

THE HAZLITT REVIEW

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HAZLITT'S INFLUENCE ON DICKENS IN *BARNABY RUDGE*

Hazlitt Society Annual Lecture, 2008

Tom Paulin

In chapter thirty-eight of *David Copperfield*, David starts to teach himself shorthand. His aim is to get a job as a parliamentary reporter, and with the help of Mr Dick and Traddles, who read speeches out loud, he practises his new skill. Traddles, 'with the assistance of Enfield's Speaker or a volume of parliamentary orations, thundered astonishing invective' against the government represented by Mr Dick. Traddles speaks as Mr Pitt, Mr Fox, Mr Sheridan, Mr Burke, Lord Castlereagh, Viscount Sidmouth, or Mr Canning.¹ The volume of parliamentary orations is, I think, Hazlitt's *The Eloquence of the British Senate* which is a major source for *Barnaby Rudge*. Dickens read this speech by Sir William Meredith:

Under this act, one Mary Jones was executed, whose case I shall just mention: it was at the time when press warrants were issued on the alarm about the Falkland Islands. The woman's husband was pressed, their goods seized for some debts of his, and she, with two small children, turned into the streets a-begging. 'Tis a circumstance not to be forgotten, that she was very young, (under nineteen) and most remarkably handsome. She went to a linen-draper's shop, took some coarse linen off the counter, and slipped it under her cloak; the shopman saw her, and she laid it down: for this she was hanged. Her defence was (I have the trial in my pocket), 'that she had lived in credit, and wanted for nothing, till a press gang came and stole her husband from her, but since then she had no bed to lie on; nothing to give her children to eat; and they were almost naked; and perhaps she might have done something wrong, for she hardly knew what she did.' The parish officers testified the truth of this story; but it seems, there had been a good deal of shop-lifting about Ludgate; and an example was thought necessary; and this woman was hanged for the comfort and satisfaction of some shopkeepers in Ludgate street. When brought to receive sentence, she behaved in such a frantic manner, as proved

1 Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, ed. Trevor Blount (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 609-10.

her mind to be in a distracted and desponding state; and the child was sucking at her breast when she went out for Tyburn.

Let us reflect a little on this woman's fate. The poet says, 'an honest man's the noblest work of God.' He might have said with equal truth, that a beautiful woman's the noblest work of God.

But for what cause was God's creation robbed of this its noblest work? It was for no injury; but for a mere attempt to clothe two naked children by unlawful means. Compare this with what the state did and with what the law did. The state bereaved the woman of her husband, and the children of a father, who was all their support; the law deprived the woman of her life, and the children of their remaining parent, exposing them to every danger, insult, and merciless treatment, that destitute and helpless orphans suffer. Take all the circumstances together, I do not believe that a fouler murder was ever committed against law, than the murder of this woman by law.²

In the preface to *Barnaby Rudge*, Dickens mentions the public hangman Edward Dennis and one of his victims, Mary Jones, who also figures in the novel. He also mentions the Whig Reformer and MP, Sir Samuel Romilly, but none of these three historical figures are further described. A note to the Penguin Classics edition, taken from Donald Hawes's Everyman edition explains that Mary Jones was 'hanged by Edward Dennis, the public Hangman, on 16 October 1771 for stealing four pieces of muslin worth £5.10s.'³ Dickens gives the circumstances of Mary Jones's arrest and execution in the preface to the cheap 1849 edition of *Barnaby Rudge*:

Even the case of Mary Jones, dwelt upon with so much pleasure by the same character, is no effort of invention. The facts were stated exactly as they are stated here, in the House of Commons. Whether they afforded as much entertainment to the merry gentlemen assembled there, as some other most affecting circumstances of a similar nature mentioned by Sir Samuel Romilly, is not recorded. (3–4)

The source of this quotation is Hazlitt's 1808 anthology *The Eloquence of the British Senate*, which it is, I think, clear from *David Copperfield*, Dickens knew.

In *The Day-Star of Liberty*, I tried to suggest something of the scope of Hazlitt's influence on Dickens, and I pointed out that Dickens, like Hazlitt, began his writing career as a parliamentary shorthand reporter.⁴ As a young man he was friendly with a number of Hazlitt's friends and associates – Leigh Hunt, for example. He knew Hazlitt's son, also William Hazlitt, and wrote a number of testimonials for

2 William Hazlitt, *The Eloquence of the British Senate*, 2 vols (London: J. Murray, 1808), I, 166–7.

3 Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, ed. John Bowen (London: Penguin, 2003), 719n. Chapter and page references for this edition are hereafter given in parentheses in the text.

4 Tom Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style* (London: Faber, 1998), 238–9.

him. And he also employed Hazlitt Junior on the reporting staff of the *Daily News*, which he set up in 1846. Like Hazlitt, Dickens wrote for *The Examiner*, and in 1848 he made a visit to Salisbury and Winterslow Hut, the inn where many of Hazlitt's critical essays were written.

John Foster describes the visit to Winterslow Hut, calling it an adventure 'in which Leech, Lennon, and myself took part with him, when, obtaining horses from Salisbury, we passed the whole of a March day in riding over every part of the plain; visiting Stonehenge, and exploring Hazlitt's "hut" at Winterslow, birthplace of some of his finest essays.'⁵ And Dickens also describes the expedition in a letter to his wife, Catherine (27 March 1848).⁶ The trip must have been inspired by Dickens's admiration for Hazlitt, an admiration that is evident in Dickens's quotations from Hazlitt in his public speeches, and in this letter to Alexander Ireland, where he thanks Ireland for the gift of his bibliography, a *List of the Writings of William Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt, Chronologically Arranged ... and a Chronological List of the Works of Charles Lamb* (1868). Dickens says:

My interest in the subject is scarcely less than your own, and the book has afforded me great pleasure. I hope it will prove a very useful tribute to Hazlitt and Hunt (in extending the general knowledge of their writings), as well as a deservedly hearty and loving one. (30 May 1868)⁷

Ireland was to edit a selection of Hazlitt's essays in 1889.⁸

Earlier, on 30 November 1842, Dickens writes to Daniel Machlise, and asks 'Shall we go to Dulwich, and stroll and dine pictorially?'⁹ The Dulwich Picture Gallery is described by Hazlitt in his *Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England* (1824), a volume collected in *Criticisms on Art* (1843–4), published by his son. Hazlitt Junior published the following volumes of his father's work:

- The Principles of Human Action* (1836)
- Literary Remains* (1836)
- Sketches and Essays* (1839)
- Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth* (1840)
- Criticisms on Art and Sketches of the Picture-Galleries of England* (1843)
- Criticisms on Art*, second series (1844)
- Table-Talk* (1845)
- Winterslow: Essays on Characters Written There* (1850)
- The Plain Speaker* (1851)

5 John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, edited and annotated, with an introduction, by J.W.T. Ley (London: Cecil Palmer, 1928), 523.

6 Charles Dickens, *The Letters of Charles Dickens: The Pilgrim Edition*, ed. G. Storey, 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965–2002), vol V: 1847–1849, 25.

7 Dickens, *Letters*, vol XII: 1868–1870, 123.

8 Alexander Ireland, *William Hazlitt, Essayist and Critic: Selections from his Writings, with a Memoir, Biographical and Critical* (London and New York: F.Warne, 1889).

9 Dickens, *Letters*, vol III: 1842–1843, 387

The Life of Napoleon (1852)

The Spirit of the Age (1858)

These publications would have caught Dickens's attention, though when he quoted from Hazlitt's essay 'On Actors and Acting' in his speech to the General Theatrical Fund (6 April 1846), he must have been drawing on the first (1817) edition of *The Round Table*.

One of the qualities which Dickens drew from his reading of Hazlitt was a particular kind of English patriotism, which he develops to outflank readers who might be quick to accuse him of being simply and narrowly a deracinated, unpatriotic republican intellectual. In the first paragraph of *Barnaby Rudge*, Dickens writes in his characteristic manner of a leisurely, good-natured escapist, observing that outside the inn or 'house of public entertainment called the Maypole', there stood 'a fair young ash, thirty feet in height, and straight as any arrow that ever English yeoman drew' (I, 5). This image is bound to touch most Englishmen's hearts, and we can see a similar subject in this moment from the inn scene in Hazlitt's 'The Fight', where the 'tall English yeoman' he encounters is 'free-spoken, frank, convivial – one of that true English breed that went with Harry the Fifth to the siege of Harfleur – "standing like greyhounds in the slips"' (xvii, 77).¹⁰

Then in the next paragraph, Dickens says that the Maypole had 'huge zig-zag chimneys, out of which it seemed as though even smoke could not choose but come in more than naturally fantastic shapes, imparted to it in its tortuous progress; and vast stables, gloomy, ruinous and empty' (I, 5). He is thinking of Minotaur's labyrinth, and he underlines this by mentioning in the next sentence that the place was said to have been built in the days of Henry VIII. The mention of Henry VIII is the first introduction of the executioner theme, while the phrase 'tortuous progress' is similar to a passage in Hazlitt's essay 'What is the People?' which was reprinted in *Political Essays*: 'Reform in old Governments is just like the new improvements in the front of Carlton House, that would not go on fast enough but for the vile, old, dark, dirty, crooked streets, which cannot be removed without giving the inhabitants notice to quit' (vii, 280).

The labyrinth image is developed in the fourth chapter of *Barnaby Rudge*, where the locksmith's shop has 'two dark winding flights of stairs' (IV, 39), that echo the 'labyrinths of public ways and shops' (III, 33) in the previous chapter. In the sentence that mentions the labyrinths, Dickens says that the 'great city' lay outstretched like a dark shadow on the ground, 'reddening the sluggish air with a deep dull light' (III, 33). That adjective 'sluggish' is a pejorative throughout Hazlitt's writing, because, influenced by Joseph Priestley, he rejects the idea that matter is 'sluggish and inert'. On the other hand, Burke, who hated and attacked both Priestley's science and politics, uses the term in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* to distinguish the English national character from the French. He says that property as an interest is 'sluggish, inert and timid', while we – here he

10 Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Hazlitt's works 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.

speaks for the English – are supposed to be ‘a dull sluggish race.’ Our resistance to innovation, he adds, is prompted by ‘the cold sluggishness of our national character.’¹¹ Dickens based the character of the Catholic gentleman, Sir Geoffrey Haredale, on Burke, and I would suggest that Hazlitt’s long, admiring, exasperated argument with Burke’s writings on the French Revolution is in Dickens’s mind as he sets the scene for his story.

A central influence from Hazlitt is the character of John Chester, who is described in chapter ten as a ‘calm, easy, cool gentleman, without a care or thought beyond his golden toothpick’ (X, 95). Dickens’s portrait of Chester shows him ‘in a state of perfect complacency, indolence, and satisfaction’ (XV, 127). He raises his eyebrows with an ‘indolent’ expression of wonder (XXIII, 193); he is ‘cool, complacent, contemptuous, self-possessed’ (XXIII, 194), and his ‘complacency’ is contrasted with a remark he makes about the letter from Emma Haredale, which Hugh intercepts: ‘Quite a woman’s letter, full of what people call tenderness, and disinterestedness, and heart, and all that sort of thing’ (XXIII, 199). The term ‘disinterestedness’, which derives from Hazlitt, is used by Dickens throughout his fiction, and here it is meant to contrast with Chester’s cold-hearted, indolent, and complacent character, a character based on Hazlitt’s portrait of the Lord Chancellor, Eldon, in *The Spirit of the Age*:

Lord Eldon is an exceedingly good-natured man; but this does not prevent him, like other good-natured people, from consulting his own ease or interest. The character of *good-nature*, as it is called, has been a good deal mistaken; and the present Chancellor is not a bad illustration of the grounds of the prevailing error. When we happen to see an individual whose countenance is ‘all tranquillity and smiles;’ who is full of good-humour and pleasantry; whose manners are gentle and conciliating; who is uniformly temperate in his expressions, and punctual and just in his every-day dealings: we are apt to conclude from so fair an outside, that

‘All is conscience and tender heart’

within also, and that such a one would not hurt a fly. And neither would he without a motive. But mere good-nature (or what passes in the world for such) is often no better than indolent selfishness. A person distinguished and praised for this quality will not needlessly offend others, because they may retaliate; and, besides, it ruffles his own temper. He likes to enjoy a perfect calm, and to live in an interchange of kind offices. He suffers few things to irritate or annoy him. He has a fine oiliness in his disposition, which smoothes the waves of passion as they rise. He does not enter into the quarrels or enmities of others; bears their calamities with patience; he listens to the din and clang of war, the earthquake and the hurricane of the political and moral world with the temper and spirit of a philosopher; no act of injustice puts him beside himself;

11 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: J. Dodsley, 1790), 75, 81, 127.

the follies and absurdities of mankind never give him a moment's uneasiness; he has none of the ordinary causes of fretfulness or chagrin that torment others from the undue interest they take in the conduct of their neighbours or in the public good (xi, 141–2).

