If the genius of Shakespear does not shine out undiminished in the actor, we perceive certain effects and refractions of it in him. If the oracle does not speak quite intelligibly, yet we perceive that the priest at

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 98.

the altar is inspired with the god, or possessed with a demon' (v, 223). In other words, Hazlitt departs from his contemporaries in his perception of *presence* in the actor's effort. In the flawed performance of the great actor, something of his greater original, the character created by Shakespeare, might still be felt. At least in this respect, in Hazlitt's perception of the possibilities of performance, he outstrips by far his two closest peers in Shakespeare criticism.

In a recent issue of the *European Romantic Review* (2007), the critic Emily Allen is especially concerned to celebrate romantic theatre as a form of 'low' romanticism, although she acknowledges, too the instability of the distinction between the literary ('high') and the theatrical ('low') in the romantic period. My own interest, by contrast, is in the attributes of a 'high' romanticism in Hazlitt's view of the contemporary stage, that is, on a quality of magnitude that emerges, at least where Shakespeare is concerned, not only from the literary text, but also from its theatrical performance.²⁰ In this context, something more must be said about the particular figuration – the remnant or residue – that Hazlitt chooses to express the relation between Shakespeare's text and a great performance.

The attempt, which, in failing, retains something of the infinitude of its object, is fundamental to romantic aesthetics; it takes a more abstract form, for instance, in the construction of the modern or 'sentimental' consciousness by the German romantic theorist, Friedrich Schiller. The sentimental poet, as Schiller describes him, 'is constantly dealing ... with reality as boundary and with his idea as the infinite'.²¹ His endeavour is perpetual because his goal is unattainable; thereby, his art is 'the art of the infinite'.²²

Schiller's formulation suggests a useful paraphrase. At the broadest level of generalization, the romantic endeavour might be described as the attempt, or more pessimistically, the failure, to render the infinite – call it inspiration, conception, nature, or the ideal – by finite means. The poetry and prose of the romantics is frequently concerned with, at the same time that it embodies, this attempt or failure. Just such a concern emerges in Hazlitt's responses to Kean, but also more than this. Hazlitt shows us in Kean, another kind of romantic than poet or essayist or artist: the romantic performer. That Kean was the exemplary romantic actor is by now accepted critical wisdom. Reinvigorating the cliché, we might elicit, from Hazlitt's earliest notices of Kean, the idea of romantic performance; that which, attempting, and falling short of the ideal, still shows the reach and achievement, as it shows the failure, of human aspiration. Schiller declared that poetry 'means nothing else than to give humanity its most complete expression possible'.²³ Unaware of the echo, Hazlitt wrote in 1817, 'Mr. Kean ... shows us the utmost force of what is *human*' (xviii, 261).

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20 Emily Allen, 'Section Introduction: The Low-Down on Romantic Theater', *European Romantic Review* 18, 2 (April 2007), 135–8.

21 Friedrich Schiller, *On the Naïve and Sentimental in Literature*, transl. H. Watanabe-O'Kelly (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1981), 42.

22 *Ibid.*, 41.

23 *Ibid.*, 39.

HAZLITT'S BURKE AND THE IDEA OF GRACE

Matthew Scott

Ay, that I will; and I'll be wise hereafter
And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass
Was I, to take this drunkard for a god
And worship this dull fool! (Caliban)

1

In his elaborate, Germanophilic account of western aesthetics, one in which he does not even manage to spell the name of Lord Kames correctly, the late nineteenth-century Oxford philosopher Bernard Bosanquet treats Edmund Burke with a patronizing brevity that is characteristic of his wider opinion of British eighteenth-century thought. Moses Mendelssohn, a figure key to the German Enlightenment out of which the later idealist tradition grew, reviewed Burke's seminal essay *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* a year after its publication in 1757 in the *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften*, and it is a passage from a letter earlier in 1758 that Gotthold Ephraim Lessing wrote to Mendelssohn, which provides Bosanquet's introduction to a writer whose aesthetics he decries as merely empiricist. 'Although [Burke's] principles are not worth much,' Lessing writes, 'still his book is uncommonly useful as a collection of all the occurrences and perceptions which philosophers must assume as indisputable in inquiries of this kind.'¹ The *Enquiry* is cast for Lessing as a kind of commonplace book, a collection of empirical data that is in desperate need of over-arching abstraction. Since Bosanquet was committed to philosophical idealism, it shouldn't surprise us that he supports Lessing's assessment and rejects a work that he sees as a crudely local observation of minute particulars lacking any grand theoretical sophistication. Recent writers have, however, encouraged us to complicate this account somewhat by reflecting further upon Burke's own influential legacy in late-eighteenth-century German

1 Bernard Bosanquet, *A History of Aesthetic*, 2nd edn (London: Allen and Unwin, 1949), 203.

thought, and in this essay I should like to build upon this, balancing my account with a reconsideration of that same legacy in the aesthetics of William Hazlitt. My reasons for doing so are not simply grounded in partisan opinion. I do intend to contribute to our understanding of the transition of ideas in Britain from the late Enlightenment to Romanticism in order to demonstrate powerful continuities as well as changes but I would also like to say something about the language used in the critical prose of this period, and in particular about the emotional vocabulary employed in moral and philosophical thought. In stating my aims thus, I follow a critic such as Isabel Rivers, who holds that the job of the literary historian of ideas is to attend to the 'terms and phrases, style, and rhetoric; ... the techniques of persuasion and literary forms' employed by any writer to convince readers of the force of his position in order to establish the contextual purpose of the work in question, but I hope also to go beyond this to suggest that there is a longer legacy, which needs our attention.² What I should like to suggest is that the very slipperiness of the language of emotion as we recover it in these difficult texts from the past, which themselves constitute something of our critical and aesthetic ancestry, can in its very uncertainty be of value to us as we search around for a rhetoric of our own that can accommodate itself to the description of emotional conditions that we perceive as having moral force, even when they are difficult to pin down. Our own difficulties with articulating critical response can therefore find useful precursors in models from the past not merely in spite of but because of those models' resistance to final, absolute interpretation and indeed to theoretical abstraction.

I have mentioned Hazlitt's debt to Burke as key to this essay and yet since this has, in its complicated contradictions, already been expertly explored in the work of David Bromwich, Tom Paulin and John Whale, I don't mean to take this on again squarely but rather in approaching the subject from an unusual angle, I hope to say something unusual about ground that is thought to be quite well known.³ In any case, in terms of the modern history of aesthetics that debt has been eclipsed by the corrective promise that Burke's *Enquiry* held out to immediate contemporaries such as Mendelssohn and later to Kant and Schiller. Burke in his rather homespun way inspired an interest in the sublime that led to far more sophisticated and influential ideas elsewhere: this has become a commonplace, if partial account of one strand in the transition of late eighteenth-century thought. Indeed, Rüdiger Safranski, in his recent *Schiller oder Die Erfindung des Deutschen Idealismus*, goes so far as to state that it was the publication of the *Enquiry*, first disseminated in English then translated into German by Christian Garve in 1773, that inspired an obsession with the sublime in philosophical, theological and literary writing throughout the late-eighteenth century; that in effect without Burke there might

2 Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660–1780*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991–2000), I, 3.

3 See David Bromwich, *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 288–300; Tom Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style* (London: Faber, 1998), 118–70; John Whale, *Imagination under Pressure, 1789–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 19–41; 110–39.

have been no critical revolution, no German idealism.⁴ It is not uncharacteristic of such statements that Safranski should proceed to provide no sense whatsoever of the ways in which Schiller's own account of the sublime differs from that of Burke. The presence is taken to be generally latent but in need of little explicit exploration, or rather it is assumed that Kant and Schiller move so far beyond Burke that his essay is useful only in so far as it provides linguistic terms (such as beauty, novelty and the sublime) for categorizing the empirical phenomena upon which later theory is to base itself. I want to ask here whether these different traditions can be explored with profit alongside one another to tell us something interesting about the pregnant contradictions present in the record of an emotive rather than theoretical response to aesthetic experience, such as that which we find in the work of Hazlitt. With this in mind, I'd like to discuss a number of different accounts of that quality of the beautiful that Burke describes in part three of the *Enquiry* as grace. It is worthwhile to dwell upon his definition for a moment:

Gracefulness is an idea not very different from beauty; it consists in much the same things. Gracefulness is an idea belonging to posture and motion. In both these, to be graceful, it is requisite that there be no appearance of difficulty; there is required a small inflexion of the body; and a composure of the parts, in such a manner, as not to incumber each other, nor to appear divided by sharp and sudden angles. In this ease, this roundness, this delicacy of attitude and motion, it is that all the magic of grace consists, and what is called its *je ne sçai* [sic] *quoi*; as will be obvious to any observer who considers attentively the Venus de Medicis, the Antinous, or any statue generally allowed to be graceful in an high degree.⁵

This is a bizarre description of graceful posture that might put us in mind of Trim reading Yorick's sermon in *Tristram Shandy*, itself a send-up of William Hogarth's serpentine line of beauty. But this notwithstanding, it is important to note the extent to which Burke relies here upon an appeal to empiricism in what looks initially like a piece of aesthetic theory. He makes a fairly half-hearted attempt first to outline some general abstract principles associated with grace but quickly backs away to associate it simply with the ineffable; grace is something about which we can know very little that is precise except that we know it when we see it. And the definition is really a bit of a hedge because rather than define the effects of grace or look for its abstract qualities, Burke simply aligns the concept with something altogether obscure that is said to be generally present in the graceful statue. There are further questions that are worth worrying. How well does an object that we describe as graceful really embody all the qualities of grace pure and simple, given the complicated history of the term? Are gracefulness and grace precise synonyms

4 Rüdiger Safranski, *Schiller oder die Erfindung des Deutschen Idealismus* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2004).

5 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, and Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, ed. David Womersley (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1998), 153.

for one another at this point in British theoretical discourse? About the best that we can do at this point is to note Burke's elision of the two words and remark that his definition evades theoretical synthesis but reinforces associations with beauty, the past and ancient statuary. It is worthwhile to keep these in mind as we turn to later uses of the term and in particular to Burke's own reliance upon grace as a term with emotive force in his post-revolutionary writings, because they will remain centrally relevant to the discussion that follows.

2

Before proceeding onto the period of *Reflections*, however, I should like to turn briefly to several of the German writers who were directly influenced by Burke's *Enquiry* and in particular to various accounts of aesthetic experience in which grace emerges as a central idea. My aim is to suggest that the kinds of objections that German writers level against Burke in fact leave the way open for us to revisit the very different reaction of Hazlitt with productive consequences. With this in mind, I'd like to turn back to the writer with whom I began.

In the revisions to his 1755 epistolary work on sentiment, Mendelssohn writes that the reading of Burke has been responsible for the refinement of his ideas but he casts the *Enquiry* as a treasure house of aesthetic experiences with no single, articulating idea. In a move that will become rather characteristic of late-enlightenment German aesthetics, and nowhere more so than in the work of Burke's most important disciple, Friedrich Schiller, he hopes to smooth over the cracks that are bound to appear in any universal account of a concept as varied as aesthetic experience, to hold that in all its forms it must boil down to a unique, common quality that exists as a universal in any human response to art regardless of social, historical, or circumstantial differences. Burke, he contends, neglects his valuable observations by failing to explain them 'on the basis of the nature of the human soul', and he does so because he denies the basic principle of recent psychological findings that in all cases the 'intuitive knowledge of perfection is gratifying'.⁶ In a blind leap of reason, it seems, we are always to sense when we are in the presence of perfection and to be pleased by our own power to do so. The philosopher must not allow experience to lead him astray, Mendelssohn explains, however much its presence in any account of the artwork appears to contradict a rationalist aesthetics. Such an objection to Burke's *Enquiry* might put one in mind of a much later and rather oblique attack on *Reflections*, which occurs in Kant's post-revolutionary essay, 'On the commonplace: This may be true in theory but it does not hold in practice'. Burke is not mentioned by name, he is only 'the worthy gentleman who so boldly criticizes theories and systems', but Kant's defence of ethical rationalism and the abstract principles of good government self-consciously contradicts the Burkean view that human freedom is not to be discovered by philosophers but is best maintained through the gradual process of correction that

6 Moses Mendelssohn, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Daniel Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 147.

follows from an empirical observation of society at work with its traditions and practices.⁷ The comparison between the two attacks is not as anachronistic as it may seem at first glance because for both Mendelssohn and Kant, a fundamental problem with Burke's empirical honesty, his acknowledgement that there is an indefinable and slippery quality to the rich variety of aesthetic experience, lies in its resistance to being yoked onto an argument about the ethical value of art.

Burke, of course, addresses this in his remarks in section eleven of part three of the *Enquiry*, 'How far the idea of Beauty may be applied to Virtue'. There he accepts that the two may be linked on occasion and gives, in the foregoing section, the example of the reading of Sallust, who draws beautiful characters, leading the reader onto feelings of admiration, reverence and even love. But he is clear that the link must not be expanded into a principle, that it is mere 'whimsical theory' to affix 'the name of beauty to proportion, congruity and perfection'.⁸ Burke is pretty clear that to set out with the principle that beauty in art must provide the key to its moral value is to muddy things terribly because it is to end up with no useful conception of the aesthetic quality itself. The most enduring aspect of the *Enquiry* seems to me to lie in its record of an extraordinary diversity of experience, of paintings and statues as well as birds, trees, animals and people. Lessing was right about this but he couldn't accept Burke's conclusions, which seem to celebrate the potential for confusion and contradiction by implying that this richness only remains because beauty is allowed to speak on its own terms and in all its variety. Burke remains resistant to the abstraction that is necessarily present in rationalism when it addresses the matter of either ethics or aesthetics exactly because it requires a certain ignorance of both immanent, local experience and the variety of the subjective response. After some concluding remarks about the German response to his work, I should like to suggest that by contrast it is in Hazlitt's writings that we find a reader who approaches Burke critically but upon his own terms.

If Mendelssohn leaves the way open for rationalism to unite aesthetics and ethics in his determination that beauty is the manifestation of perfection, then it is Kant who makes this connection explicit. 'The feeling of the beauty and the dignity of human nature' exists 'in every human breast' and it is upon this principle that virtue may be grafted onto beauty, he writes in the second section of his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* of 1764, a work that otherwise leans heavily on Burke.⁹ Although later on he will, of course, drive a wedge between aesthetic and moral enquiry, at least in terms of the separation of judgements of taste from matters of rational moral duty, it remains a cultural dream in the German tradition that a quality of aesthetic experience, Schiller's grace for example, might be isolated as the epitome of moral beauty, that in the unambiguous exhibition of grace, great art might provoke a universal purity of response leading to the apprehension

7 Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings*, transl. H.B. Nisbet, ed. H.S. Reiss, 2nd enlarged edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 274.