Chester speaks with 'so charming a voice' (XXVII, 227), and in such a 'delicious manner' (XXVII, 228), that it is difficult not to think that Dickens also had Hazlitt's admiration for Coleridge's voice in mind.

Again, when Chester taps his 'snuff-box lid' (XXVII, 228), it's hard not to remember Hazlitt's remark in *The Spirit of the Age* that Tom Moore in his songs has transformed the 'wild harp of Erin into a musical snuff-box' (xi, 174).

When Dickens describes Chester at the beginning of chapter thirty-two, lying on a sofa 'with his accustomed air of graceful negligence' (XXXII, 266), he is drawing on the aesthetic of studied negligence which Hazlitt defines. For example, Hazlitt identifies it in 'the sway of the limbs and negligent grandeur' in the *Elgin Marbles*, and he explains it in his portrait of Sir Charles Bunbury in 'The Look of a Gentleman':

as he saunters down St James's-street, with a large slouched hat, a lack-lustre eye, and aquiline nose, an old shabby drab-coloured coat, buttoned across his breast without a cape, – with old top-boots, and his hands in his waistcoat or breeches' pocket, as if he were strolling along his own garden-walks, or over the turf at Newmarket, after having made his bets secure (xii, 211).

In this essay, Hazlitt says that there is a type of aristocrat, who has too much 'negligence of manner and contempt for formal punctilios,' and then offers a portrait of Castlereagh, who may be thought to possess a 'bold, licentious, slovenly, lounging character'. Castlereagh is 'cold, death-like, smooth and smiling' (xii, 214). Chester, however, has a 'wonted precision and elegance of dress,' (XL, 332) which is quite different from Castlereagh's loose, slouchy style. That style is given to the mysterious stranger, who is the widow Rudge's husband. He never removes his 'slouched hat' (XVI, 140), and at one point a man who recognizes him as someone he passed 'near the turnpike in the Oxford-road,' slaps him on the shoulder and tells him to be "more companionable and communicative" (XVI, 141). Communication was a primary value for Unitarians, and Hazlitt expresses it in his remark in *The Life of Napoleon* that 'society is an electrical machine, by which good and evil, vice and virtue are communicated with instantaneous rapidity, from one extremity to the other' (xiv, 133). Dickens intends a similar contrast between the wearer of the slouched hat and his interlocutor as there is between Chester and his son.

Another example of negligence is in this description of Hugh:

The light that fell upon this slumbering form, showed it in all its muscular and handsome proportions. It was that of a young man, of a hale athletic figure, and a giant's strength, whose sunburnt face and swarthy throat, overgrown



'Hugh Asleep' by Hablot K. Browne (reprinted from Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, p. 97 [Oxford World's Classics, 2003] by permission of Oxford University Press)

with jet black hair, might have served a painter for a model. Loosely attired, in the coarsest and roughest garb, with scraps of straw and hay – his usual bed – clinging here and there, and mingling with his uncombed locks, he had fallen asleep in a posture as careless as his dress. The negligence and disorder of the whole man, with something fierce and sullen in his features, gave him a picturesque appearance, that attracted the regard even of the Maypole customers who knew him well, and caused Long Parkes to say that Hugh looked more like a poaching rascal to-night than ever he had seen him yet. (XI, 98)

Again the word 'negligence' points to a sinister quality. But in the next chapter, it is applied to a good character – Haredale – who is contrasted with Chester:

The one was soft-spoken, delicately made, precise and elegant; the other, a burly square-built man, negligently dressed, rough and abrupt in manner, stern, and, in his present mood, forbidding both in look and speech. The one preserved a calm and placid smile; the other, a distrustful frown. The newcomer, indeed, appeared bent on showing by his every tone and gesture his determined opposition and hostility to the man he had come to meet. The guest who received him, on the other hand, seemed to feel that the contrast between them was all in his favour, and to derive a quiet exaltation from it which put him more at his ease than ever. (XII, 103)

The term 'abrupt' is an adjective favoured by Hazlitt, who remarks that Pitt's speeches had nothing 'far-fetched or abrupt' in them (iv, 127). Haredale, as I say, is based on Burke, whose prose style, Hazlitt says, is like a chamois, which 'climbers up by abrupt and intricate ways' (xii, 10). The term 'abrupt' is always used by Hazlitt to praise style, and the fact that Pitt's speeches had 'nothing abrupt' in them is a fault.

Chester's son, Edward, is in love with Haredale's daughter, and Dickens makes the conflict between father and son one of different value systems. Chester is self-interested, while Edward holds to an ethic of 'plain speaking' and wishes a 'franker spirit' could exist between them. His father says 'There is a great earnestness, vast candour, a manifest sincerity in all you say, but I observe the faintest indications of a tendency to prose' (XV, 132). The values are Hazlitt's. I'm tempted to see the 'uncommon display of buttered toast' and the 'great rashers of broiled ham' in chapter twenty-one (XXI, 183) as a food image out of a Hazlitt essay, but this might be pushing his influence too far.

When Hugh remarks to Chester that he was a boy of six 'when they hung my mother up for a couple of thousand men to stare at' (XXIII, 200), we are brought back to the central influence of Sir William Meredith's speech attacking capital punishment. Chester remarks that he is sure Hugh's mother was 'handsome', and that her execution 'was all for the best, no doubt' (XXIII, 202). Dickens, like Hazlitt, was vehemently opposed to capital punishment, and Chester's selfishness – his interested nature – is one of the primary targets of the narrative. His smile of

‘unvarying serenity and politeness’ (XXIV, 204) is a parody of one of Unitarianism’s central values, which is expressed in this paragraph:

Ye men of gloom and austerity, who paint the face of Infinite Benevolence with an eternal frown; read in the Everlasting Book, wide open to your view, the lesson it would teach. Its pictures are not in black and sombre hues, but bright and glowing tints; its music – save when ye drown it – is not in sighs and groans, but songs and cheerful sounds. Listen to the million voices in the summer air, and find one dismal as your own. Remember, if ye can, the sense of hope and pleasure which every glad return of day awakens in the breast of all your kind who have not changed their nature; and learn some wisdom even from the witless, when their hearts are lifted up they know not why, by all the mirth and happiness it brings. (XXV, 208)

The value of benevolence is embodied in Gabriel Varden, the ‘good-natured locksmith’ who says that Barnaby Rudge Senior wasn’t ‘free and frank enough’ when he courted the young woman Varden wanted to marry (XXVI, 219, 220). The locksmith is described by Haredale as ‘a plain honest man’ (XXVI, 222) and so he carries the virtue of plain speech, which Hazlitt sets so much store by.

Another value which Hazlitt consistently adheres to is what he terms the ‘old English’ intellect, one which he contrasts with modern ways of thinking. He published an essay ‘On Old English Writers and Speakers’ in the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1825, and the quality centrally represents an undivided intellect. When Dickens says that John Willet, the proprietor of the Maypole Inn, was ‘a father of the good old English sort ... there were no new-fangled notions or modern ways in him’ (XXX, 251), he is drawing, possibly on this idea, as well as remembering that moment in ‘The Fight’, where the yeoman in the inn is described as ‘one of that English breed’ (xvii, 77). The phrase is echoed again in his description of Lord George Gordon’s servant: ‘He was a square-built, strong-made, bull-necked fellow, of the true English breed, and as Hugh measured him with his eye, he measured Hugh, regarding him meanwhile with a look of bluff disdain’ (XXXV, 292). This combines Hazlitt’s phrase with something similar to his praise of the Jack Tars’ ‘hard, obdurate character’ in his *Life of Napoleon* (xiv, 17). Also the reference to ‘fisty-cuff’ and, two paragraphs later, ‘single-stick’, echoes the celebration of rural games and customs in ‘Merry England’ (xvii, 154–5).

One of the influences which the style of the essay has on the nineteenth-century novel can be seen in the paragraphs which open chapters. Thus chapter twenty-nine begins:

The thoughts of worldly men are for ever regulated by a moral law of gravitation, which, like the physical one, holds them down to earth. The bright glory of day, and the silent wonders of a starlit night, appeal to their minds in vain. There are no signs in the sun, or in the moon, or in the stars, for their reading. They are like some wise men, who learning to know each planet by its Latin name, have quite forgotten such small heavenly constellations

as Charity, Forbearance, Universal Love, and Mercy, although they shine by night and day so brightly that the blind may see them; and who, looking upward at the spangled sky, see nothing there but the reflection of their own great wisdom and book-learning. (XXIX, 239)

The idea of benevolence, which charity and the other virtues combine to create, is developed in the next paragraph, where they are contrasted with selfishness and greed:

It is curious to imagine these people of the world, busy in thought, turning their eyes toward the countless spheres that shine above us, and making them reflect the only images their minds contain. The man who lives but in the breath of princes, has nothing in his sight but stars for courtiers' breasts. The envious man beholds his neighbour's honours even in the sky; to the money-hoarder, and the mass of worldly folk, the whole great universe above glitters with sterling coin – fresh from the mint – stamped with the sovereign's head – coming always between them and heaven, turn where they may. So do the shadows of our own desires stand between us and our better angels, and thus their brightness is eclipsed. (XXIX, 239)

Then the narrative proper begins with 'Everything was fresh and gay, as though the world were but that morning made, when Mr Chester rode at a tranquil pace along the Forest road' (XXIX, 239). The *a* sound in 'gay', 'made', and 'pace' as well as the 'rode'/'road' chime create a rhyming, lulling, specious effect, which is part of Chester's personality.

In *The Day Star of Liberty*, I suggested that there is a resemblance to Dickens in the passage in 'My First Acquaintance with Poets,' where Coleridge says in response to Hazlitt's father's praise of Sir James Mackintosh's *Vindicae Gallicae* that Mackintosh was 'a clever scholastic man – a master of the topics, – or as the ready warehouseman of letters, who knew exactly where to lay his hands on what he wanted, though the goods were not his own' (xvii, 111). In *Our Mutual Friend*, the teacher, Bradley Headstone is portrayed like this:

Mr Bradley Headstone, in his decent black coat and waistcoat, and decent white shirt, and decent formal black tie, and decent pantaloons of pepper and salt, with his decent silver watch in his pocket and its decent silver hair-guard around his neck, looked a thoroughly decent young man of six-and-twenty. He was never seen in any other dress, and yet there was a certain stiffness in his manner of wearing this, as if there were a want of adaptation between him and it, recalling some mechanics in their holiday clothes. He had acquired mechanically a great store of teacher's knowledge. He could do mental arithmetic mechanically, sing at sight mechanically, even play the great church organ mechanically. From his early childhood up, his mind had been a place of mechanical stowage. The arrangement of his wholesale warehouse, so that it might be always ready to meet the demands of retail dealers – history here,

geography there, astronomy to the right, political economy to the left – natural history, the physical sciences, figures, music, the lower mathematics, and what not, all in their several places – this care had imparted to his countenance a look of care; while the habit of questioning and being questioned had given him a suspicious manner, or a manner that would be better described as one of lying in wait. There was a kind of settled trouble in the face. It was the face belonging to a naturally slow or inattentive intellect that had toiled hard to get what it had won, and to hold it now that it was gotten. He always seemed to be uneasy lest anything should be missing from his mental warehouse, and taking stock to assure himself. (Book 2, chapter I)¹²

The portrait of Headstone takes up a whole paragraph. It condenses Hazlitt's criticisms of a mechanical, Lockean mindset, and it also represents his criticism of utilitarianism – Dickens is confronting an entire social idea, as he had done ten years earlier in *Hard Times*. That look of 'settled trouble' in Headstone's face signals the madness that his repressive, dull, mechanical mind will cause, and his interest in the criminal mind was something that Dickens drew from Hazlitt, as well as from other sources. Although it lacks the flair and detail of the portraits in *The Spirit of the Age*, it is composed like them to give certain philosophical ideas a physical embodiment.

I catch another echo of 'My First Acquaintance with Poets' in *Barnaby Rudge*, just before Joe Willet enlists in the army. Dickens says that there 'never was an unfortunate young fellow so bullied, badgered, worried, fretted, and brow-beaten; so constantly beset, or made so tired of his life as poor Joe Willet' (XXX, 251). In his sermon, Coleridge

made a poetical and pastoral excursion, – and to shew the fatal effects of war, drew a striking contrast between the simple shepherd boy, driving his team afield, or sitting under the hawthorn, piping to his flock, 'as though he should never be old'; and the same poor country-lad, crimped, kidnapped, brought into town, made drunk at an alehouse, turned into a wretched drummer-boy, with his hair sticking on end with powder and pomatum, a long cue at his back, and tricked out in the loathsome finery of the profession of blood. (xvii, 108)

It's the impacted verbs that texture Dickens's prose – 'bullied, badgered, worried, fretted and brow-beaten' – that echo Hazlitt. Later in the chapter, Chester thanks Willet 'as if he had been one of the most disinterested martyrs that ever shone on earth' (XXX, 243). This is very close to Hazlitt's praise of Guy Fawkes's disinterested motives in his essay 'Guy Fawkes' where he confesses 'I like the spirit of martyrdom' (xx, 99).

12 Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. Stephen Gill (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 266–7.

Dickens would have been aware of Hazlitt's admiration for Titian's portraits, and especially for the way Titian paints his subjects' eyes. This is present in this portrait of Lord George Gordon:

As he bustled in and out of the room, intent on these arrangements, he had an opportunity of observing the two travellers, of whom, as yet, he knew nothing but the voice. The Lord, the great personage, who did the Maypole so much honour, was about the middle height, of a slender make, and sallow complexion, with an aquiline nose, and long hair of a reddish brown, combed perfectly straight and smooth about his ears, and slightly powdered, but without the faintest vestige of a curl. He was attired, under his greatcoat, in a full suit of black, quite free from any ornament, and of the most precise and sober cut. The gravity of his dress, together with a certain lankness of cheek and stiffness of deportment, added nearly ten years to his age, but his figure was that of one not yet past thirty. As he stood musing in the red glow of the fire, it was striking to observe his very bright large eye, which betrayed a restlessness of thought and purpose, singularly at variance with the studied composure and sobriety of his mien, and with his quaint and sad apparel. It had nothing harsh or cruel in its expression; neither had his face, which was thin and mild, and wore an air of melancholy; but it was suggestive of an indefinable uneasiness, which infected those who looked upon him, and filled them with a kind of pity for the man: though why it did so, they would have had some trouble to explain. (XXXV, 293)

Except that that favourite verb 'bustled' draws on Hazlitt's central critical idea – gusto – to give force and movement to the portrait, it is as if Dickens is describing an oil painting. The description of Gordon's 'very bright large eye' is one of a series of eye descriptions in the novel, and Dickens balances it with another in the next paragraph, where Gashford, Gordon's secretary, is described like this:

Gashford, the secretary, was taller, angularly made, high-shouldered, bony, and ungraceful. His dress, in imitation of his superior, was demure and staid in the extreme; his manner formal and constrained. This gentleman had an overhanging brow, great hands and feet and ears, and a pair of eyes that seemed to have made an unnatural retreat into his head, and to have dug themselves a cave to hide in. His manner was smooth and humble, but very sly and slinking. He wore the aspect of a man who was always lying in wait for something that *wouldn't* come to pass; but he looked patient – very patient – and fawned like a spaniel dog. Even now, while he warmed and rubbed his hands before the blaze, he had the air of one who only presumed to enjoy it in his degree as a commoner; and though he knew his lord was not regarding him, he looked into his face from time to time, and, with a meek and deferential manner, smiled as if for practice. (XXXV, 293)

Gashford's 'overhanging brow' is reminiscent of John Wilson Croker, whom I've elsewhere suggested may be a model for Krook in *Bleak House*. In the next paragraph, John Willet is described as having 'a fixed and leaden eye' (XXXV, 293–4).

In chapter thirty-seven – a chapter whose opening paragraphs sound rather like one of Hazlitt's political essays – Dickens has the hangman, Edward Dennis, recount his execution of Mary Jones, saying that George the Third sometimes

'...throws me in one over that I don't expect, as he did three year ago, when I got Mary Jones, a young woman of nineteen who come up to Tyburn with an infant at her breast, and was worked off for taking a piece of cloth off the counter of a shop in Ludgate-hill, and putting it down again when the shopman see her: and who had never done any harm before, and only tried to do that, in consequence of her husband having been pressed three weeks previous, and she being left to beg with two young children – as was proved upon the trial. Ha ha! – Well! That being the law and the practice of England, is the glory of England, an't it Muster Gashford?' (XXXVII, 311–2)

This passage follows a portrait of the hangman, which employs an adjective – 'dingy' – that Hazlitt sometimes uses in a complex manner, as in 'Hot and Cold' from *The Plain Speaker*, where he describes the 'dirty, dingy, greasy, sunburnt complexion of an Italian peasant' (xii, 172). The hangman looks like this:

The man who now confronted Gashford, was a squat, thickset personage, with a low retreating forehead, a coarse shock head of hair, and eyes so small and near together, that his broken nose alone seemed to prevent their meeting and fusing into one of the usual size. A dingy handkerchief twisted like a cord about his neck, left its great veins exposed to view, and they were swollen and starting, as though with gulping down strong passions, malice, and ill-will. His dress was of threadbare velveteen – a faded, rusty, whitened black, like the ashes of a pipe or a coal fire after a day's extinction; discoloured with the soils of many a stale debauch, and reeking yet with pot-house odours. In lieu of buckles at his knees, he wore unequal loops of packthread; and in his grimy hands he held a knotted stick, the knob of which was carved into a rough likeness of his own vile face. Such was the visitor who doffed his three-cornered hat in Gashford's presence, and waited, leering, for his notice. (XXXVII, 320)

The adjectives in 'a faded, rusty, whitened black' are Hazlittian in their deliberate, incremental precision, and the point of view is more that of an art critic than a novelist.

What we begin to see is that Dickens's descriptions of his characters are often modelled on either memories of actual portraits, or on descriptions of portraits, by critics such as Hazlitt. Haredale describes Gashford like this:

'This man,' said Mr Haredale, eyeing him from top to toe, 'who in his boyhood was a thief, and has been from that time to this, a servile, false, and truckling knave: this man, who has crawled and crept through life, wounding the hands he licked, and biting those he fawned upon: this sycophant, who never knew what honour, truth, or courage meant; who robbed his benefactor's daughter of her virtue, and married her to break her heart, and did it, with stripes and cruelty: this creature, who has whined at kitchen windows for the broken food, and begged for halfpence at our chapel doors: this apostle of the faith, whose tender conscience cannot bear the altars where his vicious life was publicly denounced – Do you know this man, my Lord?' (LXIII, 362)

This is similar to Hazlitt's portrait of Wilberforce, who is paired with Eldon in *The Spirit of the Age*:

Mr Wilberforce's style of speaking is not quite *parliamentary*; it is halfway between that and *evangelical*. He is altogether a *double-entendre*: the very tone of his voice is a *double-entendre*. It winds, and undulates, and glides up and down on texts of Scriptures and scraps from Paley, and trite sophistry, and pathetic appeals to his hearers in a faltering, improgressive, side-long way, like those birds of weak wing, that are borne from their strait-forward course,

'By every little breath that under heaven is blown.'

Something of this fluctuating, time-serving principle was visible even in the great question of the Abolition of the Slave Trade. (xi, 149)

What looks like realistic description in Dickens, can on the other hand appear to be the prose of an art critic:

They went up Parliament Street, past Saint Martin's church, and away by Saint Giles's to Tottenham Court Road, at the back of which, upon the western side, was then a place called the Greens Lane. This was a retired spot, not of the choicest kind, leading into the fields. Great heaps of ashes; stagnant pools, overgrown with rank grass and duckweed; broken turnstiles; and the upright posts of palings long since carried off for firewood, which menaced all heedless walkers with their jagged and rusty nails; were the leading features of the landscape: while here and there a donkey, or a ragged horse, tethered to a stake, and cropping off a wretched meal from the coarse stunted turf, were quite in keeping with the scene, and would have suggested (if the houses had not done so sufficiently, of themselves) how very poor the people were who lived in the crazy huts adjacent, and how fool-hardy it might prove for one who carried money, or wore decent clothes, to walk that way alone, unless by daylight. (LXIV, 367)

This reads like a description of a Dutch painting in a gallery, and that phrase 'quite in keeping with the scene' sounds like Hazlitt ('keeping' is a favourite critical term

for him). Dickens is describing a group of bricoleurs, and he, too, is recycling his reading, bringing the secondhand into productive life. This theme he was to return to in *Our Mutual Friend* and *Great Expectations*.

In the next chapter – forty-five – Dickens describes the country refuge which Barnaby, his mother, and his pet raven Grip find:

Their pleasures on these excursions were simple enough. A crust of bread and scrap of meat, with water from the brook or spring, sufficed for their repast. Barnaby's enjoyments were, to walk, and run, and leap, till he was tired; then to lie down in the long grass, or by the growing corn, or in the shade of some tall tree, looking upward at the light clouds as they floated over the blue surface of the sky, and listening to the lark as she poured out her brilliant song. There were wild-flowers to pluck – the bright red poppy, the gentle harebell, the cowslip, and the rose. There were birds to watch; fish; ants; worms; hares or rabbits, as they darted across the distant pathway in the wood and so were gone: millions of living things to have an interest in, and lie in wait for, and clap hands and shout in memory of, when they had disappeared. In default of these, or when they wearied, there was the merry sunlight to hunt out, as it crept in aslant through leaves and boughs of trees, and hid far down – deep, deep, in hollow places – like a silver pool, where nodding branches seemed to bathe and sport; sweet scents of summer air breathing over fields of beans or clover; the perfume of wet leaves or moss; the life of waving trees, and shadows always changing. When these or any of them tired, or in excess of pleasing tempted him to shut his eyes, there was slumber in the midst of all these soft delights, with the gentle wind murmuring like music in his ears, and everything around melting into one delicious dream. (LXV, 372)

This is reminiscent of Hazlitt's account of spending whole indolent days on Salisbury Plain, where he stayed at an inn called Winterslow Hut:

What I like best is to lie whole mornings on a sunny bank on Salisbury Plain, without any object before me, neither knowing nor caring how time passes, and thus 'with light-winged toys of feathered Idleness' to melt down hours to moments. Perhaps some such thoughts as I have here set down float before me like motes before my half-shut eyes, or some vivid image of the past by forcible contrast rushes by me – 'Diana and her fawn, and all the glories of the antique world;' then I start away to prevent the iron from entering my soul, and let fall some tears into that stream of time which separates me farther and farther from all I once loved! At length I rouse myself from my reverie, and home to dinner, proud of killing time with thought, nay even without thinking. ('On a Sun-Dial'; xvii, 245)

Dickens says 'Their hut – for it was little more – stood on the outskirts of the town, at a short distance from the high road' (XLV, 372). I am sure he has Winterslow Hut in mind.

Salisbury Plain is a Hazlittian landscape, as we can see in this passage from 'Why Distant Objects Please,' which was collected in *Table-Talk*:

Our ears are fancy-stung! I remember once strolling along the margin of a stream, skirted with willows and plashy sedges, in one of those low sheltered valleys on Salisbury Plain, where the monks of former ages had planted chapels and built hermits' cells. There was a little parish-church near; but tall elms and quivering alders hid it from my sight, when, all of a sudden, I was startled by the sound of the full organ pealing on the ear, accompanied by rustic voices and the willing quire of village-maids and children. It rose, indeed, 'like an exhalation of rich distilled perfumes.' The dew from a thousand pastures was gathered in its softness; the silence of a thousand years spoke in it. It came upon the heart like the calm beauty of death: fancy caught the sound, and faith mounted on it to the skies. It filled the valley like a mist, and still poured out its endless chaunt, and still it swells upon the ear, and wraps me in a golden trance, drowning the noisy tumult of the world! (viii, 260)

Inflected with nostalgia, this is a Wordsworthian spot of time, whose gusto and sense of loss and illumination spoke to Dickens. It is this particular inflection which shapes *David Copperfield*.

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THE ‘LIQUID TEXTURE’ OF THE ELGIN MARBLES

Hazlitt, Reynolds, and the Miltonic Sublime

Vidyan Ravinthiran

In his book *The Day Star of Liberty*, Tom Paulin argues that Hazlitt’s neglected writings on the Elgin Marbles need to be seen as the centrepiece of his impassioned, dynamic aesthetic, that ‘the ... Marbles held a symbolic value for [Hazlitt’s] prose that’s similar to that of the Grecian urn or urns which Keats admired.’¹ I would like to complicate this valuable critical intervention, and argue that the apparently impressionistic art-criticism of Hazlitt’s writings on the Elgin Marbles does not spring merely from the kind of disconnected epiphany Paulin intimates. Rather, Hazlitt’s take on the Marbles must be understood as, in his own phrase, ‘the best answer to Sir Joshua Reynolds’s Discourses’ (xviii, 145),² mediated in turn through a conceptual vocabulary drawn from Milton. Seen in this light, Hazlitt’s seemingly subjective, free-wheeling description can be read as a calculated attempt at reintroducing and extending what David Norbrook calls ‘the distinctively republican aspect’ of the Miltonic sublime,³ an inherent radicalism that contemporary theorists, Reynolds included, had tried to domesticate into respect for established structures.

Joshua Reynolds’s *Discourses* were originally delivered as annual lectures to the students of the Royal Academy; Robert Wark describes the texts as ‘tantamount to a statement of policy for the young institution.’⁴ It is notable, however, that Reynolds aims at more than mere lessons of craft, asserting repeatedly that ‘a well regulated and sound taste ... extends itself to all habits of life, as well as to all works of

1 Tom Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt’s Radical Style* (London: Faber, 1998), 106.

2 ‘The Elgin Marbles’, *The Examiner*, June 16, 1816. 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.