8 Burke, *Enquiry*, 146.

9 Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, ed. John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 54.

of liberty, and at once fulfil its social function and its moralizing potential. The connections between Schiller's difficult work of 1793, *On Grace and Dignity*, and Burke's *Enquiry* are enticing. Schiller owned the Garve translation and although no reference is made to Burke's section on grace, Schiller's own associations of grace with beauty and of dignity with the sublime, along with his complaint that Burke fails in his analysis of beauty because he neglects rational principles, are suggestive of the telling if antagonistic influence that he felt. His terms, *Anmut* (grace) and *Würde* (dignity), are taken from Meinhard's translation of Kames's *Elements*, where they first appear in German. A problem faced by Schiller in his definition of the former term lay in the fact that there was no German word immediately available to which the concept of grace could be easily applied. Sulzer, who opined that aesthetic feelings had become so refined that they could no longer really be felt, and earlier Mendelssohn and Winckelmann had toyed around with a number of possibilities to express a word that existed in English and French but which had been in both traditions, by Burke and Lacombe, reduced to a '*je ne sais quoi*'.

For Schiller, grace and dignity are the supreme human qualities because they are at once ethical and aesthetic attributes. Grace is exhibited in some of the works of the highest artistic achievement, significant examples of which are drawn in the text from sculpture, as they are for Burke and Winckelmann, but principally, for Schiller, it is a quality of human action. Burke associates grace with motion and posture but, significantly, he stops short of describing it in terms of anything more than appearance; for the Burke of the *Enquiry*, it has no inherent moral value. The suggestion of a freedom or ease of movement is there and it is combined in careful contradiction with the stasis of sculpture so that we are left to ponder unfulfilled upon the magic of the plastic arts, obvious but indefinable, a challenge that will be taken up by Lessing in the *Laokoon*, that they may at once appear frozen in stone and pregnant with a potential to run from us. The constraint of form rubs up against exacting mimesis so that we are left merely with the '*je ne sais quoi*', or in David Womersley's phrase 'that ineffable element in which art pleases'.¹⁰ I suggest that Burke's ambivalence in defining grace is to his credit as he writes about aesthetic experience, even if it is where he and Schiller indubitably depart company from one another. For Schiller, it is from our aesthetic sensibility that we are able to recognize grace, but more importantly it is in the exhibition of grace that we come closest to demonstrating that beauty and virtue are interdependent. *On Grace and Dignity* is a fascinating attempt to define aesthetic reflection as the highest kind of moral conduct by isolating grace as an inherently and involuntary aesthetic expression of human freedom but it also represents the subordination of aesthetics to ethics, or even the collapse of the two provinces into something with which experience has little to do. When, in the fifteenth letter of his later *Aesthetic Education*, Schiller conjures up the statue of the Juno Ludovisi and describes it as the greatest manifestation of grace and dignity fused in a single work of art, it is with a rhetorical pomp that might have impressed Burke but it doesn't come as too much of a surprise to learn that Schiller had never actually seen the sculpture

10 Burke, *Enquiry*, 450n.

when he wrote about it. Writers in the German tradition certainly acknowledged the complexities present in the experience of art but the temptation remained strong to appeal to reason as a way of explaining away the embarrassments of mixed and even contradictory emotions. The consequences of such abstraction are most problematic when the accounts fail to accommodate the diversity of aesthetic response, when art is reduced to complex ideas and the matter of empirical detail is rejected, because it is then that aesthetics and ethics collapse into one another and a term such as grace ceases to have any provocative value. In the remainder of this essay, I aim to suggest that the term can be read as one with surprising force, that it is in its very slipperiness it retains the capacity to function as a thought-provoking critical term, and that it is in Hazlitt's reading of Burke that we witness this most strikingly at work.

3

Readers of Hazlitt who are attentive to Burke's presence in his writing will recall his repeated use of an extraordinary quotation from the latter's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*: 'Nobility', Burke writes, 'is a graceful ornament to the civil order. It is the Corinthian capital of polished society'.¹¹ Howe records this as occurring (more or less) in its entirety on eight occasions, and it is one particular instance that I shall come to discuss later in this essay. But I wish to dwell initially upon the phrase 'graceful ornament' to ask more precisely what Burke might mean by it, and why he chose the particular word 'graceful' rather than, say, beautiful, elegant, charming or dignified. Does it help us to understand the phrase a little better, I wonder, if we read it through the lens of Hazlitt's own writing, and in particular as a part of the texture of quotation from Burke that makes up so much of his linguistic political currency?

We come upon the lines a little over half way through *Reflections* when Burke turns to describe the condition of the aristocracy in France in a section that bears close relation to the most famous or notorious passage in the work as a whole, when Burke invokes his memory of having seen Marie Antoinette. I shall turn to this passage in greater detail later but it is important to recall that he moves there from an evocation of her refined splendour to the gross spectacle of the mob and when through a depiction of beauty spoiled he fancies that he has us on side, he sashays into an adulation of the aristocracy and nobility more generally, which, he fancies, allows him to excuse their most heinous excesses: 'It is gone, that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honour, which felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage whilst it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil, by losing all its grossness'.¹²

This is Burke at his most specious, I think, and it is therefore uncharacteristically easy to refute his claims – not least because it runs counter to his earlier

11 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), 245.

12 Burke, *Reflections*, 170.

determination to keep the aesthetic and the ethical apart from one another. Any act of difficult moral judgement, he seems to imply, must always be clouded by the temptations of aesthetic judgement. The (supposed) beauty of the nobility shapes to cover up or mask any wrongs they may commit because in the aesthetic realm, beauty simply triumphs over grossness. For Burke, the staged nature of the *ancien régime* always feels preferable to the close proximity of real events, so this delight in the comfort of the aesthetic space can be read as a deliberate strategy. But as Hazlitt well understood, for ethics to hide behind aesthetics is for it to dwell in a world of semblance, a world in which stage acting is preferred to real agency. And he repeatedly deploys this second quotation too in his writings, notably in a late review from *The Atlas*, recently recovered by Duncan Wu. There, reminding his readers of the trickery of the theatre, he writes of the actor Charles Kemble that '[i]n his hands, it may be said that "vice loses half its evils by losing all its grossness".¹³ If this encourages us to reflect that Burke's phrase captures the theatricality of the old order, then in his much earlier essay 'On Hogarth's Marriage à-la-Mode' from *The Round Table*, Hazlitt renews the connection with nobility more explicitly. Describing the third painting in Hogarth's sequence, he speaks of a painter who shows 'the deepest insight into human nature, and into the effects of those refinements in depravity by which it has been good-naturedly asserted, that "vice loses half its evil in losing all its grossness"' (iv, 26).¹⁴

Here, of course, amid a sarcastic barb at Burke's good nature, the thrust of the original quotation is turned on its head. Hogarth, the painter of real life and analyst of beauty, pierces the bubble of the aesthetic sphere in which Burke can valorize nobility as a peculiar manifestation of the beautiful – the graceful ornament of civil society – to show that great art must never eschew the ethical, that appearance must always be seen through. To yoke these two quotations together is to reinforce an ambivalence that we might feel, and to which Hazlitt draws attention, about employing the terms of aesthetic judgement in the political or ethical sphere. If 'graceful' is a term that we associate with a form of aesthetic judgement, then what might be implied in turning its application to political ends? Clearly, Burke intends the word to serve his political purpose by suggesting that it has emotive force: we would not or at least we should not wish to destroy that which has grace. And surely behind his use of that word there lies a trace of the prehistory of grace as a term in theological and moral thought. More clearly even than beauty, which from Plato to Kant and such recent writers as Elaine Scarry and Alexander Nehamas has been harnessed to discussions of morality, grace is rather clearly both a word with aesthetic and ethical force. For one thing, no term in aesthetic judgement is so pregnant with theological and supra-human connotations. If grace is a quality of the beautiful, then it also bears comparison with the sublime in terms of its

13 William Hazlitt, *New Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), II, 204.

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

application to the ineffable and unknowable, to those qualities of beauty that defy rational explanation.

Isabel Rivers has demonstrated that the word 'grace' was gradually replaced by 'sentiment' in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British thought as theological discussions about morality rubbed up against the enlightenment preoccupation with reason. As essential if opposing terms in the discussion of agency, reason and sentiment may be God-given qualities for the enlightened theologian but they reside nevertheless very clearly in the human breast. Grace, by contrast, is conferred upon us, if at all, *ab extra*, as a divine, yet arbitrary exercise in electing the few to salvation. Under such terms, grace is rather clearly a word that sits most easily within an earlier, pre-rationalist vocabulary of human agency and this might encourage us to view Burke's use of it as part of his pointed attack in *Reflections* on the rationalist philosophers, whose stamp he saw upon the revolution as a whole. Because Burke is sceptical about the capacity of reason ever absolutely to be able to lead on its own to an abstract programme for societal emancipation, grace has a particular force in his vocabulary: it is suggestive of an ancient and unwilling power, a movement that is so deeply wrought by practice that it is unconscious of itself.

It is exactly this kind of quality of grace that Hazlitt sneers at when in a marvellous essay 'On the Causes of Methodism,' he attacks the movement as a form of Popery without 'the pride and pomp of the Romish Church.' Both Methodism and Catholicism, he claims, are reliant upon indolence, ignorance and, by implication, upon an unenlightened, pre-rational set of practices: 'What the one did by auricular confession, absolution, penance, pictures, and crucifixes, the other does, even more compendiously, by grace, election, faith without works, and words without meaning' (iv, 58). He will go on to draw out a rather uncomfortable parallel between poetic inspiration and religious enthusiasm, to suggest that both the poet and the Methodist are driven by the lure of illusion to escape from an alienating real into a fictional realm. To rely for our spiritual wellbeing upon grace is to commit ourselves unwaveringly to an order over which we have no control and it is, as such, analogous to the acceptance of a political order that is based solely upon an unquestioning adherence to tradition. One of Hazlitt's bitterest passages makes this connection clear. His ferocious essay on Malthus in *The Spirit of the Age* includes a description of the failed aftermath of the revolution when in the hands of Godwin and his followers the promise was there 'that the proud monuments of time-hallowed institutions, that the strong-holds of power and corruption, that "the Corinthian capitals of polished society", with the base and pediments, might be swept away as by a hurricane' (ix, 106). The promise of a system of reform based in reason is set here deliberately against the supposedly graceful ornament of the past, and Hazlitt's disdain for Malthus lies precisely in the latter's determination to knock the stuffing out of rationalism on its own terms but through a specious logic that allows only for a return to the past: 'to say ... that reason will have become the master-key to all our motives, and that when arrived at its greatest power it will cease to

act at all, but will fall down dead, inert, and senseless before the principle of population, is an opinion which one would think few people would choose to advance or assent to' (ix, 107).

It might seem at this point that we have already – and a little early in the process – reached some rather concrete conclusions about the terms of this essay: Hazlitt and Burke ascribe very different values to the term grace, and indeed the former appears to have little use for it as a political term. My aim in drawing out Hazlitt's use of these two quotations from Burke – the two from *Reflections* that he employs most frequently – has indeed been to imply that he is at best suspicious of the connotations of the term as he inherits it from Burke, and that this suspicion has much to do with the ways in which any use of the word grace is inevitably a negotiation between aesthetic and ethical discourse, one that is fraught with potential difficulty. We might well ask what kind of graceful ornament civil society needs, if any, and indeed, whether graceful ornamentation is in an aesthetic and moral sense ever a good thing; whether grace itself is something that we should value or rather something about which we too might be suspicious. But in Hazlitt's writing, it is always easy enough to find evidence to support any counter claim.

In a late essay in celebration of footmen, Hazlitt writes that 'if not "the Corinthian capitals of polished society" they are "a graceful ornament to the civil order"; and goes on to suggest that the dignity of the footman lies in the capacity to overturn the social order by acts of spiky resistance: 'commend me to the streets with the straw at the doors and hatchments overhead ... with groups of footmen lounging on the steps and insulting the passengers – it is then I feel the true dignity and imaginary pretensions of human nature realized' (xvii, 355). Here, grace (allied to dignity) is somehow a quality of natural humanity purged of the artifice of convention and pretence. But it has about it something paradoxical, a romance of the real; indeed, Hazlitt goes on to use that very word and in so doing narrows the ostensible gulf between his own social vision and that of Burke's chivalric order. And perhaps we shouldn't be so surprised by this. No one who has once read Burke's *Letter to a Noble Lord* (1796) can ever pass over the word grace in his writings without a sense of its ambivalence. It tolls throughout that letter as a form of self-castigation when he addresses the Duke of Bedford for whom he has such complete contempt. If nothing else, this remarkable linguistic tour-de-force reminds us that Burke is not blindly in favour of the nobility, and certainly not when they fail, as he felt Bedford had in supporting the Jacobin cause, to behave nobly. That grace must be earned through social and political action more than merely through the accident of high birth is a lesson that emerges in the letter with stark clarity and not least as it builds towards first the extraordinary evocation of Windsor that Hazlitt so loved and then the comparison of Bedford with his uncle, Lord Keppel:

Am I to blame, if I attempt to pay his Grace's hostile reproaches to me with a friendly admonition to himself? Can I be blamed, for pointing out to him in what manner he is like to be affected, if the sect of cannibal philosophers of France should proselytize any considerable part of this people, and, by their joint proselytizing arms, should conquer that government, to which his Grace

does not seem to me to give all the support his own security demands? ... They are the duke of Bedford's natural hunters; and he is their natural game.¹⁵

We are returned for a moment to the definition of grace that emerged originally in the *Enquiry*, in the sense that it is a term rather beyond definition, one that relies upon its own former connotations and (in this case) social conventions. There is, I think, real ambivalence about the idea of grace in both Burke and Hazlitt, ambivalence that emerges from its relationship to beauty, to the past, and to the irrational. In what remains of this essay, I should like to shift my focus somewhat to ask a slightly different question whether, allowing that grace is an inherently confusing, even Janus-faced concept, it can nevertheless remain useful as either an aesthetic or moral and political term, and indeed even as one that subtly negotiates the space between the two discourses.

4

I have already suggested that the concept of grace is inherently rather an interesting because elusive one and although its role in the *Enquiry* is brief, it preoccupies Burke throughout his career, not least, as I have argued, when he invests the term with significance in *Reflections*. I want now to return to the quotation that I introduced earlier on in this essay, when in his horror at the destruction of the old order, he wrote, 'Nobility is a graceful ornament to the civil order'. Lest we be in any doubt about it, Burke quickly presses on into an image drawn from classical sculpture to remind us that he is thinking within the terms of his own category of the beautiful: 'It is the Corinthian capital of polished society. *Omnes boni nobilitati semper favemus*, was the saying of a good and wise man.'¹⁶ Consistent with the *Enquiry* in terms of its dependence upon the classical, grace appears here to be associated with sophisticated and refined beauty: the Corinthian order is after all late, laboured and over-developed. And yet it also has about it something that confuses matters rather. Burke's metaphor introduces an element from the natural world into his conception of grace through the inclusion in the order of acanthus leaves, which in growing out of the stone both augment and yet oddly undermine its very solidity. As a figure for nobility, Burke clearly wants to lend the suggestion of the natural organic growth of the aristocracy from the foundations of a healthy society. But his chosen rhetorical device comes a little too close to overburdening itself with the weight of history: the leaves do not only reinforce the solidity of the stone beneath them but also suggest that it is in the process of becoming overgrown with a weight of nature that will provide for its crumbling away.

The suggestion of a confused contradiction at the heart of the idea of grace is in fact consistent with an earlier and even more notorious appeal to its value: 'Never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that

15 Edmund Burke, *On Empire, Liberty, and Reform: Speeches and Letters*, ed. David Bromwich (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 500.

16 Burke, *Reflections*, 245.

proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom. The unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprize is gone!¹⁷ It is in his description of Marie Antoinette that Burke builds towards this curious, tantalizing phrase, 'the unbought grace of life,' and his rhetoric now is so lavish that it is initially rather hard to see exactly what he hopes to achieve by it. The phrase seeks presumably to conjure up a notion of some elemental human spirit that is inherently communal, ignorant of the dictates of a market economy, but respectful of order, degree and history. As it grows out of Burke's celebration of the dauphiness, it feels as if this phrase should somehow provide an honest human counterweight to her own superhuman glitter. But it can do so only in so far as grace is natural rather than ornamented, real rather than artful. We can hardly read the phrase, however, without being put in mind of Burke's own description, a little earlier, of her extraordinary ease of movement: 'and surely never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision.'¹⁸ This presents an artlessness and naïvete that is the quintessence of grace on the terms of his own definition in the *Enquiry*, a naïve beauty perhaps, but it has very little to do with the grace of the people unless we buy into the speciousness of his claim that a version of the liberty of the aristocracy may be found for the people in their very servitude to it.

Put like this Burke's criterion of aesthetic excellence sounds almost as if it has come from Schiller, but there is enough in *Reflections* to suggest that he was rather confounded by the concept, or at least that he recognized the complexity of a quality that can pull us in different ways as we seek to explain our experience of it. For the remainder of this essay, I will turn back to William Hazlitt and to a very different account to any that we have examined so far. I would like to look first at a little-known essay from *The Round Table*, 'On Manner', which provides one of his most thorough engagements with the idea of grace. This can be read usefully alongside his better-known 'On Beauty', in which he tussles with Burke, and which, as the essay turns to discuss beauty in motion, refers to grace as 'the absence of every thing that indicates pain or difficulty, or hesitation or incongruity' (iv, 71). At this point, though for no obvious reason, Hazlitt inserts a strange footnote in which he reminds his readers of the famous passage from *Reflections*, describing a queen 'whose charms had left their poison in the heart of this Irish orator and patriot' (iv, 71n). Marie Antoinette moved, Hazlitt tells us, as if 'borne on a cloud' and we are introduced thereby to a level of conflicted emotion that seems to surround his own conception of grace: it is indeed to be valued as a species of the beautiful but has about it a quality that is rather suspicious. In so far as the experience of grace produces a confused aesthetic response, Hazlitt follows Burke, but it is worthwhile to note that he also seems somehow to associate Burke with the very concept itself, that his own confusions about Burke may be bound up with the discourse surrounding the term.

17 *Ibid.*, 170.

18 *Ibid.*, 169.

In the earlier essay 'On Manner' the contradictions are even more marked. Describing a quality in others that is irresistible but somehow rather dangerous, grace, he writes, 'robs us of ourselves, and draws us by a secret sympathy towards [it]' (iv, 45). And if it is this that has seduced Burke in his vision of the queen, then it is interesting that as the essay moves towards its conclusion it changes focus somewhat to become instead a celebration of the naïve and to provide an implicit attack upon modern Britain. And it is here, as we might have come to expect, that Burke can rear up once again as a presence in Hazlitt's mind. With his sights set on attacking an affectation of manner that he finds in the nobility, Hazlitt celebrates the natural, untaught grace of gypsies, who are in his Burkean phrase, 'the grotesque ornament to the civil order' (iv, 46n). And he goes on to invoke Burke's description of Marie Antoinette rather clearly when he writes of Indian street-performers: 'They wander about in a luxurious dream. They are like part of a glittering procession – like revellers in some gay carnival. Their life is a dance, a measure; they hardly seem to tread the earth, but are borne along in some more genial element, and bask in the radiance of brighter suns' (iv, 46).

Grace and the grotesque are somehow fused for Hazlitt, as though to suggest that they both name a form of the naïve that we should celebrate over artful and mannered beauty. And although they make an unorthodox union, there is just enough of a suggestion in Hazlitt's essay that to take pleasure in aesthetic experience is to value it precisely because it is beyond rational control to lead us to ask whether by worrying the terms of Burke's politics so fully, Hazlitt comes all the closer to embracing his aesthetics. If grace pulls us in different ways as for Hazlitt and Burke it appears to, then, in Hazlitt's astonishing phrase, it also 'robs us of ourselves.' The suspiciousness of grace lies in its awful power to cause us uncritically to accept that which seduces us aesthetically – and no one surely is more alive to this danger than Hazlitt himself – but at least as important is the sense that grace unmans us momentarily, it causes us to think not as ourselves but to be drawn by contradiction to that for which we previously had little sympathy.

The matter of aesthetic, and no less of political judgement, is confusing and to over-simplify its categories is to risk reductive crudity. With the Elgin Marbles before him, Hazlitt wonders whether there are in fact aesthetic experiences in which beauty and sublimity are combined. David Bromwich has written that for Hazlitt the compatibility of the two is evinced in the fact that we may take pleasure in both, even if it is a pleasure whose origins are too imprecise for us to unpick them with accuracy: 'As sublimity is an excess of power', Hazlitt writes, 'beauty is, we conceive, the blending and harmonizing of different powers or qualities together' (xviii, 165). Softness and strength are both forms of aesthetic power for Hazlitt even though they appear at first to be in opposition, and indeed they function for him as euphemisms for the Burkean categories of beauty and the sublime. If we take rational pleasure in the former, then as Burke himself observed, with tragic pleasure in mind, we certainly take irrational, or inexplicable pleasure in the latter. But as we learn at the very end of his essay 'On the Elgin Marbles', for Hazlitt strength and softness are not exclusive powers; they may exist together within the complexity of art and indeed must necessarily do so precisely because

it is the nature of the aesthetic that it should not be restricted to *a priori* rules. Bromwich writes of the delight that Hazlitt appears to take in discovering that the experience of an artwork lies in contradiction to theorized rules and he sees this as part of Hazlitt's delight at the capacity of the human mind to record the kind of diverse phenomena to which no theory can ever accommodate itself. A passage that fits itself excellently to Bromwich's notion but which he ignores comes immediately before Hazlitt's discussion of strength and softness and it is entitled 'That grace is the beautiful or harmonious in what relates to position or motion' (xviii, 165). The passage is remarkable because it so clearly fails in what it sets out to do. At first Hazlitt, whose own Unitarian background must surely inform upon the inexorable, supra-human qualities of the term, tells us that grace describes the use of beauty so that ideas are 'brought in without effect, or without making a *boggle* in the mind' (xviii, 166). Grace is, it seems, simply a matter of gradual transition and movement – we are comfortably back where we started with the Burke of the *Enquiry*. And yet then of a sudden he changes tack, and the boggle seems to be uppermost in his mind: 'But sometimes the most violent are the most graceful ... That which is not beautiful in itself, or in the mere form, may be made so by position or motion. A figure by no means elegant may be put in an elegant position. Mr Kean's figure is not good; yet we have seen him throw himself into attitudes of infinite spirit, dignity, and grace' (xviii, 166).

Finally, we are returned to the space of the grotesque – 'deformed people ... who, in spite of their unpromising appearance, usually assume the most imposing attitudes, and give themselves the most extraordinary airs imaginable' (xviii, 166) – and it is hard to conceive that Hazlitt's discussion of grace can run so far in seriousness. But that he should allow it to do so suggests to me that to follow Hazlitt is to imply that when we speak of grace in terms of aesthetic and moral judgement, we name an emotional response that tugs simultaneously in two opposing directions, an emotion which at best speaks as evidence of our potential capacity for humanizing sympathy even when faced by phenomena that resist easy understanding. It is certainly true that Hazlitt rejects an aesthetics of rational abstraction in favour of an account that allows for the kinds of confusions for which any theory might have little use but his is an interesting example of a critical response that remains alive to the kinds of ethical considerations that shift precisely because in the searching after the grounds of sympathy, they acknowledge confusion as an honest human reaction to the difficult experience of novelty. It is, on reflection, apt that this essay began with a few lines from Caliban. There grace and a form of the grotesque are combined in the rather unfortunate hope that Prospero's draconian justice might lead Caliban from the latter to the former: Hazlitt, I suggest, unearths the pretence of such a motive, and yet he makes a virtue of its likely failure.

WHY HOGARTH MATTERED TO HAZLITT

Mali Purkayastha

This article addresses some of the ways in which Hazlitt considered Hogarth both a ‘great comic painter’ as well as an ‘exception to general rules’ (xx, 276) in the practice of art, and why Hogarth’s work should have lent itself so readily to critical appreciation in literary terms.¹ The flourishing graphic satire of this period had already established a strong association between pictorial and literary burlesque, while Hogarth’s acknowledged excellence in the portrayal of character encouraged comparisons with writers such as Shakespeare and Henry Fielding. Hazlitt endorses Hogarth’s reputation as a moralist and commends the lifelike quality of his characters, but he has a particular use for Hogarth as an alternative to the false aesthetic of Reynolds. Whereas Reynolds’s theory of middle forms excludes the particular and idiosyncratic from representation, Hogarth’s works could be seen to unite the generic with the particular to produce individual rather than uniform representations of character. At the same time, since Hogarth’s narratives celebrate the everyday and the familiar, thus extending rather than transcending individual experience, the discussion of Hogarth in *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* qualifies its praise by contrasting his performances with the grand style of such painters as Raphael, Rembrandt, Rubens, Poussin, Leonardo, Titian, and Claude, whose works embody the ideal for Hazlitt. One of the aims in Hazlitt’s analysis of Hogarth, then, is not so much to defend him against critics who place his productions in an inferior rank, for instance, to those of the Academy, but to differentiate the range of possible achievement in art, acknowledging the foundation of some practices with other traditions, both literary and dramatic, and reconciling these with the technical skills of particular artists.

Hogarth, Reynolds, and the portrayal of character

Hazlitt’s criticism of the academic position regarding the arts in Britain makes fertile use of William Hogarth as an artist rather than as a theorist. Writing in

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

The Champion, Hazlitt tends to use Hogarth's name as almost sufficient in itself as a counter-argument to Joshua Reynolds and his theory of the ideal. In his series of articles, 'Fine Arts – Whether they are Promoted by the Academies and Public Institutions' (1814), later the entry on the fine arts for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1824), Hazlitt draws attention to Hogarth's popularity and continuing appeal, implicitly challenging Reynolds's criticism of him: '[Hogarth's] works have received a sanction which it would be vain to dispute, in the universal delight and admiration with which they have been regarded, from their first appearance to the present moment' (xviii, 21).² Although Hazlitt elsewhere dismisses popularity as a measure of artistic achievement, here his use of the adjective 'universal' and the duration he stipulates, 'from their first appearance to the present moment', indicate that he is not speaking of a temporary afflatus: the longevity and extension of an artist's fame are an index of his true greatness, for his influence on public taste is not exerted in the same way or in the same degree in every place and time. Some of Hogarth's works had enjoyed unbroken popularity for nearly a century, even being exhibited in the salons of Europe; while by the end of the eighteenth century, the mania for collecting his work was so high that ephemera fetched higher prices at auction than his prints. Thus public favour might be accepted as indicative of Hogarth's achievement at the same time as denying that the far greater financial success enjoyed by Reynolds, who served a more elite clientele, was a comparable measure of worth.

Moreover, although in the instance just cited, Hazlitt expresses his agreement with public opinion, he does not take Hogarth's popularity alone as a guarantee of merit. This is made clear in the essay 'On Imitation' in *The Round Table*, almost contemporary with the *Champion* articles on the Fine Arts.

People dispute for ever about Hogarth. The question has not in one respect been fairly stated. The merit of his pictures does not so much depend on the nature of the subject, as on the knowledge displayed of it, on the number of ideas they excite, on the fund of thought and observation contained in them. They are to be looked on as works of science; they gratify our love of truth; they fill up the void of the mind: they are a series of plates of natural history, and also of that most interesting part of natural history, the history of man. (iv, 75)

The artist's public reputation here seems acceptable as a fair measure of the talent that the critic independently perceives in him, but Hazlitt also suggests that such appreciation has to do with the recognition of the everyday and the familiar found in Hogarth's characters and their purity of representation, independent of the subject matter.