3 David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics 1627–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 137.

4 Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert Wark (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), xvi.

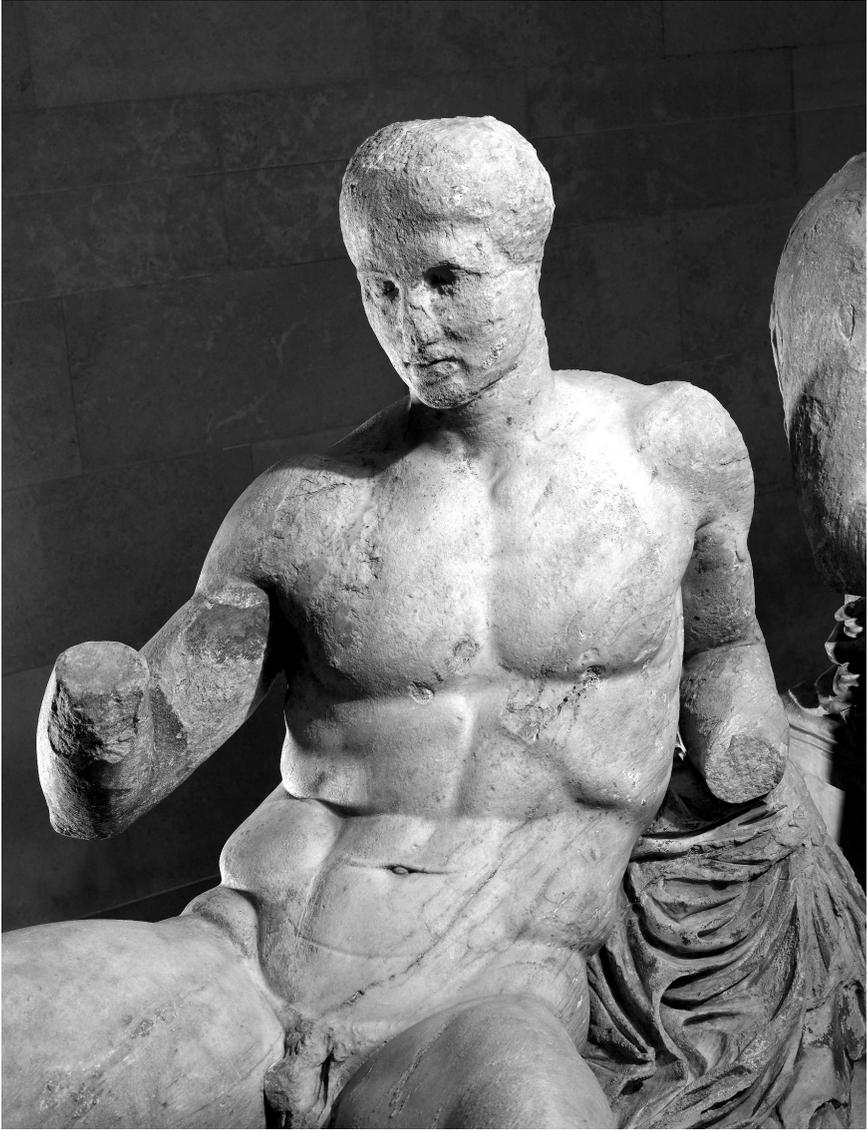


Figure from the Elgin Marbles (© The Trustees of the British Museum)

art.⁵ Such pronouncements, repeated throughout the text, position the *Discourses* within an emergent discourse which deployed a hypostasized conception of 'taste' as a kind of *brisure* linking prescriptive formalization of aesthetic experience to the production of the civic humanist citizen. As a repository of potentially infinite, irrational affect, the nascent category of the sublime played an over-determined role in this type of writing.

Thomas Weiskel points out that if the founding text of the eighteenth-century sublime was Boileau's 1674 translation of Longinus' treatise, no less important was the twelve-book version of *Paradise Lost* published in the same year.⁶ He also argues that it was in the nature of the eighteenth-century sublime to obscure its origin; when, for example, Burke uses anti-monarchical moments from Milton's republican epic as unexamined touchstones in his *Enquiry*, his overemphasis on 'obscurity' works to occlude the poem's radical confidence in the individual's ability and right to topple the existing polity. A profound ambiguity about the sublime's spectacle of power, and how it affects the individual's sense of his own power, can be traced back to the very beginning of the discourse: Longinus' *Peri Hypsous* characterizes the rhetorical sublime as that which not only 'reigns supreme' over the subject with 'irresistible might', but also 'uplifts' the soul, which 'takes a proud flight, and is filled with joy and vaunting, as though it had itself produced what it has heard.'⁷

There is, then, a radical moment in the sublime, an incitement to potentially revolutionary activity. So it is not surprising that the writings of contemporary taste theorists repeatedly display the strains involved in subordinating the sublime instance to the development of civic character. 'We shall but just observe,' Alexander Gerard writes, 'that the sublime passions, habitually prevailing in the temper, and uniformly displaying themselves in suitable expressions and effects, constitute dignity and sublimity of character.'⁸ Having used the words 'habitually', 'uniformly' and 'suitable' quietly to replace 'sublime passion' with a tasteful 'sublimity of character', Gerard goes further, actually linking the sublime with that reverence properly produced by the structural integrity of existing institutions: 'the principal source of grandeur in architecture is association, by which the columns suggest ideas of strength and durableness, and the whole structure introduces the sublime ideas of the riches and magnificence of the owner.'⁹ As the sublime starts to lose its radical edge, it blurs into conservative admiration for state 'structures', both literal and figurative. The individual spectacle of power is assimilated into Burke's conception of society as an organically-evolved artefact with a built-in resistance to change. The reciprocal relation between the sublime object and the uplifted

5 Ibid, 187–8.

6 Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 8.

7 Longinus, *Peri Hypsous*, transl. Rhys Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899), ch. 7, available online at <http://classicpersuasion.org/pw/longinus/desub002.htm> (November 17, 2008).

8 Alexander Gerard, *An Essay On Taste* (London: A. Millar, 1759), 20.

9 Ibid, 23.

spectator evaporates; Longinus' 'vaunting' confidence turns into 'sublime ideas of the riches and magnificence of the owner', and a notional utopianism petrifies into a sense of solidarity with the status quo.

This architectural metaphor, with its attendant vocabulary of strength and solidity, is important for Reynolds, who writes in Discourse VII that both artistic taste and virtue derive from 'the same desire to find something steady, substantial and durable, on which the mind can lean as it were, and rest with safety'.¹⁰ John Barrell has argued that from Discourse VII onwards, Reynolds gradually moves from an aesthetic based on the primacy of abstracting reason towards a reliance on those customary prejudices enshrined in the existing state, a reactionary turn he attributes to the painter's 'intellectual mentors', Burke and Johnson.¹¹ It could be argued that it is this uncritical faith in 'substantial and durable' custom which leads Reynolds, in Discourse X on sculpture, to valorize the inertia of stone itself, which resists change, imposing its materiality on the sculptor like a sense of cultural responsibility. Although he admits, for example, that Bernini's work 'distinguishes him from the common herd', the students are told that it is still flawed by 'an injudicious quest of novelty; [he] attempted what was not within the province of the Art, and endeavoured to overcome the hardness and obstinacy of his materials'.¹² Reynolds repeatedly deploys classical *hendiadys* – 'hardness and obstinacy', 'grave and austere', 'dignity and gravity', 'sobriety and gravity' – to refer his audience's attention to the supposedly inherent qualities of the 'materials' sculptors work with – 'the weight and solidity of stone was not to be overcome'.¹³ These polished doublets strike the ear like immovable convictions and stylistically embody the ideal sculpture in which 'every thing is carefully weighed and measured, one side making almost an exact equipoise to the other'.¹⁴ Paulin's analysis of Hazlitt's aesthetics thus fails to recognize Reynolds's influence on Hazlitt's epiphanic account of the language-character of sculpture; Reynolds's prose visibly tries for a stony materiality of its own, once emergent socio-cultural imperatives start to generate his syntactical texture.¹⁵

Approaching Reynolds as a verbally dextrous stylist is necessary if we are to catch him at his sleight-of-hand. I would argue that his lexis of 'dignity' and 'gravity' and his submission before sculpture's totalizing grandeur makes clear the ways in which his 'ideal' or 'grand style' leeches off the category of the sublime, a hidden dependence which Hazlitt deconstructs in his *London Magazine* essays 'On the Elgin Marbles' (1822). Noting that Reynolds's theory never mentions 'power or magnitude in an object as a distinct source of the sublime', Hazlitt foregrounds the substitution of 'grandeur' for 'sublimity': 'Sir Joshua ... makes grandeur or

10 Reynolds, *Discourses*, 134

11 John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: The Body of the Public* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 41.

12 Reynolds, *Discourses*, 183.

13 *Ibid.*, 184.

14 *Ibid.*, 176.

15 Reynolds defines 'imitation' as the sculptor's 'language' authentic beyond the 'arbitrary and conventional' signs of 'poetry and elocution' (*ibid.*, 177).

sublimity consist in the middle form, or abstraction of all peculiarities; which is evidently false, for grandeur and sublimity arise from extraordinary strength, magnitude, &c. or in a word, from an excess of power, so as to startle and overawe the mind' (xviii, 164–5). By nullifying this destabilizing 'excess of power', the *Discourses* project 'grandeur' as a kind of castrated sublimity, whose take-off stalls in a self-regarding idealism.

If we accept that Hazlitt is on a mission here to revivify the attenuated republican sublime, we should see his extraordinary advocacy of the Elgin Marbles as a deliberate counter-example to Reynolds on the Torso Belvedere: 'A mind elevated to the contemplation of excellence perceives in this defaced and shattered fragment, *disjecti membra poeta*, the traces of superlative genius, the reliques of a work on which succeeding ages can only gaze with inadequate admiration.'¹⁶ It is in a 'defaced and shattered fragment' that Reynolds's conservative sublime – 'gaz[ing] with inadequate admiration' – reveals itself. He cites Horace to affirm the dismembered torso as a 'trace' remnant of dominating, classical power which the rightly 'elevated mind' should 'perceive' with awe – a kind of unironized Ozymandias. In doing so, he is, in effect, repeating Gerard's manoeuvre as he reduces the unnamed sublime to mere 'inadequate admiration', as any felt 'excess of power' gets excluded from the unstartled contemplative pleasures of the gentleman of 'elevated' taste.

Stephen Larrabee has noted Hazlitt's tardiness in coming to an appreciation of classical sculpture;¹⁷ perhaps his imagination simply seized on the Elgin Marbles as a potentially radical inscape he could oppose to Reynolds's example.¹⁸ It is surprising that the element of dialogue has gone unnoticed by critics, since Hazlitt is clearly responding to Reynolds's dismembered 'reliques' when he claims for the Marbles, in a note in the *Morning Chronicle* (1824),¹⁹ 'a flexibility and sway of the limbs and of the whole body', insisting that the 'flesh has the softness and texture of flesh, not the smoothness or stiffness of stone' (x, 168). These limbs, Hazlitt stresses, are still alive; the ambiguous, floating syntax aligns them with the spectator's own body as Reynolds's purely mental 'contemplation' takes on the and sinew. Obviously a fragmentary sculpture does not sway, nor, to the touch, does it keep the 'softness and texture of flesh' instead of the 'smoothness or stiffness of stone': Hazlitt is 'thinking metaphorically'.

This last slightly slippery phrase belongs to Frederic Will, who uses such terminology to differentiate Hazlitt from supposedly more legitimate art critics. Although he identifies Hazlitt's 'considerable speculation along vitalist, or organic lines' as approximating to a monist standpoint, he insists that 'this monism is

16 Ibid, 177–8.

17 Stephen A. Larrabee, 'Hazlitt's Criticism and Greek Sculpture', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2.1 (January 1941): 77–94, 79.

18 Indeed, in 'The Elgin Marbles', Hazlitt follows up his declaration that the Marbles are 'the best answer to Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses*' by saying that 'considered in that point of view, [the Marbles] are invaluable; in any other, they are not worth so much as has been said' (xviii, 100).