In the latter respect, Hazlitt saw Hogarth as a great moralist. In this he was happy to concur with the majority, as he felt that the common voice had a greater role to play in guiding moral conduct than in teaching the principles of art. Hogarth's

2 Previously printed in a review article of the British Institution in 1814 as 'Hogarth, Wilson, etc.'; the apparent contradiction in Hazlitt's analysis of the representation of character in different artists is noted by John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), 325.

morality consists, in the first place, in his depiction of human types, and this particular kind of appeal to the generic (unlike Reynolds's) was quite acceptable to Hazlitt, who believed that even genius is partly 'local and national,' and that the character of a nation can be divined from a certain common physiognomy which in turn lends itself to satire ('On Imitation'; iv, 74). If personality does not consist in a random set of attributes, but partly consists of what has been inherited from the race, Hazlitt could justify Hogarth's use of physiognomy, and even the stratification of human nature that it implied, without yielding to Reynolds's theory of the universal ideal or an unqualified appeal to common taste.³

For Hazlitt, the merit of Hogarth's portrayal of the generic lies in his ability to infuse the generic with the particular, by introducing in it a level of specific detail, or 'character'. It is Hogarth's excellence in the portrayal of character that Hazlitt focuses on when attacking Reynolds's style of painting. In the *Round Table*, Hogarth's *Marriage à-la-Mode* reveals for Hazlitt an artist who has found a middle course between the 'insipid tameness' of those who paint models in pursuit of the ideal and the 'gross vulgarity' of the caricaturist who exaggerates what is strange or comic (iv, 21; 29). The peculiar tact with which this is achieved is enough to demonstrate Hogarth's genius, since this consists above all in the expression of an original mode of vision in the artist. The faces in Hogarth 'go to the very verge of caricature,' yet achieve the 'precision, consistency and good sense of actual faces' (iv, 29). While there is an occasional lack of individuality – as in the representation of two lawyers (iv, 26) – Hogarth avoids the merely generic by a number of means. First he constructs his figures on 'exact physiognomic principles,' rather than producing the universal by abstraction. Hazlitt notes the 'petulant self-sufficiency' of the apothecary, the Quack, whose face is 'composed as it were of salve,' the 'listless languor and tremulous suspense' in the expression of the bride (iv, 25; 27), and that figures are so often shown in motion: the servant-girl allows her dish to 'totter like her virtue' in the embrace of a 'greedy rascal' and the Politician is 'burning a hole in his hat with a candle while reading a newspaper' (iv, 30-1). Finally, character is reinforced by deft association, as when one woman's hair appears to become a wreath of flowers, or the red hair of another is so continuous with the same hue in her chair as to amount to an 'alliteration in colouring' (iv, 27) and exemplify *gusto*, the power of stimulating one sensation in order to bring about another.

Character in this sense is the added dimension to literal representation that links the individual with general nature, or general truth, and represents an extension of experience for the viewer and audience. Hogarth's faces

exhibit the most uncommon features, with the most uncommon expressions; but which as yet are as familiar and intelligible as possible, because, with all

3 The claim that Hogarth's pictures are 'works of science' may also suggest his debt to the study of physiognomy. It certainly implies that they are different from the works contrasted with 'natural philosophy', the works, that is, of 'Homer, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Dante, and Ariosto, ... Raphael, Titian, Michael Angelo, Correggio, Cervantes, and Boccaccio' in 'Why the Arts are not Progressive: A Fragment' (iv, 161).

the boldness, they have all the truth of nature. Hogarth has left behind him as many of these memorable faces, in their memorable moments, as, perhaps, most of us remember in the course of our lives, and has thus doubled the quantity of our experience. (iv, 29)

The underlying theory of the imagination seen here implies that the artist's treatment of his subject is the source of its effect on the spectator. Reynolds has failed to grasp this in his mechanical pursuit of the ideal; it is therefore easy to show that in his criticisms of Hogarth's choice of subjects he is employing false criteria. In the *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*, 'the merit of [Hogarth's] pictures,' as Hazlitt emphasizes, 'does not depend on the nature of the subject' but rather the choice and representation of character ('On the Works of Hogarth'; vi, 133). In fact the narrative cycles of Hogarth's *Progresses* have a better claim to 'history' than other paintings which explicitly claim that title, their achievement marked by the representation of character Reynolds had claimed to be one of the principal aims of the highest form of art, history painting. Character in painting is indeed history painting, and Hogarth's work exemplifies this by representing character at the moment of expression:

Every thing in his pictures has life and motion in it. Not only does the business of the scene never stand still, but every feature is put into full play; the exact feeling of the moment is brought out, and carried to its utmost height, and then instantly seized and stamped on the canvas for ever. The expression is always taken *en passant*, in a state of progress or change, and, as it were, at the salient point. (vi, 145)

Hogarth and the ideal

In the lecture 'On the Works of Hogarth,' Hogarth's portrayal of character ranks him with Shakespeare and Chaucer, not only for his immediate and true imitation of nature, but also for his ability to mix the serious with the ludicrous, as well as for comprehensive invention: 'he painted beauty or ugliness indifferently, as they came in his way' (vi, 144). Yet despite his celebration of Hogarth's facility in observation and imitation, Hazlitt is at pains not to exaggerate his stature as an artist. Though much of the lecture elaborates Hogarth's merits, Hazlitt also acknowledges that there is a world to which it would be useless for Hogarth to aspire.

Hogarth only transcribes or transposes what was tangible or visible, not the abstracted and intelligible. You see in his pictures only the faces which you yourself have seen, or others like them; none of his characters are thinking of any person or thing out of the picture ... There is nothing remote in thought, or comprehensive in feeling. The whole is intensely personal and local; but the interest of the ideal and poetical style of art relates to more permanent and universal objects. (vi, 147)

An art higher than Hogarth's is concerned with poetry and ideas rather than the immediate world of experience. In his art criticism, Hazlitt singles out a number of artists, including Raphael, Titian, Poussin, Rubens, Leonardo and Claude (Lorrain), who are praised primarily for their fulfilment of his notion of the ideal, that is, their ability to refer to something beyond the image itself. By contrast, in the lecture 'On the Works of Hogarth', Hogarth's style of painting is placed firmly in the world of the familiar, where anything ideal would be foreign: 'He had an intense feeling and command over the impressions of sense, of habit, of character, and passion, the serious and the comic, in a word, of nature, as it fell within his own observation, or came within the sphere of his actual experience; but he had little power beyond that sphere, or sympathy with that which existed only in idea.' (vi, 146) As a specimen of comic realism, Hogarth is first praised by Hazlitt for his representation of character, then faulted for his inability to transcend his own experience, and finally lamented as inadequate to replace Titian, Raphael, Rubens or Rembrandt. Hogarth's excellence in the rendering of individual character is at the expense, it would appear, of his ability to capture the ideal.

On another occasion, in fact, Hazlitt goes so far as to imply that the gratuitous ugliness of Hogarth's scenes precludes beauty altogether. In a conversation with Northcote, who had himself collaborated with James Gillray, the caricaturist,⁴ Hazlitt writes of Hogarth that 'he, too, gave the incidents and characters of human life with infinite truth and ability; but then it was in the lowest forms of all, and he could not rise even to common dignity or beauty' (xi, 247). The lecture 'On the Works of Hogarth', however, is less extreme. It is a paradoxical feature of this lecture that, while it sets Hazlitt's own notion of the ideal against that of Reynolds, Hogarth is praised chiefly for his ability to confound Reynolds's methodology for approaching the ideal through abstraction, while remaining deficient when measured by Hazlitt's own criteria for the ideal. If the ideal reposed in natural beauty, then Hogarth has 'as many pleasing faces in his pictures as in Sir Joshua'; if it consisted in truth to life, Hogarth 'possessed the most complete and absolute mastery over the truth and identity of expression and features in his subjects' (vi, 144-5). Hogarth is as much at home in the genteel as in the vulgar; yet the choice of the latter subjects is not made a reason for commendation, though his skill in the treatment of them deserves the highest praise (vi, 144). Coleridge, by contrast, when he joined Hazlitt in discerning beautiful figures in Hogarth, did not hesitate to ascribe them to a 'poetic sensibility' never 'extinguished' by his satirical bent. Crediting Hogarth with a 'ludicrous distortion, both of attitude and of physiognomy' in many figures, Coleridge claimed that the introduction of beauty 'diffuses through all and over each of the group a spirit of reconciliation and human kindness'. Above all it is the sympathy for humanity which 'prevents the instructive merriment at the whims of nature, or the foibles or humours of our fellow-men, from degenerating into the heart-poison of contempt or

4 See Diana Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 42.

hatred.⁵ Coleridge's phrase 'poetic sensibility' seems to indicate moral sympathy, whereas Hazlitt tends to use the concept of poetry within the visual to indicate the permanent and universal, and something beyond the literal observation of experience. To Hazlitt, Hogarth's weakness, in comparison with the old French and Italian masters, is that he 'only transcribes or transposes what was tangible and visible, not the abstracted and intelligible' (vi, 147), and lacks the quality of 'the *ideal*, passion blended with thought and pointing to distant objects, not debased by grossness, not thwarted by accident, nor weakened by familiarity, but connected with forms and circumstances that give the utmost possible expansion and refinement to the general sentiment' (vi, 148).

This notion of the ideal is as far from anything in Hogarth as it is from Reynolds's notion of discerning the universal in the concrete; it treats the imagination as a faculty whose working is autonomous, and not merely ancillary to the representation of natural reality. Thus in another essay, 'On the Landscape of Nicolas Poussin', Hazlitt finds Poussin to be an artist of the higher kind, 'the painter of ideas', who, 'of all painters, the most poetical', constructed detailed narratives within his pictures, every part in 'conscious keeping' with the rest (*Table Talk*; viii, 169–73). 'The interest of the ideal and poetical style of art', says the lecture on Hogarth in *English Comic Writers*, 'relates to more permanent and universal objects; and the characters and forms must be such as to correspond with and sustain that interest and give external grace and dignity to it' (vi, 147). Though such works depict a finer nature, the essay on Poussin clarifies that this is simply 'a second nature; not a different one' (viii, 170). In Hazlitt's writings on the Elgin Marbles, similarly, the Marbles, like Poussin's pictures, embody the finer nature Hogarth's prints do not, a fineness created 'from objects in nature, answering to an idea in the artist's mind'. Hence not Hogarth, but the 'Elgin Marbles are the *best answer to Sir Joshua Reynolds's Discourses*' ('The Elgin Marbles'; xviii, 100; my italics).

Shakespearean Hogarth

Such reservations lead us to wonder whether Hogarth would have enjoyed the same prominence in Hazlitt's discussions of painting had it not been for Hogarth's opposition to the Royal Academy and the practices it promoted. The indications might be, perhaps, that any stick was good enough for beating Reynolds. But a more thorough examination confirms that Hogarth's standing to Hazlitt is in and of itself, not simply in relation to Reynolds. This standing is explained in the second of his essays 'On Genius and Common Sense' in *Table Talk*, where Hazlitt suggests a pragmatic division of labour within the arts:

5 S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. W. J. Bate and J. Engell, vol. VII of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series no. 75, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) II, 179. The editors' note records that Coleridge reckoned Hogarth among England's five unique men, including Shakespeare, Daniel Defoe, Milton and Thomas Fuller. 'Mr Coleridge' in *The Spirit of the Age* also attests to Coleridge's liking for Hogarth (xi, 33).

As there are certain instruments fitted to perform certain kinds of labour, there are certain minds so framed as to produce certain *chef-d'oeuvres* in art and literature ... Perhaps Shakespeare's tragedies would in some respects have been better, if he had never written comedies at all ... Yet I count those persons fools who think it a pity Hogarth did not succeed better in serious subjects. The division of labour is an excellent principle in taste as well as in mechanics. (viii, 49)

The last sentence is typical of Hazlitt's propensity to apply a phrase from political discourse without retaining the value he would assign it in that sphere. (Similarly, in the essay 'Why the Arts are not Progressive: A Fragment,' he states that extending the right to vote is a better rule in politics than in literature and the arts: 'the principle of universal suffrage, however applicable to matters of government, which concern the common feelings and common interests of society, is by no means applicable to matters of taste, which can only be decided upon by the most refined understanding' [iv, 164].) The division of labour commended by Adam Smith is not the mediaeval model, in which every craftsman creates his own product, but one in which no workman creates any product of his own, as he merely occupies one stage in a corporate process. Hazlitt, on the other hand, is presupposing the older pattern, in which the craftsman assumes full authority for his product in both conception and execution, but occupies a particular place in the range of artistic production.

Thus, where the artists on whom Reynolds focuses his discussion are either models to be imitated or examples of mistakes to be avoided, Hazlitt can afford to cite an artist, even while acknowledging his limitations, because he does not aim to regulate a discipline but rather to differentiate and explain its range of achievement. It is not a case of reckoning Hogarth's merits against his vices – if it were, he could not abide comparison with the old masters, or even with abstract notions of the ideal – but rather to emphasize those qualities in Hogarth which are useful for the clarification of the case against Reynolds and his particular notion of the ideal. The artist is no longer an *exemplar* of either perfection or imperfection, but merely an *example* in the case for a certain definition of art. As Hazlitt makes clear in his *Encyclopaedia Britannica* essay on the fine arts, Hogarth, the Greek statues, Italian masters, and Dutch and Flemish schools, are all models, which 'owe their pre-eminence to one and the same perfection – the immediate imitation of nature', and each of these categories represents perfection of a kind rather than an absolute standard of excellence in art (xviii, 111).

Furthermore, the fact that Hogarth's achievement was seen by many to represent an unusual development in the tradition of British painting would suggest that Hazlitt was drawn to him by something other than his artistic merits alone. The discussion of formal analogies between poetry and painting, a staple of critical analysis throughout much of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, is relatively absent from the writings of Hazlitt and his contemporary essayists. This may be because it had become more common to look for evidence of the idiosyncrasy of genius in the form of experiments with tradition, or simply because it was

evident that the fine arts had found little opportunity since the Reformation to flourish, whether through formal training, access to national collections or in public exhibitions. Nonetheless, that Hogarth's significance was established, by the time Hazlitt was writing of him, in relation to literary canons of taste (where his artistic achievement was not recognized as equal to that of other artists such as Thomas Gainsborough and Richard Wilson), is a fact of some importance. Hogarth is significant to Hazlitt as a mode of representation, which not only allows him to distinguish between different types of imaginative production, including the natural, comic, tragic-comic, tragic, moral, and ideal, but also enables the application of the visual to the literary.