19 Republished in *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy* (1826; x, 168–9).

only metaphorically intended. Hazlitt's philosophy is just a rampant empiricism, which extends a sense of life into all objects of knowledge. The pervasive dualism of neoclassical critics is alien to Hazlitt, as is a really consistent monism.²⁰ That dismissive 'just' reduces Hazlitt's writings on the Marbles to mere effulgence, ignoring the possibility of genuinely meaningful 'metaphorical' thought. But closer analysis of Hazlitt's prose may reveal this extension of 'a sense of life into all objects of knowledge' as a more complicated and exacting procedure than Wills admits. We need to pay attention, for example, to the way in which Hazlitt's description of the Marbles' 'flexibility and sway of the limbs' replaces Reynolds's inert *hendiadys* with a Shakespearean asymmetry which stresses the second, monosyllabic term. 'Sway' is, notably, Shakespeare's word for monarchical force; in 'What is the People?' Hazlitt laments the 'mild paternal sway of absolute power' (vii, 265). Remembering Menenius's conservative analogy of the state with the body in *Coriolanus*, a play Hazlitt called 'a store-house of political commonplaces' (iv, 214), we realize that by fusing the 'sway' of 'power' with the word's kinetic meaning, and then reclaiming it democratically for 'the whole body' of the statue, his erasure of the distinction between the perceiving subject and the art object goes hand in hand with a democratic, republican insistence on seeing power 'communicated' throughout the whole frame. To break open the concept of 'taste' and restore to the aesthetic experience its visceral appeal to the whole feeling body, not just the mind, is also to push for a more radical distribution of power through the polity. The blurred distinction between the perceiving subject and the art object reaffirms the reciprocal uplift of the sublime, before the participatory, fluid syntax of the next sentence pushes through the special effect: 'There is an undulation and a liquid flow on the surface, as the breath of genius moved the mighty mass' (x, 168).

The trick here is the sly shift from the present to the past tense – 'there is an undulation', 'as the breath of genius *moved* the mighty mass'. (One thinks of Helen Vendler's acute analysis of how exactly Seamus Heaney brings 'The Grauballe Man' back to life through subtle syntactical effects.²¹) This is a way of maintaining and amplifying Reynolds's admiration of originary genius while insisting that because the sculpture keeps a 'liquid flow', it remains in *process*. It is not monumental, an inert artefact of power, but maintains instead a continual and unending negotiation with the spectator as his gaze interacts with its responsive surface; Hazlitt's 'flow' and movement is coterminous with Longinus' emphasis on sublime 'transport'. If Reynolds operates within a Burkean discourse which acquiesces, with 'inadequate admiration', before 'the weight and solidity' of customary prejudice, Hazlitt insists contrarily, with a sublime gesture, on his right to read the sculptures a particular way, because institutions are fluid and available for rewriting through the sheer force of style. His repeated assertions – 'there is a flexibility', 'there is an undulation' – show him trying forcibly to communicate a particular reading of the Elgin

20 Frederic Will, 'Two Critics of the Elgin Marbles: William Hazlitt and Quatremère de Quincy', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 14.4 (June 1956): 462–74, 466.

21 See Helen Vendler, *The Breaking of Style* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 52–9.

Marbles which ultimately develops out of the complex Miltonic intertexture of his prose.

In his lecture 'On Shakespeare and Milton' (1818), Hazlitt not only writes that Milton's 'grandeur of the naked figure...convey[s] to us the idea of sculpture' (v, 60), but also describes his aesthetic in terms of meltdown and flow: 'the fervour of his imagination melts down and renders malleable, as in a furnace, the most contradictory materials' (v, 58). It is this curious interaction between the sculptural and the liquid that Hazlitt seizes from Milton's aesthetic to counterpoise imaginatively the Marbles' 'softness and texture' and 'liquid flow' against its 'stiffness of stone,' a metaphor which gives a fertile contradiction body and substance within the reader's mind. The words 'liquid' and 'texture' may have floated free of Milton's description of the angels' invulnerable physical constitution in Book VI of *Paradise Lost*: 'vital in every part,' they cannot

... in their *liquid texture* mortal wound
 Receive, no more than can the fluid air:
 All heart they live, all head, all eye, all ear,
 All intellect, all sense, and as they please,
 They limb themselves, and colour, shape or size
 Assume, as like them best, ...

(ll 347–53; my italics)

What Will describes as Hazlitt's 'rampant' pseudo-monism therefore derives, ultimately, from the complex fluid mechanics of Milton's universe. The political significance of this discourse must be emphasized; Norbrook argues, in *Writing the English Republic*, that 'Milton's monism, his rejection of a sharp split between spirit and matter, worked also against a comparable split between theology and politics.'²² As Milton describes Satan healing from his wounds, his conjuration of 'spirits' of an ideal sensitivity – 'all eye, all ear' – articulates not only his anguish at his own blindness but also his conviction that although the Protectorate has failed, and revolutionary hopes have been quashed like those of the rebel angels 'till that hour/ Not liable to fear, nor flight, nor pain' (Book VI, ll 396–7), there is still a chance. Hazlitt is drawing on this enthusiasm as he affirms the 'liquid texture' of the Elgin Marbles, mere fragments which yet seem to 'limb themselves' through the transformative power of his prose. As he rewrites the sculptures, the very act of rewriting, of transforming stone into malleable, flowing matter, demonstrates a republican commitment as, like Milton's 'spirits,' the object before him 'assumes, as likes [him] best,' the 'shape' he desires.

This Miltonic turn to the free and flowing may have been spurred directly by a passage from Reynolds's Discourse X which mocks the trendy special effects deployed by 'modern' sculptors: 'The folly of attempting to make stone sport or flutter in the air, is so apparent, that it carries with it its own reprehension.'²³ Barrell

22 Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 437.

23 Reynolds, *Discourses*, 182–3.

identifies a vacillation in the tenth discourse between Reynolds's developing allegiance to customary prejudice and 'his original civic principles',²⁴ and perhaps this explains the hypothetical sculptor's over-determined encounter with his inflexible materials; his submission to stone's 'reprehension' is an acceptance of sedimented custom, a Burkean faith in the evolved inevitability of existing structures. Reynolds looks to forestall a moment of uncertainty, bowing out of rational debate as he depicts the sculptor's individual agency surrendering before the ideal materiality of stone.

But as that oxymoron suggests, this is a kind of rhetorical trick, which Hazlitt, again, deconstructs in his writing on the Marbles. In 'On the Elgin Marbles', after his usual criticism of Reynolds's ideal 'middle form', which he denominates 'the glittering phantom that hovered round the head of the genuine artist', he cites Book V of *Paradise Lost*: 'So from the ground/Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves/More airy, last the bright consummate flower!' (ll 479–81; xviii, 151). Hazlitt quotes from Raphael's tangent on the cosmic order to accuse Reynolds of hypocrisy, since despite his supposed commitment to the inexorable 'weight and solidity' of stone, Discourse X is actually constructed on an 'airy' abstraction. Accordingly, the 'phantom' turns Reynolds's own prose against him, specifically his description of 'Grace' in sculpture as 'a phantom which has no existence but in the imagination of affected and refined speculators'.²⁵ Hazlitt's implication is that the 'middle form' is a similarly phantasmal refinement. Despite Reynolds's ostentatious adherence to the organic laws of matter – which equate to conservative *doxa* – his argument actually works through a forsaking of the sensory and material in favour of their idealized simulacrum, the commonsensical turn to 'brute fact' functioning, as Adorno has argued, as an in fact anti-materialist cancelling of thought.²⁶ Although Reynolds claims it is 'folly to make stone sport or flutter in the air', this is essentially what he is doing as he uses stone, with its implications of solidity and 'reprehension', as a beaten-thin intellectual counter within a speculative discourse which usurps, in Hazlitt's mind, the ever-renewed primacy of nature's 'green stalk' and leaves.

To make this point, Hazlitt refers, again, to one of the many moments in *Paradise Lost* where what is solid mysteriously melts down or sublimes. Samuel Johnson's conservative imagination – 'all change is of itself an evil'²⁷ – was notably repulsed by these apparent glitches in Milton's aesthetic: 'He should have secured the consistency of his system by keeping immateriality out of sight, and enticing his reader to drop it from his thoughts'.²⁸ Johnson is right in that these passages are often obtrusive; as Milton repeats his magic trick with ostentatious gusto, solids repeatedly sublime, and *vice versa*, as when Satan 'Down right into the world's

24 Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting*, 154.

25 Reynolds, *Discourses*, 179.

26 As cited by Simon Jarvis in *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 88.

27 Cited by Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting*, 153.

28 'Milton' in *The Oxford Authors: Samuel Johnson*, ed. Donald Greene (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 711.

first region throws/His flight precipitant, and winds with ease/Through the pure marble air his oblique way' (Book III, ll 562–4). Hazlitt writes of 'this exquisitely modulated passage' that 'the verse...floats up and down as if it had itself wings' ('On Milton's Versification' and 'On Shakspeare and Milton'; iv, 40 and v, 62–3), an observation kin to Longinus' insistence on a sublime reciprocity of affect imaged as a 'proud flight ... filled with joy and vaunting'. It is clear that Milton's precipitation of marble out of thin air touched his imagination deeply; the trope of 'marble air' reappears in his essay 'On a Sun-Dial' (1827), where he comments of the sundial that 'its stationary character ... forms a contrast to the most fleeting of all essences. It stands *sub dio* – under the marble air, and there is some connexion between the image of infinity and eternity' (xvii, 239). Hazlitt is, therefore, drawn to the paradox of marble air precisely because its fusion of the 'stationary' and the 'fleeting' is for him the very image of sublimity.

Norbrook has argued that *Paradise Lost* 'reflects its republican milieu less in specific allusions than in overall intellectual and generic structures',²⁹ my point is that Hazlitt picks up on a particular republican trope from that text which comes to the fore in his writings on the Marbles as he seeks a radical vocabulary to set against Reynolds's valorization of fixed stone. This valorization is a theoretical gesture Hazlitt aligns, in his *Table Talk* essays 'On Certain Inconsistencies in Sir Joshua Reynolds's Discourses', with a conservative mindset: 'Sir Joshua appears to have imbibed from others (Burke or Johnson)...a spurious metaphysical notion that art was to be preferred to nature ... from which he only emancipates himself for a moment to relapse into the same error again shortly after' (viii, 130). Hazlitt thus identifies the same shift in Reynolds's writings as Barrell – he calls it a 'radical defect' (viii, 122) – and in doing so locates the *Discourses* within a tradition of conservative commentary. He seizes upon Milton's terminology of sculptural flow to confront this reactionary discourse with what Norbrook calls Milton's 'sublime *concordia discors*, straining the boundaries of representation', which opposes 'predictable courtly symmetry': 'This cosmology is republican in the sense that it plays down any sense of monarchy as a natural order and strongly emphasizes the element of artifice in any polity'.³⁰ I would argue that Milton foregrounds the material–celestial transitions Johnson deplored precisely in order to emphasize this 'element of artifice'. When he describes, in Book VII, how '... God made/The firmament, expanse of liquid, pure,/Transparent, elemental air' (ll 263–5), he lends the constructed 'firmament' a sense of 'liquid', airy flux to historicize state creation as an essentially fluid, dynamic process. Throughout the text, air itself seems to yearn towards solidity and form, a kind of imaginative aether out of which a free commonwealth could yet develop, what *Areopagitica* describes as 'that ethereal and fifth essence, the breath of reason itself'.³¹

29 Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 437.

30 *Ibid.*, 473.

31 *John Milton: The Major Works*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 240.

Hazlitt clearly read Johnson's essay closely, since the description of Milton as a forge-worker in the lecture 'On Shakspeare and Milton,' melting down and making malleable 'the most contradictory materials' is a rewrite of Johnson's assertion that Milton's 'materials were supplied by incessant study and unlimited curiosity. The heat of Milton's mind might be said to sublimate his learning, to throw off into his work the spirit of science, unmingled with its grosser parts.'³² 'Materials,' 'sublimate,' 'grosser parts': Hazlitt is responding to the implications of this passage as he zooms in on Milton's free-flowing sculptural quality; he may even be drawing on the dormant wordplay of 'sublime' and 'sublimate' which Johnson's own text isn't aware of. In the 1824 note on the Marbles, as he musters a response to 'the hardness and obstinacy' of Reynolds's 'materials,' he makes a typically quickfire, associative connection, recalling Johnson's co-opting of *Paradise Lost's* 'materials' and infusing the Elgin Marbles with Milton's sublime flux: 'It seems here as if stone could move: where one muscle is strained, another is relaxed, where one part is raised, another sinks in, just as in the ocean ... there is no alliteration or antithesis in the style of the Elgin Marbles, no setness, squareness, affectation, or formality of appearance' (x, 169).

This is a sharp riposte to Reynolds's neo-classical insistence on 'one side making almost an exact equipoise to the other,' and it shows, again, how the germ of Hazlitt's breakthrough analogy with 'harmonious, flowing, varied prose' (x, 169) was present in Reynolds's lecture. The repeated epiphany – 'it seems here as if stone could move,' 'as if the very marble were a flexible substance' – is essentially Miltonic, and derives from Hazlitt's image of the poet, in his *Round Table* essay 'On Milton's Versification,' as an artisan of 'palpableness and solidity' (iv, 38), shaping his materials as we watch: 'The sound of his lines is moulded into the expression of the sentiment, almost of the very image' (iv, 39). This insistent, moulded visuality returns in Hazlitt's depiction of the Ilissus who can be seen 'floating in his proper element, and is, in appearance, as firm as a rock, as pliable as a wave of the sea. The artist's breath might be said to mould and play upon the undulating surface' ('On the Elgin Marbles'; xviii, 163). Such 'moulding' activates a muted pun, since elsewhere Hazlitt describes the Marbles as being 'more impressive from their *mouldering*, imperfect state' and goes on, as Larrabee observes, to connect these inscapes of classical possibility with 'the light that arises from the tomb of virtue, genius, liberty!' ('The Marquis of Stafford's Gallery,' *Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England*; x, 28).³³ Hazlitt thus sees the Elgin Marbles existing simultaneously as pliable or fluid and as a sublime fragment of 'an earlier, nobler, simpler Greece' which could yet be moulded into a new republican structure. In comparison, the Apollo Belvedere is merely 'a modern fine gentleman ... an ornament' (x, 28). Such privileging of classical authenticity over later ornament is a common republican manoeuvre; in *Areopagitica*, for example, Milton explicitly aligns himself with 'the old and elegant humanity of Greece'.³⁴

32 *The Oxford Authors: Samuel Johnson*, 707.

33 Cited by Larrabee, 'Hazlitt's Criticism and Greek Sculpture,' 84.

34 *Milton: The Major Works*, 238.

This republican emphasis on stripped-down, originary verities fuses with the core Romantic hypostasis of 'nature' to brace Hazlitt's dialogue with Reynolds over the potentialities of the sublime. The sculptor of the Marbles is set against 'that stage of progress described at much length in Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses*, in which having served out his apprenticeship to nature, he can set up for himself in opposition to her' ('On Certain Inconsistencies in Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses*'; viii, 145). Hazlitt is not only criticizing Reynolds for straying from nature's truth into a realm of abstraction; he is also, I think, objecting to that emphasis on *domination* which conditions the *Discourses*, whether it is the artist forcing nature into his ideal template or, as we have seen, the sculptor acquiescing before the inexorable 'reprehension' of stone. In both scenarios, Reynolds's artist takes an essentially adversarial position, setting 'up for himself in opposition'. Hazlitt's monism, 'metaphorically' cognized or not, can be read as an attempt at reimagining a less conflictual and dominating relationship between the spectator and the art-object, as the texture of his prose description fuses with the apparently moving surface of the Marbles to draw out their own form of historical knowledge.

Hazlitt may be trying to work through these speculations as he repeats Reynolds's contrast between the painter and the sculptor indentured to his materials in his distinction of the poet and the prose writer in the essay 'On the Prose Style of Poets,' where the poet set to writing prose is compared to 'a painter's attempting to carve a block of marble for the first time – the coldness chills him, the colourless uniformity distracts him, the precision of form demanded disheartens him' (*The Plain Speaker*; xii, 8). For Reynolds, sculpture is over-determined: on the one hand, it is a supplementary genre which he deals with only briefly, but the 'hardness and obstinacy of [its] materials,' as he perceives them, also conceptually incarnate his faith in a unitary grand style. This is an attitude Hazlitt characteristically pathologizes, since to his avidly republican imagination, such crude logocentrism is inextricably linked with the 'spirit of Monarchy' his eponymous essay (1823) describes as 'nothing but the craving in the human mind after the Sensible and the One' (xix, 255). At pains to show that this conservative, monarchical sublime – what he calls the 'mock-sublimity of thrones' (xix, 256) – is far from disinterested, he describes it as a 'craving,' the disempowered spectator's 'false appetite' for a 'reflex image of his self-love ... realized, embodied out of himself in the first object he can lay his hands on for the purpose' (xix, 255). For Hazlitt, this is a sickly misunderstanding of power relations. I am thinking, again, of his famous essay on *Coriolanus*, where he writes that poetry naturally falls in with 'the language of power' (iv, 214). Within the prose-writer/poet model he extracts from Reynolds's sculpture/art dichotomy, he cannot deconstruct the inherited language of domination, only provocatively reverse the relation: 'the prose-writer is master of his materials: the poet is the slave of his style' (xii, 9).

I want to conclude, however, by suggesting that Hazlitt's sublime interaction with the Elgin Marbles does represent a movement beyond domination. If the poet he describes facing up to the hard graft of prose-writing is related to Reynolds's sculptor overpowered by the 'reprehension' of stone, inadequate before its 'coldness,' 'uniformity,' and 'precision of form,' then the task of his utopian description of the

Marbles is to erase those first two attributes, a move which involves redefining the very nature of stone, so it no longer carries within itself a 'reprehension' to radical manipulation. Instead, it comes to embody, and redeem, what in 'On the Spirit of Monarchy' he calls 'natural infirmity' (xix, 255), an irrational human content which can yet be moulded – and will, he suggests, inevitably mould itself – into non-dominating republican structures. To return to his writing on the Marbles, stone does not have to be *made* to 'sport or flutter in the air', because this is, Hazlitt implies in the 1824 note, what it naturally does by '*the logic of form*. One part being given, another cannot be otherwise than it is. There is a mutual understanding and reaction throughout the whole frame' (x, 168). Because the Marbles are an anonymous production, Hazlitt is able to claim them as the unmediated precipitations of nature – 'art and nature are here the same thing' ('On the Elgin Marbles'; xviii, 146). This inevitably evolved 'logic of form' provides a republican riposte to Burke's belief in an organically ordered society: as Hazlitt emphasizes the sculptures' 'mutual understanding and reaction', he rewrites them as a version of the body politic, a vision of a liberal republic whose 'mighty *mass*', moved by 'the breath of genius' (x, 168), maintains a free-thinking, kinetic energy absent from the 'inexplicable dumb *mass* without distinction or meaning' he describes elsewhere as the end result of 'Sir Joshua's theory' ('On Certain Inconsistencies in Sir Joshua Reynolds's Discourses'; viii, 134, my italics highlight the hidden crowd image). This resembles Milton on 'the grip of custom' in *Areopagitica*, where he associates 'rigid external formality' with 'a gross conforming stupidity, a stark and dead congealment of wood and hay and stubble, forced and frozen together.'³⁵

Those elements of Hazlitt's discourse which Frederic Will dismisses as 'metaphorical' therefore need to be seen, to paraphrase Norbrook, as part of a sublime intervention which 'strains the boundaries of representation' towards such a vocabulary of aesthetic response as avoids turning its object into the 'forced and frozen' idol Milton describes. Refusing the 'stark and dead congealment' of customary prejudice which Reynolds affirms as a natural 'reprehension', Hazlitt instead envisions 'the historical [a]s nature in action' (xviii, 150). The 'sway' and 'liquid flow' of the Marbles thus reproduces 'the double superiority' of history over Reynolds's portraiture, since portrait 'treats of objects as they are; history of the events and changes to which they are liable' (xviii, 161). The malleable, responsive 'texture' of the Marbles recognizes the shaping pressures of history while affirming 'the moving principle' (viii, 128) of individual agency – 'the breath of genius' – in a truly sublime reciprocity. Its complex image projects into the future in two ways – as flowing movement, and as a spectacularly incomplete fragment. Flow insists on experienced duration; fragmentation on a larger temporal purview. An accommodation to historical reality, a dialectical openness to change, is thus balanced against an abiding utopianism which associates the classical remnant with the building blocks of a future republic.

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35 Ibid, 270.

HAZLITT'S RHETORICAL STYLE

Ian Patel

In his maturity William Hazlitt was never one kind of writer. Treating culture and society in the manner he desired called for a style that could adapt itself across a broad argumentative landscape, could acclimatize itself to the various discourses already established for social, political, and cultural discussion. Hazlitt's particular kind of cultural criticism consisted in a style and method of argumentation that formed a critique in itself. He was often a confessional writer, one whose intellectual honesty dictated both the form and content of his essays. Criticism, in his hands, is as much a rhetorical attempt to persuade as an exercise in deductive reasoning. Hazlitt's criticism, in other words, is carried out by means of an *appeal* to reason, one which threads rhetoric into discursive analysis. Given that little *can* be said without question to be true of culture and society, what *cannot* needs to be argued for as such. Such a critique was among other things Hazlitt's attempt to render communicable what he saw as 'certain broader aspects of society and views of things common to every subject, and more or less cognizable to every mind' ('On the Conversation of Authors', *The Plain Speaker*; xii, 26).¹ Like some critics today, he wished to be neither judge nor theorist – neither Dr Johnson nor Coleridge, as he might have had it – but a persuader. For Hazlitt such a critical procedure was prerequisite to intellectual candour, to what he once referred to as 'common sense and common honesty' ('On Jealousy and Spleen of Party', *The Plain Speaker*; xii, 372).

To refer to Hazlitt's 'rhetorical criticism' is to an extent tautological in the sense that what we now call criticism is part of an older rhetorical tradition.² But it is possible to treat rhetoric more as a critical practice than an inclusive theory for literary interpretation. In contemporary critical terms, Hazlitt's writings align him,

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

2 The transition from rhetoric to criticism is generally recognized to have begun in earnest in the eighteenth century. The one publication said definitively to signal this transition is Lord Kames's *Elements of Criticism* (1762). This work formulated what had been implicit in the satires of the Scriblerus club – namely, that standards of literary judgement and 'taste' should be recognized over a practical occupation with the contrivance of persuasive speech. The theoretical construction of aesthetic categories worked in tandem with the rhetoric-to-criticism transition, literary training becoming as much an education in so-called Sensibility as a formal, manual-based matter of learning particular rules.

perhaps unexpectedly, with those critics – Habermas, Arendt, Eagleton – who are sensitive to the ways in which language allows ideology to function in common life in troubling ways. These critics nevertheless stress, in a move that is sympathetic to Hazlitt's thinking, that language is the one resource by which a society might debate its way towards a better version of this common life.

A facility in registers and a discursive self-awareness are, ultimately, what makes Hazlitt a rhetorical critic. His peculiar sense of irony is bound to a rhetorical awareness of the contingencies of whatever register he is writing in. That is to say, it was towards the ends of persuasiveness and intellectual honesty that Hazlitt transitioned (in rhetoric this is known as *metastasis*) from analytic discourse to colloquial nudges-winks to unthinking vituperative to anecdotal reminiscence, and did so in a series of disquisitions, asides, apostrophes, and conversational eddies. Hazlitt's transitions do not contradict his always authoritative statements. Rather, they provide a counterpoint to such statements after the fashion of a Socratic dialogue.

In Hazlitt's essay 'On the Conversation of Authors' (1820), this rhetorical awareness is an awareness of speech and writing as vying modes of communication, modes which dictate the mechanics and overall integrity of discursive argument. In this essay, Hazlitt preoccupies himself with certain differences he sees between writing and speech, 'conversation' coming to the fore as a metaphor for the way discursive argument should proceed. He begins by opposing not writing with speech but 'argument' with 'discussion'. The former he associates with the formality of claustral book-learning, with 'a certain scholastic precocity' to be found in authorship, a precocity liable to be 'absurd, dogmatical, and violent' when engaged in debate (xii, 32, 33). 'He [an author] would be thought to understand the subject better than others, or indeed would show that nobody else knows anything about it' (xii, 32). The spirit of argument, Hazlitt maintains, is often 'a spirit of hostility', in which 'you contradict one another, will not allow a grain of sense in what your adversary advances, are blind to whatever makes against yourself, dare not look the question fairly in the face, so that you cannot avail yourself even of your real advantages, insist most on what you feel to be the weakest points of your argument' (xii, 33). The application of words like 'laboured', 'affectation', 'formality' to a certain kind of written argument aims to convey what he sees as the strained, myopic feel of an argument that closes itself off to counterclaims (xii.33). He seems to have been acutely aware of the dangers of a discourse being seduced by the linear drive of its train of thought, and over-relying solipsistically on its own idiom. Accordingly, in this essay, he contrasts what he sees as certain authors' self-regarding and sheltered manner of argument with the cut-and-thrust of vocal discussion. To succeed in discussion authors must submit themselves to the terms of common understanding: 'By mixing with society, they rub off their hardness of manner, and impracticable, offensive singularity, while they retain a greater depth and coherence of understanding' (xii, 32). Discursive argument, in this process, is made more communicative, conversable to a wider audience – more an interdependent affair of mutual understanding than one of authority, pedantry, and authorial status. 'Discussion' is an enterprise conducted not 'for victory' but

for consensus: 'discussion is a pleasant and profitable thing, where you advance and defend your opinions as far as you can, and admit the truth of what is objected against them with equal impartiality: in short, where you do not pretend to set up as an oracle, but freely declare what you really know about any question' (xii, 33).