In the lecture 'On the Works of Hogarth' (where the artist, significantly, is incorporated into a series on *writers*), Hazlitt invokes comparison with Shakespeare's reputation in order to show that Reynolds's criteria are contradictory when applied to Shakespeare, and therefore invalid: 'If Sir Joshua's theory were true, Dr Johnson's *Irene* would be a better tragedy than Shakespeare's' (vi, 139). The effect of having such a rule to measure by, however, is that the painters singled out as exemplary of their art must also be those to whom it is possible to apply the vocabulary developed for the appreciation of literature. Hogarth is ascribed many of the same qualities that Hazlitt finds to be present in Shakespeare and lacking in Ben Jonson, Shakespeare's contemporary:

Shakespeare takes his groundwork in individual character and the manners of his age, and raises from them a fantastical and delightful superstructure of his own ... Ben Jonson is a great borrower from the works of others, and a plagiarist even from nature; so little freedom is there in his imitations of her, that he appears to receive her bounty like an alms. ('On Shakespeare and Ben Jonson'; vi, 38)

An analogy can be seen between this comparison of Shakespeare with Jonson, and the parallel comparison, in the lecture 'On the Works of Hogarth', of Hogarth with his more highly-reputed successor, the academician David Wilkie (1785–1841). Wilkie's genre paintings in the Dutch tradition are works of 'pure imitative art', revealing him to be a 'serious, prosaic, literal narrator of facts'; Hogarth's pictures, by contrast, 'are not indifferent, unimpassioned descriptions of human nature, but rich, exuberant, satires upon it' (vi, 139). The primacy of literary over artistic terms of analysis appears in the choice of such words as 'satire', 'prosaic', and 'transcript' in comparing Hogarth to Wilkie.

Hazlitt ranks Hogarth with Shakespeare, Chaucer, and Garrick for his ability to reconcile contradictory faculties (vi, 144),⁶ and he also draws an analogy with the

6 Walpole likewise recognizes Hogarth's originality in terms of his intermediate art: 'Hogarth had no model to follow and improve upon. He created his art; and used colours instead of language. His place is between the Italians, whom we may consider as epic poets and tragedians, and the Flemish painters, who are as writers of farce and editors of burlesque nature ... he observes the true end of comedy: reformation; there is always a moral to his pictures.' In William Hogarth, *Anecdotes of William Hogarth, by Himself*, ed. J.B. Nichols (London: J. Nichols and Son, 1833), 69.

epic tradition fused with the more contemporary form of the novel. In the *Round Table* essay 'On Hogarth's Marriage à-la-Mode', Hazlitt contends that if Fielding could present *Tom Jones* as an epic, 'because it contained a regular development of fable, manner, character, and passion,' then Hogarth's works should also qualify as 'Epic Pictures' (iv, 28). And in the *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*, Hazlitt can praise Fielding as equal to Hogarth 'as a painter of real life,' bringing together a 'variety of characters in common life, marked with more distinct peculiarities, and without an atom of caricature ... [making] use of incident and situation only to bring out character.' ('The English Novelists'; vi, 112-13). In general, indeed, it is the narrative qualities of Hogarth's work that are most valued, despite his own professed desire to imitate performance and a stage.⁷

Strictly by the standards of drama, it seems, Hogarth tends to fail in Hazlitt's judgement. In one of his conversations with Northcote, the topic of Hogarth is discussed in terms of imagery drawn from the theatre. Northcote declares that he sees no objection to 'the comparison with buffoons on the stage,' and characterizes Hogarth's work as a 'halfway house between farce and tragedy' ('Conversations as Good as Real'; xx, 273). Hazlitt counters that all high tragedy 'resolves the sense of pain or suffering into the sense of power by imagination,' whereas the 'tragicomedy' of Hogarth does the reverse. If Charles Lamb 'despised Kean's face in *Othello*,' Hazlitt prefers Kean nonetheless to Hogarth's attempt at 'tragic faces' (xx, 274). Although Northcote also sounds like Hazlitt, when he replies that Hogarth, as the 'great comic painter,' is an 'exception to general rules,' he does little more than excuse Hogarth's deficiencies, pointing out that comedy is not at home in painting and suggesting that Hogarth practised a 'kind of shorthand of the art, obliged to run neither into caricature nor into still-life' (xx, 276). The implication here is that the criteria used to evaluate drama and the stage, even if Hogarth himself would have subscribed to them, are inappropriate to Hogarth's own particular genius and productions.

Hogarth's reputation: some conjectures

Charles Lamb spoke warmly of a man whose only two books were Shakespeare and Hogarth, and in his essay 'On the Genius of Hogarth' he focuses on the dramatic composition of *The Rake's Progress* (painted 1732-3, engraved 1735) and *Gin Lane* (1751), praising their 'kindly admixture' of the serious and the comic, and the power of making the part stand for the whole, rather than being confined to the realism of their subject and the formal limits of representation.⁸ For Hazlitt, similarly, it seems that Hogarth is united to Shakespeare not so much by any formal traits as by the affinity of genius and a similar ability to embody both the serious and the ludicrous. However, there seems little indication that Hazlitt saw Hogarth's achievement as comparable to that of Shakespeare in literature; and he does not

7 'I endeavoured to treat my subjects as a dramatic writer: my picture is my stage, and men and women my players, who by means of certain actions and gestures, are to exhibit a *dumb-show*.' Hogarth, *Anecdotes*, 9.

8 First published in *The Reflector*, II, 3 (1811), 61-77.

recognize in Hogarth the power he finds in Poussin, that 'at his touch, words start up into images, thoughts become things' (viii, 170). Hazlitt's praise is therefore more qualified than Lamb's, but both, by the attention given to Hogarth and by the polemic nature of their comments, make it clear that their concern is not merely with the reputation of one artist, but with the nature of his artistic production.

Why should so prominent a role have been accorded to an artist who, by Hazlitt's own admission, cannot rank with those whom he admired so much more for their visual representation of the ideal? One obvious answer is that Hogarth disavowed the aims of Reynolds even before they were formulated, and that praise for the one artist can hardly coexist with tolerance of the other. It seems unlikely, however, that such considerations weighed with Lamb, and even in Hazlitt's case, the utility of Hogarth must have been undermined by his failure to conform to his own conception of the ideal.

The present study suggests that a better answer is to be found in the fact that Lamb and Hazlitt, although interpreters of both the literary and visual culture of their time, were predominantly concerned with literature, including drama. This interest is exemplified by Lamb's *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets*, by Hazlitt's lectures on the English poets and the Elizabethan dramatists, and above all by the extensive body of work which both devoted to William Shakespeare. Shakespeare was by this time the inevitable touchstone of genius for the literary critic, and the easiest way to praise any English artist was to say that he stood comparison with Shakespeare. At the same time, because of Shakespeare's unrivalled position as a dramatist, and because the appreciation of Shakespeare was now conceived less frequently with reference to the stage, the analogy tended to rely on those literary characteristics of the artist's work other than the purely dramatic. The comparison of Hogarth to Shakespeare was partly justified by his proficiency in depicting vulgar characters and his appeal to the patriotism of the English,⁹ but even this, combined with his opposition to Reynolds and the Royal Academy, would have meant little if his pictures had not lent themselves, both to circulation as well as analysis and discussion using the same criteria that had already defined the genius of the national poet. The evolving discipline of criticism seized on an artist who not only committed his own artistic theory to writing, but even in his visual works, as Lamb asserts and Hazlitt implies, had shown himself to belong as much to literature as to art.

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9 See *Great English Painters. Selected Biographies from Allan Cunningham's Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, ed. William Sharp (London: Walter Scott, 1886), 147, where Cunningham describes Hogarth as 'the spontaneous offspring of the graphic spirit of his country, as native to the art of England as independence is,' and quotes Hogarth's attack on Academies. Hogarth's profound dislike of the French is supported by an account on 167 of his expulsion from France on suspicion of being a spy.

‘A GALLERY IN THE MIND’

Hazlitt, The Louvre, and the Meritocracy of Taste

Maureen McCue

In September 1802 Samuel Rogers wrote to an aged William Gilpin, the great promoter of the picturesque, that he was off to France in order to visit the Louvre, or rather the Musée Napoléon's, art collection. Like many others, including Henry Fuseli, Maria Edgeworth and Benjamin West, who had the means and the desire to travel to the continent, Rogers was taking advantage of the brief window of opportunity provided by the Peace of Amiens. He expressed regret at not being able to take his friend along, to see ‘Titian & Coreggio, Phidias & Praxiteles, [who] tho’ in exile & among the Gauls, are still what they were.’ Gilpin responded:

I write immediately, not to answer your letter, but as you are going to France, to give you a commission to the Belvidere Apollo. With my compliments beg to know, whether he is the real Apollo, or a fictitious one?

About a month ago a gentleman, the Dean of Ely, called upon me, & informed me, that Mr. Wyatt ... told him, that the king had sent to Paris, to inquire about the Italian statues – that he had formerly been intimately acquainted with the Apollo, in Italy – & that he was certain the Apollo at Paris, was fictitious.¹

This private correspondence, as well as the national chain of communication it relates, beautifully illustrates the central and dynamic place the visual and plastic arts held in the wider British imagination at the turn of the nineteenth century. In this passage the civic humanist tradition of the eighteenth century (the king's grand-tour knowledge of the Apollo) is balanced with the current socio-political situation (questioning the authenticity of French plunder). Rogers's assertion that, though tainted by the French, these objects still hold the power and prestige given them by an older generation, as well as Gilpin's questioning of the authenticity of the Belvedere, voice the conflicting claims that both Britain and France were the legitimate heir to Italy's republican past. The playful tone of Gilpin's letter suggests a friendship with Italy and the ‘Italian statues’, a quality which, in a more

1 Carl P. Barbier (ed.), *Samuel Rogers and William Gilpin: Their Friendship and Correspondence* (London: published for Glasgow University by Oxford University Press, 1959), 66–7.

overtly political piece, would most likely colour Britain as protector of Italy, and therefore liberty and learning. In his *Classical Tour through Italy*, for example, John Chetwode Eustace writes,

Without doubt the name of Rome echoes in our ears from our infancy; our lisping tongues are tuned to her language; and our first and most delightful years are passed among her orators, poets and historians. We are taught betimes to take a deep interest in her fortunes, and to adopt her cause, as that of our own country, with spirit and with passion. Such impressions made at such an age are indelible, and it must be admitted, are likely to influence our feelings and opinions during life.²

The question of art and who lays claim to the most important pieces (physically or ideologically), then, is a political question and a national concern of Britain.

The French Revolution opened up and secularized the meaning of art, and with it, the concept of a public museum was born.³ The civic humanist tradition had stressed the importance of art in the formation of a polite society, and for over fifty years, the Royal Academy had been attempting to inaugurate a British School of Painting which, it was hoped, would rival the French Academy. These artists used old master canvases and copies, alongside casts of Greek, Roman, and Greco-Roman sculptures for training and inspiration. Yet at the turn of the century art was becoming more widely available to those who were neither artists nor aristocrats. In *The Birth of Pandora and the Division of Knowledge*, John Barrell argues,

As long as the possibility of appreciating the higher genres of the art was thought of as available only to the aristocracy, it was certainly imagined that an informed concern with painting and sculpture conferred status on the noble or gentle connoisseur; it confirmed his standing as a patrician in the fullest sense of the word, as someone not only born to exercise power, but fit to exercise it. As a result, a form of prestige became attached to the ability to articulate the civic discourse, and that ability could remain to some extent a source of prestige when the discourse came to be spoken by, and addressed to, those with no claim to be regarded as patricians.⁴

In 1798 three English merchants bought the Orleans collection, which was, as Francis Haskell has argued, 'probably the finest collection in private hands

2 John Chetwode Eustace, *A Classical Tour through Italy*, 4 vols (London: T. Miller, 1821), vol. 1, 348–9.

3 See Jonah Siegel, *Desire and Excess: The Nineteenth-Century Culture of Art* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000); Elizabeth Holt (ed.), *The Triumph of Art for the Public, 1785–1848: The Emerging Role of Exhibitions and Critics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); and Francis Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art: Some Aspects of Taste, Fashion and Collecting in England and France* (London: Phaidon, 1976).

4 John Barrell, *The Birth of Pandora and the Division of Knowledge* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 68.

anywhere in the world at the time.⁵ For several months, the entire collection was displayed at a Pall Mall auction house, and for the first time people were able to see, in person, famous works that they were already familiar with by name, in print, or from travel guides. This was the would-be painter William Hazlitt's first encounter with the works of old masters, and would only be surpassed by his extended visit to the Louvre a few years later during the 1802 Peace of Amiens.

During his lifetime, Hazlitt made several trips to the continent, visiting the Louvre on each occasion. As a young painter, commissioned to copy the old masters, he spent four months in Paris during the Peace of Amiens.⁶ Twenty years later he returned on a more extensive tour of the continent, which is detailed in his *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy*.⁷ Finally he returned in July 1826 to research his *Life of Napoleon*.⁸ However, between his first visit to the museum and his death, his thoughts were never very far from it, as is evident from extensive references, often in unlikely and surprising places, found throughout the body of his work.

As several critics have argued, the Louvre was for Hazlitt, a manifestation of his republican ideals.⁹ His extended commitment to the Louvre before its (re)dispersal is deeply connected to his support of Napoleon and the republic. Hazlitt argues for a levelling up of society as a whole, where thought is free and men of genius can practise without title or wealth to recommend them. The Musée Napoléon, he argues, 'is the true spirit of Jacobinism; and not the turning the Thuilleries into a potatoe-garden.'¹⁰ His accounts of the individual's experience of art, in the Louvre and even in lesser galleries,¹¹ attests to the idea that the product of the French Revolution is a liberation of cultural productions. My concern in this essay, however, is with what happens with this 'freed' art. Throughout Hazlitt's accounts is an implicit suggestion that there are a limited number of people who can truly appreciate art. His art criticism, especially in pieces which invoke the Louvre, implicitly argues for a meritocracy of art, in which the individual, naturally privileged, viewer creates and continually re-hangs an internal 'gallery in the mind'.

In several texts, Hazlitt relates what it was like to walk in the Louvre for the first time. In 'On the Pleasure of Painting' he writes, 'I marched delighted through a quarter of a mile of the proudest efforts of the mind of man, a whole creation of

5 Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art*, 25.

6 Hazlitt remained in Paris from October 1802 until February 1803.

7 Originally published as a series of articles for the *Morning Chronicle*, from September 1824 to November 1825; published collectively in May 1826.

8 Hazlitt stayed until October 1827. See J.W. Kinnaird, *William Hazlitt, Critic of Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 129–64 and Herschel Baker, *William Hazlitt* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 442–69.

9 See, for example, Stephen Cheeke, 'Hazlitt and the Louvre', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 57 (2007), 111–35.

10 *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe, 21 vols. (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1930–1934), xiii, 213. Subsequent references in the text.

11 See his *Sketches of the Principal Picture Galleries in England* (x).

genius, a universe of art! I ran the gauntlet of all the schools from the bottom to the top; and in the end got admitted into the inner room' of Italian old masters (viii, 15). The viewer moves freely through this arena, and his mind is liberated from external circumstances. The gallery is not solely the physical space of the Louvre, but also a collective mind. These seemingly infinite productions 'told the great and mighty of earth that their empire was passed away' (xiii, 212). The old masters, and their naturally occurring genius, were honoured as the 'salt of the earth', while the individual becomes a sort of Everyman:

The spirit of man walked erect and found its true level in the triumph of real over factitious claims. Whoever felt the sense of beauty or the yearning after excellence haunt his breast, was amply avenged on the injustice of fortune, and might boldly answer those who asked what there was but birth and title in the world that was not base and sordid – 'Look around! These are my inheritance; this is the class to which I belong!' (ibid.)

Unlike kings or aristocrats, the old masters had earned their claims to genius and their immortal names. In essence, they were all examples of an empowered mind; having their works freely available to all emancipates human genius from the bonds of political, social, and cultural servitude. There is a subtle shift from the universal 'spirit of man', to the particular 'whoever felt the sense of beauty', which in turn becomes the 'I'. The relationship between the universal and the particular, or the universal manifested in the particular, forms the base of much of Hazlitt's philosophy and his literary and art criticism. The meritocracy of taste – this 'class to which I belong!' – is able to connect the ideals of liberty and genius to particular works.

Hazlitt is often viewed as a tenacious terrier on the bone of French Republican ideals, yet his art criticism does more than mourn the loss of the Louvre, and the hopes of the French Revolution. It re-orders society. In his 1814 essay on the Louvre in *The Morning Chronicle*, Hazlitt responds to an article in the previous week's *Times*, which endorsed the rights of the Russian, Austrian, and German governments to counter-attack Napoleon in Paris. As a preface, Hazlitt includes an excerpt from the article, which asks: 'If Blücher, if the Cossacks, get to Paris, – to Paris, the seat of Bonaparte's pride and insolence, – what mercy will they shew to it, or why should they shew it any mercy? Will they spare the precious works of art, to decorate the palace of a monster whom they justly detest?' In a clearly partisan counter-attack, Hazlitt chides the *Times* writers – as well as poet laureate Robert Southey – for having forgotten the struggle for liberty, or rather, being so short-sighted as to miss what is ultimately at stake in the potential destruction of Paris. He writes,

It seems to them just that Paris should be sacrificed to revenge the setting fire to Moscow by the Russians, and that the monuments of art in the Louvre ought to be destroyed because they are Bonaparte's. No; they are ours as well as his, – they belong to the human race; he cannot monopolize all genius and all art. But these madmen would, if they could, blot the Sun out of heaven

because it shines upon France. ... They, no more than their friends the Cossacks, can perceive any difference between the Kremlin and the Louvre. There is at least one difference, that the one may be built up again, and the other cannot. (xix, 126–7).

Art manifests the potential of human genius, and as such, stands above and outside human and political follies. Bonaparte's collecting of the world's finest pieces, or even his career more generally, is a creative act of genius. Yet, while these art works 'belong to the human race', the readers and writers of the *Times*, the Germans, Russians, and Cossacks, are so narrowly focused on contemporary politics, the 'machine that goes on of itself', that they would willingly destroy the world's works of genius to destroy one man.

Anticipating Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*, Hazlitt argues that it is those who create the products of human genius, rather than politicians, who truly protect human liberty.¹² The critical act of viewing and valuing art is in essence a creative act which protects human genius and liberty. In order to appreciate art, one must connect to the piece's internal *gusto*;¹³ this is a creative process, producing a correlation between the true critic and the artist. Hazlitt separates the mechanical from the creative viewers of art. We begin to see that one's interaction with art, whether in the political arena or alone in a gallery, should be creative, incorporating an understanding of *gusto* with an ability to connect liberty, genius, the sister arts together. The *Times* writers read the political situation, and therefore art's value, mechanically. Hazlitt continues,

But here it is: once destroy the great monuments of art, and they cannot be replaced. Those mighty geniuses, who have left their works behind them an inheritance to mankind, live but once to do honour to themselves and their nature. 'But once put out their light, and there is no Promethean heat that can their light relumine.' Nor ought it ever to be re-kindled, to be extinguished a second time by the harpies of the human race. What have 'the worshippers of cats and onions' to do with those triumphs of human genius, which give the eternal lie to their creed? We would therefore recommend these accomplished pioneers of civilization and social order, after they have done their work at the Louvre, to follow the river-side, and they will come to a bare inclosure, surrounded by four low walls. It is the place where the Bastille stood: let them rear that, and all will be well. (xix, 127–8)

12 Also, compare this to Hazlitt's characterization of Napoleon in which he argues that Napoleon's project to create this collection is on the level of the old masters (*Life*, xiii, 212).

13 As Uttara Natarajan explains, "The distinction in the essay "On *Gusto*" between "the objects themselves in nature" and "the objects in the picture" is not the conventional distinction between nature and art, but between the imaginative perception of nature and the imaginative expression of nature in art; the imagination is the source of "something divine" in both. This "something divine", then, that is expressed in the pictorial arts, is the manifestation, not of deity, but of what Hazlitt calls "*gusto*" in the artistic imagination" – *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense: Criticism, Morals, and the Metaphysics of Power* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 47.

This is a tightly packed argument, one that finds constant reiteration throughout Hazlitt's work. These works are unique productions, but it is even more complicated than this. As in his *Morning Chronicle* articles on 'Why the Arts are not Progressive?' (xviii, 5–10), Hazlitt argues that the creative impetus and circumstances to create art at the level of Raphael's *Transfiguration* or Titian's *Portrait of the Man with One Glove* has already been extinguished. The Kremlin, the Bastille, and other symbols of human servitude are easily replaceable and replicable; not so with the products of human genius. It is important to note that the painters have done 'honour to themselves and their nature'. This highlights the role of the individual in painting. The *gusto* of a piece is unique to a particular painter; this is what the viewer responds to. Another essential point is the false religion of the *Times* audience ('What have "the worshippers of cats and onions" to do with those triumphs of human genius, which give the eternal lie to their creed?'). Elsewhere Hazlitt describes going to galleries as going on a pilgrimage to worship at the 'shrine of art'.¹⁴

Hazlitt is unique in mourning the loss of the Louvre, especially because most of this art is Italian and many British radicals had a higher affinity with Italy even than with the ideals of the French Revolution. In his *Life of Napoleon*, Hazlitt justifies Bonaparte's pillaging of art works during his Italian campaign by relaying the following anecdote. Italy's 'contributions' included Correggio's *St Jerome*, for which according to Hazlitt, the Duke of Parma offered the equivalent of £80,000 in order to keep the painting. While his army agents wanted to accept the money and leave the painting, Napoleon refused, in the hope that the work would elevate French artists to the level of the Italian masters (xiii, 210). In Hazlitt's estimation, this hope separates Napoleon, his museum project, and the old masters from his own military agents, as well as the *Times* audience. In the *Life of Napoleon*, Hazlitt argues that, 'What is subject of barter and sale in time of peace, may be reckoned among the spoils of war. The Cartoons, the Elgin Marbles answer it. ... If the army-agents had had their way, we should have heard nothing about the robbery, because we ourselves should have liked to have pocketed the same sum' (xiii, 213).¹⁵ Rather than a pillaging, the Musée Napoléon 'was the crowning and consecration of art' (xiii, 212). 'This' Hazlitt argues, 'was what art could do, and all other pretensions seemed to sink before it. School called unto school; one great name answered to another, swelling the chorus of universal praise' (xiii, 212). Gathering together these works brought them to a higher level than was possible, when they were shut behind the doors of private palaces, papal residences, and cloistered churches. This was the potential of painting realized.

In other pieces of art criticism, Hazlitt repeatedly describes the difference between seeing an highly varnished contemporary piece and witnessing the internal light of an old master painting, as well as the mutual illumination of old

14 For more on the religious overtones in Hazlitt's art criticism, see Cheeke, 'Hazlitt and the Louvre'.

15 Hazlitt continues, 'We who transfer whole people and bombard peaceful towns, talk at our ease about rapine and sacrilege committed on statues and pictures, because they offer no temptation to our cupidity' (xiii, 213).

masters which occurs in a well-planned gallery. This is similar to the 'chorus of universal praise' in the quotation above. Rather than the works of art losing their individual vitality by being taken from their origins, art, collectively, is brought 'to a gorgeous height'.¹⁶ However, Napoleon's nationalistic hope for the improvement of the arts was in vain: 'Not a ray of the sentiment or beauty contained in this picture [Correggio's *St Jerome*] dawned upon a French canvas during the twenty years it remained there.' 'Works of genius' Hazlitt argues 'do not beget other works of genius' (xiii, 210). In this reiteration of his argument in his essays on the progressiveness of the arts, he asserts that while the results of science are 'definable and mechanical', art, contrary to Joshua Reynolds's supposition, is individual and 'undefinable' (xiii, 211). The over-exposure to casts and works of genius, without a proper study and clear understanding of Nature, 'only create[s] indolence, distraction, pedantry, and mediocrity' in the artist (xiii, 211). Hazlitt's opinion, that the French, despite having the best works at their disposal, were not able to raise their national academy of painting is aligned with his idea that the time for pictorial genius has come and gone.

It also becomes clear in *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy* and in his art criticism in general, that Hazlitt does not put much stock in French taste, which he deems overly effeminate and courtly. 'The French' he writes, 'see nothing but what is French. ... They have no turn for the fine arts, music, poetry, painting. ... [T]hey are qualified for nothing that requires the mind to make an arduous effort to soar beyond its ordinary flight' (xiii, 211). As the *Times* writers were so narrowly focused on supporting political retribution that they failed to realize what they were willing to sacrifice, so too are the French so blinded by national prejudices that they can neither create nor appreciate high art. Hazlitt uses the same image of flight in his discussion of Hogarth, whose 'mind had feet and hands, but not wings to fly with' (vi, 148). While Hogarth had a particular type of *gusto*, it was limited by known circumstances. Though Hogarth painted what was natural to him well, unlike Raphael, he did not move into the realm of the ideal. Each artist and viewer creates and sees as much as he is capable of creating or seeing. The French are limited by their own character: 'Bonaparte could do and did a great deal for France; but he could not *unmake* the character of the people. Give them David's pictures, and they are satisfied; and no other country will ever quarrel with them for the possession of the prize!' (xiii, 211).¹⁷

16 Their adoptive home had 'set an exclusive value on what could contribute to the public ornament or the public use, and had disallowed all claims to distinction that could insult over or interfere with those of truth, nature, and genius' (xiii, 212–13). This raises some issues similar to those in the Elgin Marbles debate. See William St. Clair, *Lord Elgin and the Marbles*, 3rd rev. edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

17 National characteristics are an universal attribute of the unthinking (i.e. mechanical) viewer, regardless of country. Part of Hazlitt's problem with David is that he has copied from art, rather than Nature first. This is the same attack that he levels at Reynolds's *Discourses*, David Wilkie's style, and the Royal Academy more generally. Though most critics focus on his celebratory writings on the Louvre, it is also interesting to note that he likened the Modern French wing to Purgatory, while he was waiting for admission to the Paradise of the Italian Old Master gallery. This took several days. See viii, 15 and his letters to his father.

Though Napoleon's gathering together of the best works was an unprecedented achievement and the ideal of art made (nearly) visible, there are important links to be made to Britain's own art project, the Royal Academy. For Hazlitt, it was obvious that the hope to raise the French Academy was in vain. The Louvre's collection was an end in itself, and raised art higher than it had or would ever be again. Art was becoming more accessible on British soil, through the increasingly popular annual Royal Academy exhibitions at Somerset House, the purchase of the Orleans collection, and the eventual formation of public galleries (largely in response to the Louvre).¹⁸ However, civic humanist discourse was no longer enough and yet a plethora of people were expected to speak intelligently about art, in all its myriad forms.¹⁹ But, Hazlitt argues, the 'diffusion of taste is not ... the same thing as the improvement of taste' (xviii, 45). The creation of the Louvre, and later the ability to travel in post-Waterloo Europe, does not guarantee that one will 'see' art.

Each individual mind, whether Hogarth's, Raphael's, or a citizen of France's, sees what he is able to see. In *The Plain Speaker*, Hazlitt argues that it is 'difficult to see what is before you. ... We imagine that we see the whole of Nature, because we are aware of no more than we see of it' (xii.291). We see in art or Nature what corresponds to ourselves; this reinforces our nature and when we return to the painting we will be able to see more of it. This cycle of ongoing education, however is stifled by the exhibitions at Somerset House. The viewer's eyes are dazzled by the thick varnish, whereas we respond to the internal light of the old masters. Hazlitt is arguing for a new type of training for the viewer of art, something which is akin to the painter's own artistic development. In his article, 'Fine Arts. Whether they are Promoted by Academies and Public Institutions,' Hazlitt criticizes the spectators at Somerset House:

It is probable that in all that stream of idleness and curiosity which flows in, hour after hour, and day after day, to the richly hung apartments of Somerset-house, there are not fifty persons to be found who can really distinguish 'a Guido from a Daub', or who would recognize a work of the most refined genius from the most common and everyday performance. (xviii.46–47)

Rather than a gallery of genius, Britain's home of art is a cabinet of curiosities. Somerset House is overcrowded and the thick varnish of these new works seems to mesmerize their viewers, an idea stressed by the word 'Daub'. This previously unidentified quotation is taken from Book VI of Cowper's *The Task* and recurs several times throughout Hazlitt's work, although often without the quotation marks. Cowper's poem, published in 1785, represents a typical eighteenth- and nineteenth-century image of the informed but superficial connoisseur:

18 See David Solkin (ed.), *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House 1780–1836* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).

19 See Maryanne Ward, 'Preparing for the National Gallery: The Art Criticism of William Hazlitt and P.G. Patmore,' *Victorian Periodical Review* 23, 3 (1990), 104–10.

Nor him, who by his vanity seduc'd,
 And sooth'd into a dream that he discerns
 The diff'rence of a Guido from a daub,
 Frequents the crowded auction: station'd there
 As duly as the Langford of the show,
 With glass at eye, and catalogue in hand,
 And tongue accomplish'd in the fulsome cant
 And pedantry that coxcombs learn with ease;
 Oft as the price-deciding hammer falls
 He notes it in his book, then raps his box,
 Swears 'tis a bargain, rails at his hard fate
 That he has let it pass – but never bids!