In this light Hazlitt defended spoken discussion as being often richer than its solo, written counterpart, the former's conclusions being inevitably more robust and cogent in their integration of counter-arguments and opposing worldviews:

This was a remark of Rousseau's, and it is a very true one. In the confidence and unreserve of private intercourse, they are more at liberty to say what they think to put the subject in different and opposite points of view ... to bring in the limitation, to obviate misconception, to state difficulties on their own side of the argument, and answer them as well as they can. (xii, 32-3)

Rousseau thought speech was a better mode of communication than writing since in conversation you could ask your interlocutor to clarify ambiguous terms or expand on points of misunderstanding.³

Hazlitt, however, isn't actually saying that we should avoid the written in favour of the spoken argument. The painter James Northcote is singled out in the essay for his conversational facility, but Hazlitt's final praise is reserved for a dialogical form of written argument that orchestrates the play of spoken discussion: 'A *lens* is necessary to connect the diverging rays, the refracted and broken angular lights of conversation on paper' (xii, 40). Taking speech's example in writing involves manipulating arguments Punch-and-Judy-style, letting them bang away at one another until the strongest claim can be fairly said to have won the endorsement of your argument's final analysis. Hazlitt gives the term 'connected discourse' to this kind of conversation-indebted written argument (xii, 40). The 'lively sallies' of good conversation are motivated by the 'immediate irritation' that follows the rub of another person's views (xii, 40). Written 'connected discourse' may be said to put into play such clashes of candid spoken debate, but as a whole rhetorically conducting the argument towards a single endpoint. Hazlitt describes this process, in this case going awry, with reference to Northcote: 'One of his [Northcote's] *tête-à-têtes* would at any time make an Essay; but he cannot write himself, because he loses himself, in the connecting passages, is fearful of the effect, and wants the habit of bringing his ideas into one focus or point of view' (xii, 40).

Two months before he published 'On the Conversation of Authors' in 1820, Hazlitt had published another anonymous essay for the *London Magazine* entitled 'On the Difference between Writing and Speaking'. In this essay Hazlitt defends writing as the single mode that succeeds in calling a particular argument to full account. Writing calls for 'a certain reach of capacity' that speaking does not (xii, 263). Hazlitt nevertheless acknowledges, with a kind of wary fascination, speech's ability to engineer an 'infallible communication between the hearer and the speaker' (xii, 266). If, in this earlier essay, Hazlitt concerns himself more with the

3 See, for instance, his posthumously published *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (1781), *passim*.

potential abuses of speech than in his later one, he commits himself in both essays to writing that trades on the verve and communicativeness of the spoken word. In 'On the Difference between Writing and Speaking,' Burke's prose is presented as the marriage of the best in writing and speaking. Hazlitt's Burke is essentially an author, but one whose peculiar ability took him beyond both the potential abstraction of written argument and the potential meretriciousness of spoken argument:

A regularly bred speaker would have made up his mind beforehand; but Burke's mind being, as originally constituted and by its first bias, that of an author, never became set. It was in further search and progress ... It was not tied down to the printer's form. It could still project itself into new beauties, and explore strange regions from the unwearied impulse of its own delight and curiosity. (xii, 275-6)

Rhetoric in its traditional form was understood to be artistic in the way it touched up a piece of writing with an *exordium* or *reditus ad propositum* like a painter with a fine-point brush. Hazlitt's method of dialogical writing, however, anticipates the turn in rhetorical theory towards rhetoric as a philosophy of argumentation. Rather than attempting Sisyphus-like to roll language back to a supposedly ideologically-clean default setting, we could accept that language is rhetorically positioned the moment it's put into articulation. The Cambridge-based scholar, I.A. Richards, for one, thought this was the case. Metaphor, he wrote, 'is fundamentally a borrowing between and intercourse of *thoughts*, a transaction between contexts. Thought is metaphoric, and proceeds by comparison ... the method is to take more note of the skill in thought which we possess and are intermittently aware of already.'⁴ In this work, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936), Richards puts the case for rhetoric as a way of arguing that proceeds comparatively from different contextual positions. The rhetor appeals to one discursive way of reasoning, then another, wearing a groove in the same argumentative track, and in doing so brings into his consideration a different way of putting his case in the tongue of a complementary intellectual tradition. In this way he remains faithful among other things to the way a metaphoric language dictates a certain comparative manner of reasoning. Asking how language works, Richards believed, was asking 'how thought and feeling and all the other modes of the mind's activity proceed.'⁵

A dialogical airing of counter-arguments is something Hazlitt himself allows for in 'On the Conversation of Authors.' He begins his essay by censuring the complacency and dry-as-dust vapidness of book-learning in comparison to the vigour of ordinary life, the notion that 'because we are *scholars*, there shall be no more cakes and ale!' (xii, 27). He then counter-argues that only erudite conversation can satisfy him in the course of his daily life: 'this sort of neighbourly gossip will not

4 I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), 94.

5 *Ibid.*, 95.

go down after the high-raised tone of literary conversation' (xii, 30). Hazlitt makes general statements about the conversation of authors – 'An author has studied a particular point ... he is not contented to take it up casually in common with others' (xii, 32) – before undermining these statements in his misgivings about Coleridge's conversation: '[Coleridge] is the only person who can talk to all sorts of people, on all sorts of subjects, without caring a farthing for their understanding one word he says' (xii, 35). This is not simply the infuriating rhetorical brio for which Hazlitt has traditionally been taken to task. Such argumentation might be defended as a kind of rehearsal, a way of keeping your mind limber. Hazlitt's final aphoristic word on conversation supports the dialogical argument that leads up to it: 'The art of conversation is the art of hearing as well as being heard' (xii, 39). The basis of argumentation is openness to the fact 'that there are other opinions and other pretensions to be adjusted' (xii, 32). Such openness is conducive not only to argumentative cogency, but to consensus: 'where you cannot differ openly and unreservedly, you cannot heartily agree' (xii, 31).

What is remarkable about writers like Hazlitt is the way their style acknowledges the partisan, tendentious nature of their writing to the reader. His critical strategy at some level involves what is known in classical rhetoric as an Ethical Appeal. This particular version of the Ethical Appeal (*ethopoeia*) represents in many ways the fundamental – the most pressing and ambitious – work of rhetoric: *to persuade* in the fullest sense of the word. It requires the rhetor to convince us not only of his intellectual perspicacity and argumentative facility, but of his basic goodness and even-handedness, and understanding of his addressees' needs and fears. This daunting task requires every effort to be made to harness a hearer or reader at a democratic level, and to convince him that what is going on is at base an act of communication between one human being and another.⁶ Ethical-Appeal-based writing acknowledges that comprehensive claims about the way we live and ought to live need among other things to be rhetorically earned. Accordingly, Hazlitt deliberately makes recognizable in the structure of his arguments, the way in which a conclusion is reeled in steadily on a malleable line of thought.⁷ It is a process that relies on intellectual honesty – 'candour', in Hazlitt's vocabulary – as the royal road to persuasiveness.

In 'On Familiar Style' (1822), Hazlitt yet again draws on conversation in promoting this idea. One must, he states, 'write as any one would speak in common conversation' (viii, 242). To write conversationally is to appeal to the

6 The Roland Barthes of 'The Death of the Author', and those poststructuralist critics who debated the merits of Barthes's essay post-1968, would find the idea that writing is at root an act of communication between one human being and another troublesome to say the least. But as William Gass points out in *The Habitations of the Word*, while a literary text is made anonymous by the language systems that produce its meaning, 'this "anonymity" ... may mean many things, but one thing which it cannot mean is that *no one did it*' – see William H. Gass, *The Habitations of the Word* (1985; Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1997), 273.

7 The image of a thought being reeled in like a gaffed fish also occurs in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. In chapter 1, Woolf describes her method of reasoning in these terms as she recalls sitting contemplatively by a river, conveying rhetorically (I would argue) the contingencies that anchor her polemic.

kind of human interdependence that makes communication viable. In the same essay Hazlitt says of writers who fail in this attempt that '[t]he web and texture of the universe, and of the heart of man, is a mystery to them: they have no faculty that strikes a chord in unison with it' (viii, 247). His own success in this kind of conversational or communicative writing can be measured by a number of means, one of which might well appeal to Virginia Woolf's comment that 'his essays are emphatically himself ... so thin is the veil of the essay as Hazlitt wore it, his very look comes before us.'⁸

Poststructuralist critics such as Paul de Man have been concerned to define the 'rhetoricity' of language as such, or, to be more specific, the inability of so-called metadiscourses to escape the figuration and rhetorical tendentiousness of the very discourses on which they attempt to provide a commentary.⁹ In a way that is mindful of this claim, rhetoric might be defended as a useful term for the way we might understand our language usage as inevitably positioned. In doing so, we recognize the frailties and complicities of our language usage in relation to the effect we hope rhetorically to achieve. Applied to the way we argue, such self-awareness gives weight to the argumentative honesty and integrity of our reasoning. Hazlitt's particular employment of the Ethical Appeal is rooted in the same desire that gives spark to his rhetorical style of argumentation generally, a desire to overcome the quandary at the heart of communication: the sense that 'you can speak to be understood, but this you cannot be, except by those who are in on the secret' (xii, 35).

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8 Virginia Woolf, 'Hazlitt' in *Collected Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf, 4 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1966-7) I, 151.

9 For a survey of contemporary ideas on rhetoric, see John Bender and David E. Wellbery (eds), *The Ends of Rhetoric: History, Theory, Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990). See also Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, ed. Wlad Godzich (London: Routledge, 1986).

ON TRANSLATING HAZLITT INTO FRENCH

Laurent Folliot

William Hazlitt existe-t-il?

Hazlitt's fame in France a few years ago can perhaps be illustrated by an anecdote one might equally find amusing or appalling. Two of this translator's friends, when told about the project he was then working on, expressed some degree of surprise at the name of Hazlitt. The reason for their bewilderment was that they had believed 'William Hazlitt' to be a fictional author, invented by David Lodge for satirical purposes in his *Small World* – not merely a crusty old writer no one is supposed to care about, but an imaginary one at that. It is true that an up-and-coming independent publisher had just released two of Hazlitt's essays in a small volume entitled *On the Pleasure of Hating* (in tune with the Parisian gusto for paradox, provocation, and literary nastiness), and that in the early 1990s the prestigious publisher José Corti had issued a translation of *Liber Amoris*, perhaps from similar motives. Beyond these isolated efforts, however, the sole extant translations discovered in the course of an enquiry into the online catalogue at the Bibliothèque Nationale dated back to the 1930s; actually, it turned out that at the time Hazlitt had been included in the curriculum for the main French academic examination in English, which certainly has not been the case in recent years. Indeed Hazlitt was never much read beyond a small Anglophile coterie, unlike, say, De Quincey, whom Baudelaire made firmly at home in the pantheon of French 'decadence'.

Yet something of the renewed interest in Hazlitt triggered ten years ago by Tom Paulin's *The Day-Star of Liberty* has finally progressed across the Channel, with the result that an independent publisher (les Éditions Circé) was willing to issue a book-length selection of his essays, mostly taken from *The Plain Speaker*. A number of general factors may help to account for that release: the current vogue of the essay as genre, evinced equally by publishers' catalogues and university curricula; the slowly growing awareness of English Romanticism as an area of European literature worthy of attention (Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* remains unavailable in French to this day); the potential attraction of a number of Hazlitt texts in a

country with a long-standing tradition of misanthropic black-bile literature. Indeed, the title chosen for the Circé anthology was not *Le Franc-parleur* – which would have been a close, although less idiomatic and slightly misleading rendering of *The Plain Speaker* – but *Du Goût et du dégoût*, retranslating as ‘On Taste and Distaste’ or better still, as ‘On Gusto and Disgust’. It was felt that this thoroughly Hazlittian opposition might prove intriguing, as Hazlitt’s vindication of culture as pleasure could chime in with the present taste for ‘taste’ and sympathy for late eighteenth-century hedonism, just as the *dégoût* aspect would strike a chord with the national relish for literary savagery (which it did not fail to do, judging from a short review in *Libération* praising the way Hazlitt ‘dissects with joyful cruelty the customs and conformism of his times’¹).

These elements, however, are only part of what might be termed the rough translatability of an author, in other words his or her immediate marketability: the way a general posture or mood can be isolated at the cost of some inevitable misrepresentations, or at least exaggerations. What I would like briefly to explore in this paper are the specific issues raised (and the specific interest aroused) by the task of translating Hazlitt. The obscurity I have mentioned can partly be explained by the fact that so much of his writing is intensely topical, steeped in contemporary references just as unfamiliar to a French reader as the innumerable quotations and allusions to Renaissance or eighteenth-century English poetry and prose which saturate his texts. From that point of view, the universal, Shakespearian stature of the essayist is essentially imprisoned in the pine-trunk of his national limitations. Yet this insistent historicity is part of the compelling force in Hazlitt’s voice, a force which recalls the translator to a more complex sense of his own language and literary tradition. This is especially so because – and here Hazlitt’s non-existence in French histories of literature becomes painfully ironic – his writing provides a French reader with an unusual opportunity to reconsider his received notions about English and French cultures and styles: in other words, Hazlitt’s originality amid the other English Romantics lies partly – although not entirely, as we will see – in his occasional proximity to a ‘French’ literary vein.