(*The Task*, vi. 283–94).

The image of the connoisseur armed with the accoutrements of knowledge, particularly his 'fulsome cant/And pedantry' becomes a source of ridicule at the close of the eighteenth century. As Chloe Chard has argued 'Accounts of works of art very often designate connoisseurs, or other categories of spectators who claim specialized expertise, as affected not because they are effusive but because they are coldly pedantic, pretending not to emotion but to knowledge and critical skills.'²⁰ Byron depicts this image well in Canto IV of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, ultimately rejecting 'The paltry jargon of the marble mart' (448) in favour of an emotional and visceral response to art.

In his *Table Talk* essay 'On Criticism', Hazlitt argues 'there are connoisseurs who give you the subject, the grouping, the perspective, and all the mechanical circumstances of a picture; but never say a word about the expression' (viii.218). The exhibitions at the Royal Academy are exactly suited to these spectators because the works on display offer no more than what they can either glean from the catalogue or make a note of in their common-place books. Set a group of these fellows in front of a large history painting and they would 'float with wings expanded in lofty circles,' but they would entirely miss out on the expressions of the painting's figures. 'The face' he writes, 'forms no part of their collective inquiries; or so that it occupies only a sixth or an eighth proportion to the whole body, all is according to the received rules of composition. Point to a divine portrait of Titian, to an angelic head of Guido, close by – they see and heed it not' (viii. 219). This mechanical engagement with art is akin to the political agenda of the *Times*; the true viewer, i.e. the would-be critic, must learn to articulate the spirit or *gusto* of the artist's work. The elusive quality of capturing the expression is the biggest challenge for both artist and critic.

This is a direct censure of the Royal Academy's endorsement of history painting as the highest form of art, as well as its actual breadwinning work of portraiture. While history painting was the official stance of the Academy it is important to remember, as David Solkin has argued, that it was portrait painting which created

20 Chloe Chard, *Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour: Travel Writing and Imaginative Geography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 108.

the most viable and lucrative market,²¹ even in the case of the Academy's president's, Sir Joshua Reynolds's, career. The popularity of portraits alongside the prestige of history painting, encouraged artists to create works on an overly grand scale with a high level of varnish, in order to compete in the overcrowded market of the annual exhibit. As Hazlitt stresses, this created a taste for large scale and 'glittering' works, hindering the spectator in learning how to view paintings. He writes, 'Their ideas always fly to the circumference, and never fix at the centre. Art must be on a grand scale; according to them, the whole is greater than a part, and the greater necessarily implies the less' (viii.219). The valuing of general over particulars is a strong point of contention between Hazlitt's philosophy and Reynolds's *Discourses*. For Hazlitt, it is the particulars of any given work that raises it to the ideal and which makes associations possible between paintings, artists, literature, and philosophy.

Genius is seldom seen, as the number of portrait painters demonstrates. The danger for Hazlitt is that real opinions on art will be lost in the deadening crowds of the RA exhibit: 'The principle of universal suffrage, however applicable to matters of government, which concern the common feelings and common interests of society, is by no means applicable to matters of taste, which can only be decided upon by the most refined understandings'. This 'refined understanding' implies a continual education of the viewer, and this sets up a correlation between artist and critic. While there is a certain amount of 'Natural sensibility' or talent in any artist, it is also important to undertake deep and extended study, to learn how to 'sympathize with all the degrees of beauty and power' (viii, 16). Knowing the mechanical while pursuing the ideal is 'pleasure as well as power'. The genuine artist, 'absorbed in the pursuit of a higher object', will push past the instrumental and technical aspects of his profession in his passion for abstract truth. The same holds true for the critic. Instead of being impressed only with the 'glitter and varnish' of the RA pieces or measuring the length of Christ in Raphael's *Transfiguration*, the true critic pursues, studies, remembers, and articulates the internal light of the old masters.²² This allows him to make associative connections between the sister arts, as well as his own judgments against any particular piece or school. Unlike Sir Joshua Reynolds's claim that Michelangelo was first among painters, Hazlitt's ideal critic constantly re-hangs his own museum of the mind as he encounters new works. He articulates the particular of each painting in relation to all the other paintings he has ever seen, in order to illuminate his understanding of the piece. In his mind, even after the Louvre has been dispersed, 'school calls unto school'.

One of Hazlitt's most striking passages on the Louvre is found in his lecture on Hogarth in the *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*:

Later in life [after first seeing engravings of Raphael's Cartoons], I saw other works of this great painter (with more like them) collected in the Louvre:

21 See David H. Solkin, *Painting for Money: the Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), especially the Introduction, 1–27.

22 See especially his essay, 'Mr Angerstein's Collection', in *Sketches of the Principal Picture Galleries of England* (x, 7–17).

where art, at that time, lifted up her head, and was seated on her throne, and said, 'All eyes shall see me, and all knees shall bow to me!' Honour was done to her and all hers. There was her treasure, and there the inventory of all she had. There she had gathered together her pomp, and there was her shrine, and there her votaries came and worshipped as in a temple. The crown she wore was brighter than that of kings. Where the struggles for human liberty had been, there were the triumphs of human genius. For there, in the Louvre, were the precious monuments of art: – There 'stood the statue that enchants the world'; there was Apollo, the Laocoon, the Dying Gladiator, the head of the Antinous, Diana with her Fawn, the Muses and the Graces in a ring, and all the glories of the antique world: –

'There was old Proteus coming from the sea,
And wreathed Triton blew his winding horn.'

There, too, were the two St Jeromes, Correggio's and Domenichino's; there was Raphael's Transfiguration; the St Mark of Tintoret; Paul Veronese's Marriage of Cana; the Deluge of Poussin; and Titian's St Peter Martyr. It was there that I learned to become an enthusiast of the lasting works of the great painters, and of their names no less magnificent; grateful to the heart as the sound of celestial harmony from other spheres, waking around us (whether heard or not) from youth to age; the stay, the guide, and anchor of our purest thoughts; whom, having once seen, we always remember, and who teach us to see all things through them; without whom life would be to begin again, and the earth barren; of Raphael, who lifted the human form half way to heaven; of Titian, who painted the mind in the face, and unfolded the soul of things to the eye; of Rubens, around whose pencil gorgeous shapes thronged numberless, startling us by the novel accidents of form and colour, putting the spirit of motion into the universe, and weaving a gay fantastic round and Bacchanalian dance with nature; of Rembrandt, too, who 'smoothed the raven down of darkness till it smiled,' and tinged it with a light like streaks of burnished ore: of these, and more than these, of whom the world was scarce worthy, and for the loss of whom nothing could console me – (vi, 148–149).²³

This lengthy quotation exemplifies Hazlitt's enthusiasm for the Louvre, and versions of it appear throughout his work.²⁴ This is the experience of an individual within an inherited cultural space, but it also testifies to the active participation of the individual in his own artistic education. The works in the Louvre were the works on every British grand tourist's itinerary; indeed the French had collected them with the help of guidebooks.²⁵ Yet Hazlitt associates these canonical pieces

23 In this quotation, Hazlitt includes the accepted canon of sculptures, though elsewhere he is severely critical of most of them, especially the Venus de' Medici and the Belvedere Apollo. See, for example, *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy* (x, 222–3).

24 See, for example, his *Morning Chronicle* article, 'The Louvre' (xix, 127).

25 For more on the collecting of the Louvre, see Cecil Gould, *Trophy of Conquest: The Musée Napoléon and the Creation of the Louvre* (London: Faber, 1965).

with British literature. Instead of naming the Venus de' Medici, for example, he quotes Thompson's *The Seasons*, which compares Musidora's bathing attitude when she is spotted by her lover Damon to the shape of this beloved Venus.²⁶ As well, he invokes Wordsworth twice. Art teaches the viewer to see and then guides him throughout life, until all things are seen through and associated with remembered pieces. Beautifully, Hazlitt celebrates his favourite aspects of his most treasured painters, and though he is not speaking of one specific painting, he recreates the encounter with the works of these masters. Each artist does one thing particularly well, and yet through continual engagement with these artists, the viewer's understanding of the ideal of art is brought to a crescendo.

Not everyone can view art, but for those who can the ideal is brought into the earthly realm. The Louvre had been the closest manifestation of the ideal made real, but it was not perfect. It did not for example have Raphael's Stanze or any of the old master works Hazlitt later encountered on his own soil. It would take him his whole life to create and collect the ideal museum; every new encounter with art demanded a re-hang of this mental museum and forced new connections between art, literature and philosophy. In an essay from *Table Talk*, Hazlitt describes a life spent intimately with art:

Pictures are a set of chosen images, a stream of pleasant thoughts passing through the mind. It is a luxury to have the walls of our rooms hung round with them ; and no less so to have such a gallery in the mind, to con over the relics of ancient art bound up 'within the book and volume of the brain, unmixed (if it were possible) with baser matter!' A life spent among pictures, in the study and the love of art is a happy noiseless dream : or rather, it is to dream and to be awake at the same time ; for it has all 'the sober certainty of waking bliss', with the romantic voluptuousness of a visionary and abstracted being. They are the bright consummate essences of things, and we may say that he 'who of these delights can judge and knows to interpose them oft, is not unwise'. (viii.173)

The critic dedicated to studying art, in time earns his right to study art. In this way, Hazlitt's meritocracy of taste is formed by a new type of artist, the critic.

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²⁶ James Thomson, *The Seasons and the Castle of Indolence*, ed. James Sambrook (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), lines 1334–70 of 'Summer'.

HAZLITT ENTERS THE RING

Kevin McCarra

I have only reported on one fight in my life. The resemblance to William Hazlitt ends there in absolutely all respects. My fight was of such inconsequence that *The Times* sent me to it purely because I then lived in Glasgow, a fact that outweighed the unfortunate truth that I am a football writer. Frank Bruno would become world champion later in 1995, but I saw him when he had come to town simply to keep himself occupied. He knocked out his opponent Mike Evans in round two. It was no sort of bout yet I still remember the shock. Sitting so close to the ring, you hear the thud and understand that when fighters appear to tap at one another's kidneys during a clinch they are doing a degree of harm that no amount of television coverage will ever convey.

There is an enticing horror to boxing. When I first read 'The Fight' I could see it was concerned with the thrill of anticipation at least as much as with the encounter between Bill Neate and Thomas Hickman. We are about two-thirds of the way through the essay before one man takes a swing at the other. Returning to 'The Fight' for this article I noticed to my surprise that Hazlitt went to Hungerford as a spectator in December 1821 when he was already 43. He only had a further nine years to live. This exercise must have galvanized him because it seems such a young man's piece.

Hazlitt himself is in the thick of 'The Fight'. As narrator, he has more energy than urgency. Indeed the actual contest between Neate and Hickman seems, for a while, to be continually receding from us, as if this account is touched by the Tristram Shandy comedy of postponement. There is, instead, the slapstick chronicle of confusion and coincidence, as well as the picaresque recollection that he almost got thumped by the gin-ridden ex-boxer Jack Randall who was landlord of the pub that Hazlitt frequented.

You could argue that all the zestful digressions are intended to stoke the excitement over a fight that is withheld from us for page after page. It does not have that effect on me. In my own trade, I am happiest when covering the football match itself. This is a treat when so much print journalism has to be given over to comment and speculation. Despite the superb technology of the Sky Sports channels that gives viewers perfect coverage of a game, people, happily for me, still like reading match reports of what they have watched on television. They seem to want discussion of, to be pretentious, the inner life of the game and its ramifications

for players, managers and clubs. Hazlitt, in theory, was in a wonderful position to immerse himself in the fight, since there was no film crew to beat him to the punch, no promoter to deal with, no post-bout press conference to attend, no formulaic press conference quotes to be scribbled down.

We come almost belatedly to the encounter between Neate and Hickman. Rather than feeling a build-up in momentum, I recognize a suppressed disquiet in Hazlitt. The fight itself was likely to have been nastier still than we are allowed to witness. It was, after all, the practice of the age to end a round not when three minutes had elapsed, but when one of the fighters had been knocked to the ground. Hickman is not beaten until, by Hazlitt's vague reckoning, the 17th or 18th rounds. I feel we are spared quite a lot of the gore. There is a distancing from the violence. We are given the depiction of 'a death's head, spouting blood,' but Hazlitt abruptly veers away from the cruel truth of the destruction and takes refuge in literature: 'He was not like an actual man, but like a preternatural, spectral appearance, or like one of the figures in Dante's *Inferno*.'

Is this not a means of putting distance between himself and what has been done to Hickman? Hazlitt cannot avoid signalling his unease. Without warning, he rears up to address those who have reservations about two men beating one another senseless while huge sums are wagered on the outcome: 'Ye who despise the FANCY, do something to shew as much *pluck*, or as much self-possession as this, before you assume a superiority you have never given single proof of by any one action in the whole course of your lives!'

The issue gnaws at Hazlitt. Having travelled down with the 'rattle brain' Joe Toms, he returns home with the civilized Jack Piggott. The latter is converted into walking warranty for the essential nobility of boxing. Wondering about the book his companion is reading, Hazlitt is delighted to learn that it is a volume of the *New Eloise*. 'Ladies,' he cries, 'after this, will you contend that a love for the FANCY is incompatible with the cultivation of sentiment?' It is a laughable argument that an inclination both to read Jean-Jacques Rousseau's novel and to attend a fight demonstrates that boxing is civilized by association.

Apart from the gusto of the piece, there is depth to Hazlitt's essay because the moral questions about the violence of the spectacle cannot be kept at bay, much as he might wish to ignore them. He is affronted when one of boxers acts in a coarse way that temporarily turns him into a venal human being and stops Hazlitt from perceiving him as an idealized figure. We learn that Hickman, a fortnight before the fight, approached Neate and bragged, 'I'll knock more blood out of that great carcase of thine...than you ever knock'd out of a bullock's!' Hazlitt considers this unseemly: 'It was not manly, 'twas not fighter-like'. Hickman has to be washed clean of this sin, bathed in his own blood before Hazlitt can extol him again.

The verbal spats between fighters are ritualistic nowadays and are termed 'trash talking'. It helps sell tickets if there is some clash between the fighters at the weigh-in or press conferences. What would Hazlitt have made of the jailhouse rhetoric of Mike Tyson before a bout with Donovan 'Razor' Ruddock in 1991? 'I can't wait to taste those great big lips of yours,' he said, 'I'm gonna make you my girlfriend'; Tyson was trying to undermine his opponent's masculinity, but in all the shows

of repellent bravado fighters are also striving nervously to fend off a dread of the harm that may befall them. It is significant that the confrontational conduct in Hazlitt's essay comes from Hickman, the lighter of the boxers and therefore the one who knows he is more at risk.

Hazlitt cannot conceal the unease that boxing causes in him. The ring is a mirror in which we catch a glimpse of one's own disturbing traits. I have never forgotten how mesmerized I was when sitting in my living-room watching the Nigel Benn–Gerald McClellan fight in 1995. Benn, having been knocked out of the ring in the first round, rallied remarkably. I was filled with a desperate craving to see him put McClellan out for the count. Benn, it turned out, did more than that. McClellan collapsed in his corner and needed emergency surgery to remove a blood clot from his brain. When he emerged from a coma some weeks later, he was blind, almost deaf, and afflicted by short-term memory problems. His sisters look after him. As I watched the fight, I had yearned to see Benn punch McLellan into oblivion without doing lasting harm. That was an absurd wish.

I now take little interest in the actual sport any more, but I continue to be enthralled by the writing about it. In one of the finest pieces on modern boxing, Hugh McIlvanney recounted the last fight of Johnny Owen's life. The Welsh bantamweight was knocked out in the 12th round of a world championship fight in 1980 and died seven weeks later without regaining consciousness. In a now famous phrase McIlvanney wrote of Owen, 'It is his tragedy that he found himself articulate in such a dangerous language.' The paradox persists that some men, like the gifted Owen, seem born for a profession that harms and very occasionally kills them.

McIlvanney is both honest and defiant about boxing. 'I acknowledge no hypocrisy,' he wrote, 'in deciding that I could be at a graveside in Merthyr Tydfil when Johnny Owen was buried and at the ringside in New Orleans a fortnight later when Roberto Duran met Sugar Ray Leonard. Our society will have to become a lot more saintly before the abolition of boxing qualifies as an urgent priority.' The cost is reckoned, but McIlvanney also knows that the sport embodies something in our nature that will not be suppressed. It is a bleak sort of vindication.

Others prefer to babble about the route boxing offers out of the ghetto or the discipline it instils in those who will never be good enough to make their living out of the ring. That is a glib justification that pretends there are no safer methods to rise above such circumstances. A writer of worth is incapable of covering the sport without peering into its shadows. Some sneer at the dabblers. 'Hazlitt was a dilettante who wrote one fight story,' declared A. J. Liebling. The *New Yorker's* marvellous chronicler of boxing in the 1950s is having a little fun by adopting that hard-nosed tone, but it is true, as well, that Hazlitt had no cause to embed himself in boxing and gauge the nobility and the squalor.

Liebling had the astringent wit of a *New Yorker* writer and paired it with a deep knowledge of boxing and its milieu. If Hazlitt was beating back panic about the bloody truth of boxing, Liebling has his humorous irony to contain the terrors. Without being ponderous, he skewers the exploitation of the business. People thrive financially by managing endangered boxers while speaking pluckily

from a position of total safety. In a piece about the Rocky Marciano–Jersey Joe Walcott fight of 1952, we are presented with a cameo of Marciano’s manager. He finds Al Weill supposedly awaiting ‘telephone calls from Pittsburgh, Providence, Honolulu, and Salt Lake City. A prizefight manager will never admit he is waiting for a telephone call that costs less than a dollar.’ The fakery delights Liebling because of the material it presents to him.

Weill deplores a boxer who wasn’t smart enough, crying out, ‘I can’t fight for them,’ as if it were only his age that prevented him from taking the punches himself. ‘The manager,’ Liebling reports, ‘threw to the floor a cigar only four-fifths smoked, for him an evidence of great emotion, and ground the stub with his right heel, as if obliterating an evil memory.’

This is terrific source material for the satirist. Irony, too, is Liebling’s way of keeping some distance from the occasional gore and horror of the sport. There is, beneath the ridicule, a fondness for the fighters. When required to vindicate the sport itself, all the same, Liebling resorts to arguments that are a burlesque of logic. In the introduction to *The Sweet Science*, a collection of some of his *New Yorker* pieces from the 1950s, he celebrates Billy Ray, who was once a bareknuckle boxer and still has all his wits about him as he approaches his 90s despite a career of, apparently, 140 fights. This is contrasted with the alleged mortality of people in academia, where ‘faculty members were dropping on the tennis courts so fast that people making up a doubles party always brought along a spare assistant professor.’ When a man is as funny as Liebling it is impossible to care when he decides to ignore the fact that boxing differs from most sports because the actual purpose of it is to protect yourself, if at all feasible, by inflicting brain damage, with a knockout, on your opponent.

The moral issues are rarely kept at bay any longer. More often, they are the core of the story. My friend and fellow *Guardian* writer, Don McRae, won Sports Book of the Year for *Dark Trade: Lost in Boxing*. The title is uncompromising and it is borne out by his analysis of, and meetings with, many of the principal boxers of modern times. In ‘The Baddest Man,’ the chapter on Tyson, we are brought face to face with the minutiae of the profession in which sparring partners are routinely beaten up for little reward, McRae records Tyson practising: ‘He snapped Jesse’s head back and forth as if opening and shutting the creaking drawers of an old filing cabinet.’

Tyson, himself, is a character who could, from one perspective, be viewed as pitiable. As a short, fat child whose father was long gone, he would regularly be beaten up in the various New York ghettos in which he lived. Tyson was schooled in destruction and tells McRae that the delight he took in tearing the head off his sister’s doll when he was five or six was the equivalent of an orgasm. By the time his twelfth birthday was in sight he owned a gun. Beyond the ring he had, as an adult, little flair for looking after himself. McRae reports that, during his marriage, Robin Givens and her mother transferred \$10m from his account to theirs. Even if that had not happened, there would still have been the dreadful rage in Tyson that could not be contained by the ropes of the boxing ring. McRae’s account is nuanced and we are shown that Tyson appreciates that, however much he is paid, there is still

something noxious about the audience who generate the wealth. He claims to have been provoked into that 'girlfriend' comment about Ruddock. 'Everyone looks so fucking smug eating those little cakes and looking up at the niggers talking about fighting,' he explained of that press conference.

For a while the reader is fooled into thinking that he very nearly has the measure of Tyson. There is no scope for such presumption and complacency. The final pages of the chapter are brutal. We are shown Tyson talking 'gently' to the 18-year-old Desiree Washington and telling her she is a 'nice Christian girl'. Washington agrees to go on a date with the boxer and is raped by him. Tyson was convicted and served three years of a six-year sentence.

It is not McRae's purpose to explain Tyson to us, to damn him or to rummage for mitigation. In *Dark Trade* he is set before us in all his horror, pitiable victim and abhorrent criminal. He, of course, is a hideously unusual figure who does not reflect the everyday reality of boxing as a profession. Nonetheless, there must be extreme traits entwined with a business based on hitting other people for cash. Hazlitt knows this and half-reels from it. Distinguished writers on boxing such as McRae, who is full of admiration for the account of Neate and Hickman, have not entirely turned away from the sport as Hazlitt did. With a queasiness, they go on bearing witness to boxing and what it tells us about the shadows in our souls.

THE GUARDIAN

REVIEW OF HAZLITT STUDIES 2007

Certainly the weightiest, in more respects than one, of the works on Hazlitt published in 2007 is the two-volume *New Writings of William Hazlitt*, edited by Duncan Wu.¹ These handsome, heavy books, a compilation of Hazlitt's journalistic writings, omitted from or discovered subsequently to P.P. Howe's magisterial edition, represent the forensic labours, not only of Wu, but also the many dedicated Hazlitt scholars before him, especially the late Stanley Jones. The essays collected here capture, above all, Hazlitt's journalistic mode, that extempore quality so often obscured in his more finished publications. Wu's introduction offers a useful overview of Hazlitt's journalistic career, as well as an excellent analysis of his characteristic style, although the latter refers rather to the established canon than to the new writings collated in this edition. The range of Hazlitt's interests – aesthetic, philosophical, and political – is on display in these essays, which offer new material of considerable value; for instance, the 1809 letter to the *Morning Chronicle*, in which Hazlitt engages with contemporary brain science, or the 1816 reviews of Hunt's *Rimini* and Coleridge's *Christabel* volume.

The drawback of the edition is its size. Considerable space is devoted to writings whose authorship is doubtful, or which are inconsequential, regardless of authorship. The real gold in these volumes would have shown better unalloyed with baser metal. A publication at once slimmer and more solid, possibly a single volume, might have made a more practical resource for both scholars and general readers.

Another contribution by Wu to Hazlitt studies is an essay, 'Stendhal and the British Romantics', in a volume entitled *British and European Romanticisms*.² This useful source study argues the impact on Stendhal's thought of British Romanticism, particularly Hazlitt's commentaries on the mind and its workings.

That *Liber Amoris* has become central to the present-day interest in Hazlitt is confirmed by two publications of 2007. Jon Cook's short biography, *Hazlitt in Love*, recounts the story of Hazlitt's unrequited love for Sarah Walker.³ Cook's aim is to reach an understanding of the story and its two principal characters without falling into narrow moral judgements. His main critical premise is that Hazlitt's

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

2 Duncan Wu, 'Stendhal and the British Romantics' in *British and European Romanticisms: Selected Papers from the Munich Conference of the German Society for English Romanticism*, ed. C. Bode and S. Domsch (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2007), 37–49.

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

reading governs his experience of love. No new information comes to light in the book, but Cook tells the story sympathetically and lucidly, addressing himself more to the general reader than the academic community. *Liber Amoris*, again, is Gregory Dart's subject in the April issue of the *Charles Lamb Bulletin*.⁴ Dart's nuanced and sensitive reading exposes the social and political bearings of the text, germane to the way in which Hazlitt tells his story, as much as to the story itself. The essay is especially insightful about a pervasive characteristic of 'littleness' in Hazlitt's love-story: in its setting, its scope, its idol, and the very objects that figure in it. Dart relates this to Wordsworth's exaltation of mean or insignificant things, as an assertion of democratic value, but with the proviso that any such over-investment in the imagination's power to bestow value proportionately divests the object outside the self of life or meaning.

For some time now, the *Charles Lamb Bulletin* has been a major forum for shorter writings on Hazlitt. In its January issue, Phillip Cardinale's lively article, 'Hazlitt's Mousetrap: A Reassessment of "On the Pleasure of Hating"' argues persuasively that the essay named in its title, generally taken to be an expression of Hazlitt's ill-nature, actually promotes the antidotes to hatred.⁵ The following issue of the *Bulletin*, designated 'A William Hazlitt Issue', in which Dart's essay is featured, also carries an article by Sybil Oldfield, which vigorously takes Hazlitt's side in his attack upon Malthus, and concludes that 'Hazlitt was a true social prophet'.⁶

Essays on Hazlitt have appeared, too, in other of the leading Romanticist journals in Britain and the United States. The still-neglected topic of Hazlitt's theatre criticism is addressed in Jim Davis's article, 'The Sublime of Tragedy in Low Life', in the *European Romantic Review*.⁷ Davis's object is to unpack the title phrase of his essay, a quotation from Hazlitt's description of the comic actor, John Emery, a Yorkshireman who played the role of the rustic Robert Tyke in Thomas Morton's *The School of Reform*. The article examines Hazlitt's and other contemporaries' comments on Emery, to argue that 'the sublime of tragedy in low life', as Hazlitt perceives it, is distinguished not only by the more normative attributes of force and intensity, but also by its 'association with the vulgar, local, and particular'. Such a sublime relies on imitation rather than creation, and its manifestation is momentary rather than sustained, alternating with periods of comedy throughout the performance.

Another under-studied subject, Hazlitt's interest in linguistics, is treated in Marcus Tomalin's essay in *Romanticism*, "'Vulgarisms and Broken English": The Familiar Perspicuity of William Hazlitt'.⁸ Focusing in particular on Hazlitt's *New and Improved Grammar of the English Tongue* (1809), as well as the better-known

4 Gregory Dart, 'Liber Amoris, or the New Pygmalion', *Charles Lamb Bulletin* 138 (April 2007), 38–46.

5 Phillip Cardinale, 'Hazlitt's Mousetrap: A Reassessment of "On the Pleasure of Hating"', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, 137 (January 2007), 24–30.

6 Sybil Oldfield, 'Hazlitt versus Malthus', *Charles Lamb Bulletin* 138 (April 2007), 47–56.

7 Jim Davis, 'The Sublime of Tragedy in Low Life', *European Romantic Review* 18, 2 (April 2007), 159–67.

8 Marcus Tomalin, "'Vulgarisms and Broken English": The Familiar Perspicuity of William Hazlitt', *Romanticism* 13, 1 (2007), 28–52.

essay, 'On Familiar Style,' Tomalin argues that Hazlitt's advocacy of familiar style should be understood in relation not only to his practice as a journalist, but also to an ongoing engagement with the grammatical treatises of his day, where the phrase stands for a specific linguistic register. Especially compelling is Tomalin's conclusion about the 'distinctly reactionary form' of Hazlitt's linguistic radicalism, which adopts one conservative linguistic dictum, that of perspicuity, so as to turn it against another, that forbids the use of the familiar style in serious literature.

Hazlitt's art-criticism is treated in Stephen Cheeke's excellent essay, 'Hazlitt and the Louvre' in the annual *Keats-Shelley Journal*, which reconstructs the historical moment of Hazlitt's 1802 visit to the Louvre at the beginning of the 'museum age', when competing nationalisms drove the acquisition and display of art in public collections.⁹ This visit, Cheeke argues, shaped Hazlitt's later art criticism, becoming the paradisaical experience that he seeks to recuperate in his responses to art thereafter. For Hazlitt, the universalist context of republican France uniquely enabled the realization of art's sacramental function, that is, the religious effect of the art work was most manifest, and thus also most problematic, in the context most hostile to the original context from which that art work has been displaced. The intensity with which Hazlitt experienced the 'aura' or presence of the art at the Louvre during his first visit, shows up the complex, sometimes contradictory relations between politics, religion, and aesthetics in his responses to art, and in his communication of those responses to the reader.

9 Stephen Cheeke, 'Hazlitt and the Louvre,' *Keats-Shelley Journal* 56 (2007), 111–35.



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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 each summer in Oxford and members qualify for concessionary rates.

The Society publishes *The Hazlitt Review*.

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