Un Hazlitt français?

Hazlitt’s commentary on French character and culture was at times notoriously acerbic: one thinks, among numerous instances, of the way he expatiates on the ‘natural antipathy between the two nations’ (French and English) in ‘Madame Pasta and Mademoiselle Mars’ (xii, 327), or of his devastating attack on French levity and formality in his February 1816 review of Schlegel’s dramatic criticism for the *Edinburgh* (xvi, 88–90).² In various ways these texts evince an ‘antipathy’ which is both psychological and literary-aesthetic, and seem to place Hazlitt firmly within a British Romantic group of writers who sought to define genuine, passionate

1 *Libération Livres* (20 September 2007), viii.

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.

literature or poetry in opposition to French (neoclassical) standards. Yet Hazlitt's liberalism, dislike for the war and fascination with the emperor probably ensured that the verdict he passed on French literature was never as inexorable as that of De Quincey, or even Wordsworth. His criticism and general aesthetic laid too much emphasis on the diversity of books and character, on the manifold riches of lived experience and the ubiquity of the poetic spark, for him to exclude a whole literary tradition from his rather catholic Temple of Fame. This is why, in fact, he often mentions French authors without dismissing them at once as shallow and mechanical. One occurrence in particular comes to mind: the digression on Rabelais and Voltaire in the sixth of the *Lectures on the English Poets*. Beyond the sheer exhilaration of Hazlitt's sentences, which, as often, suggests some kind of sympathetic identification with the object of criticism, there is a keen sense of the differences within a foreign tradition which comes to bear on the issues a translator of Hazlitt must face. I will quote the text at some length:

Rabelais loved [absurdity], exaggerated it with supreme satisfaction, luxuriated in its endless varieties, rioted in nonsense, 'reigned there and revelled.' He dwelt on the absurd and ludicrous for the pleasure they gave him, not for the pain. He lived upon laughter, and died laughing. He indulged his vein, and took his full swing of folly. He did not baulk his fancy or his readers. His wit was to him 'as riches fineless'; he saw no end of his wealth in that way, and set no limits to his extravagance: he was communicative, prodigal, boundless, and inexhaustible. His were the Saturnalia of wit, the riches and the royalty, the health and long life. He is intoxicated with gaiety, mad with folly. His animal spirits drown him in a flood of mirth: his blood courses up and down his veins like wine. His thirst of enjoyment is as great as his thirst of drink: his appetite for good things of all sorts is unsatisfied, and there is a never-ending supply. [...] How Friar John roars and lays about him in the vineyard! How Panurge whines in the storm, and how dexterously he contrives to throw the sheep overboard! How much Pantagruel behaves like a wise king! How Gargantua mewls, and pules, and slabbers his nurse, and demeans himself most like a royal infant! what provinces he devours! what seas he drinks up! How he eats, drinks, and sleeps – sleeps, eats, and drinks! The style of Rabelais is no less prodigious than his matter. His words are of marrow, unctuous, dropping fatness. He was a mad wag, the king of good fellows, and prince of practical philosophers!

Rabelais was a Frenchman of the old school – Voltaire of the new. The wit of the one arose from an exuberance of enjoyment – of the other, from an excess of indifference, real or assumed. Voltaire had no enthusiasm for one thing or another: he made light of every thing. In his hands all things turn to chaff and dross, as the pieces of silver money in the Arabian Nights were changed by the hands of the enchanter into little dry crumbling leaves! He is a Parisian. He never exaggerates, is never violent: he treats things with the most provoking *sang froid*; and expresses his contempt by the most indirect hints, and in the fewest words, as if he hardly thought them worth even his

contempt. He retains complete possession of himself and of his subject [...] His callousness was an excellent foil for the antagonists he had mostly to deal with. He took knaves and fools on his shield well. He stole away its cloak from grave imposture. If he reduced other things below their true value, making them seem worthless and hollow, he did not degrade the pretensions of tyranny and superstition below their true value, by making them seem utterly worthless and hollow, as contemptible as they were odious. This was the service he rendered to truth and mankind! His *Candide* is a masterpiece of wit.

(‘On Swift, Young, Gray, Collins, &c.’; v, 112-14)

What is intriguing to the reader here is Hazlitt’s alertness to the historicity of the French language and literature, to the changing drama of national characters and their expression. This opposition of old and new Frenchman through Rabelais and Voltaire, although couched in cultural and psychological terms, is also a linguistic one. Rabelais’s folly and enjoyment is, inseparably, a madness for words, an enjoyment of their materiality that goes beyond all rules of sense (‘his words are of marrow, unctuous, dropping fatness’), and similarly Voltaire’s Parisian indifference and callousness are conveyed through a radical disenchantment of language. Hazlitt’s point, thus understood, brings to mind a fateful narrative about French literature which remains deeply entrenched in national habits of cultural perception: that of a movement away from the Renaissance *copia*, cornucopia or copiousness exemplified by Rabelais and Montaigne, towards the concision and perspicuity of *Grand Siècle* and Enlightenment classicism; or, more darkly, from some kind of pristine, joyful openness and creativity to the anxiety of academism whereby many modern French writers felt they still had to contend with the spectre of a superficial, desiccated formalism. Indeed a virulent rejection of Malherbe and Boileau has been very much the order of the day for a long line of writers from Mallarmé and Proust down to Julien Gracq or even the structuralists, all bent on subverting and exorcizing the yoke of academism from within language, through a violent or patient undermining of established rhetorical habits. It is from that perspective that a French translation of Hazlitt, with his rollicking prose and infectious relish for all stylistic intensities, must be contemplated: by keeping in mind the ongoing attempt to widen the canon and language of the French tradition.

One cannot help noticing, however, that Hazlitt’s own judgement, despite his occasional strictures on French literature, is much more nuanced than the previous account might indicate. To some extent, what Tom Paulin has pointed to as Hazlitt’s *bête noire* in cultural politics – the ‘faultless regularity’ of Pitt’s oratory, paired with the ‘dry’ rationalism of the Lockean tradition – finds a close and rather more ubiquitous equivalent in a French holy alliance of Cartesianism and belletristic correctness.³ Yet what Hazlitt has in mind is just as often the Johnsonian, English establishment version of that classicism, whose stately couplets and binary periods reflect the

3 Tom Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt’s Radical Style* (London: Faber, 1998), 27-9.

pompous dogmatism of its aesthetic judgements. By contrast, the praise bestowed on Voltaire's *Candide* is not simply a sly hit against *The Excursion* ('It has been called "the dull product of a scoffer's pen"; it is indeed the "product of a scoffer's pen; but after reading the Excursion, few people will think it *dull*"; v, 114); it also reflects Hazlitt's attraction to the crispness and ease of Voltaire's demystifying irony: 'It is in the most perfect keeping, and without any appearance of effort. Every sentence tells, and the whole reads like one sentence', he writes a little later (v, 114). As he often does, Hazlitt eschews any facile, clear-cut distinction between Romantic and classical (or Enlightenment): his privileging of experiential vividness over the rules of expression and of passion over dryness does not preclude his appreciation of a quintessential eighteenth-century French work. Indeed it is perhaps not exaggerated to say that the seduction of Voltaire's 'apothegms' reveals something like a French sensibility which keeps surfacing now and then in Hazlitt's writings. This might be illustrated, for instance, by the lapidary brilliancy of some of his most sardonic sallies, which at times sound indebted to the grim lineage of the French moralists (La Rochefoucault comes to mind, or even an angrier La Bruyère): 'Pure good grows insipid, wants variety and spirit. Pain is a bitter-sweet, which never surfeits. Love turns, with a little indulgence, to indifference or disgust: hatred alone is immortal' ('On the Pleasure of Hating'; xii, 128).

Even more suggestive, however, is the deep and significant affinity between Hazlitt and his closest French contemporary, Stendhal. The comparison, of course, is not a chance one: these two writers had such numerous affinities that they seem at times to embody between themselves a special variety of European liberal romanticism. Stendhal was a keen reader of the *Edinburgh Review* and an occasional plagiarist of Hazlitt's articles long before they actually met and 'my friend M. Beyle' became Hazlitt's regular 'informant' on things French and even Italian.⁴ And, naturally, both men were amongst the staunchest apologists for Napoleon in the post-war years. Yet although both are nostalgic about Bonaparte, they display comparatively little of that fascination with quasi-superhuman or inhuman power common to Napoleon-haters and zealots alike. Their Bonapartism has less to do with the brutal sublimity of the conquering emperor than with, say, the bravura and excitement of the 1796-97 Italian campaign. One might think, for instance, of the opening of *The Charterhouse of Parma*, where the gallant French officers who enter Milan trigger a sort of joyful, hedonistic revolution: on the one hand the balls, beauties and sparkling wine, the sudden shaft of the Enlightenment piercing through the gloom of despotism and priestcraft, on the other, reverberating through Stendhal's writing, the mad, glad discovery of Italian arts and skies. The object of that nostalgia is gusto on the grand historic stage, opposed to Restoration boredom and hypocrisy, and implying – or at least easily compatible with – a sort of French-flavoured cosmopolitanism: Enlightenment freedom translated into actual fact, riding on horseback as it were. Hazlitt's strictures on French taste and pictorial neoclassicism notwithstanding, his encomium on the foundation

4 For a useful and detailed account of their relation, see Robert Vigneron, 'Stendhal et Hazlitt', *Modern Philology* 35.4 (May 1938), 375-414.

of the Louvre as a repository of human passion and dignity free at last from the encroachments of despotic pride (as well as his enthusiastic quotations from Napoleon's Italian proclamations) bear testimony to a similarly exalted vision of the Italian campaign as a climax of European Jacobinism or republicanism, and of Bonaparte's leadership as a literate and even a literary one.⁵

If one were to point to an aesthetic or stylistic expression of that liberating shock, it would be Hazlitt's and Stendhal's shared emphasis on quickness and vividness of finish – a finish which indeed, at times, is close to that of a quick, fine sketch. The rapidity of execution praised by Hazlitt as the mark of true genius in the essay 'On Application to Study'⁶ finds a deliberate parallel in Stendhal's *Charterhouse of Parma*, written in eight weeks, or in the virtuoso nonchalance of his autobiographical *Life of Henry Brulard*. It might thus be suggested that the muscularity or 'nervousness' Tom Paulin identifies as a feature of republican English prose gets quite close at times to a playful, Bonapartist terseness – especially in those merciless satires on pedantry Hazlitt in his lighter, breezier moments shared with Stendhal and their common forbear in that mode, Voltaire. At times Hazlitt's rapid, paratactic yet finely balanced or contrasted clauses seem so readily translatable that the translator is delighted with the sheer effect of a semi-colon on his computer screen. Take for instance these scathing lines deprecating the short-sightedness of utilitarian philosophers in a tone of easy yet precise dismissal, opposing the inexhaustible wealth of experience to its 'bald' truncation at the hands of the new scholiasts:

They stick to the table of contents, and never open the volume of the mind. They are for having maps, not pictures of the world we live in: as much as to say that a bird's-eye view of things contains the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. If you want to look for the situation of a particular spot, they turn to a pasteboard globe, on which they fix their wandering gaze; and because you cannot find the object of your quest in their bald 'abridgements,' tell you there is no such place, or that it is not worth inquiring after. They had better confine their studies to the celestial sphere and the signs of the zodiac; for there they will meet with no petty details to boggle at, or contradict their vague conclusions. Such persons would make excellent theologians, but are very indifferent philosophers.

('On Reason and Imagination'; xii, 44-5)

Of course the Scottish rationalism indicted by Hazlitt is not without its French counterpart, and his own metaphysics is largely Romantic; but the style of the indictment seems strongly reminiscent of the Voltairean ideals mentioned above. One also thinks of the following judgement on professional reformers, with its

5 See *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte*, chapter IX (xiii, 210-3); and also the anecdote about the Consul's reaction on being introduced to an English officer named Lovelace in a note to the essay 'On Reading Old Books' (xii, 227-8n.).

6 '... rapidity of execution ... is often productive both of sharpness and freedom ... There may be less formal method, but there is more life, and spirit, and truth' (xii, 62).

fine, unobtrusive alliteration and almost chiasmic balance: 'I do not dispute their virtue, I doubt their sensibility' ('On the Spirit of Obligations'; xii, 82).

These are not quite, however, the only aspects of Hazlitt's style and tone that may appear germane to a French tradition. A softer, more tender vein is at times discernible in his prose, for instance in the unabashedly erotic Rousseauism of the following evocation of childhood memory and innocence in the essay 'On Reading Old Books':

With what eagerness I used to look forward to the next number, and open the prints! Ah! Never again shall I feel the enthusiastic delight with which I gazed at the figures, and anticipated the story and adventures of Major Bath and Commodore Trunnion, of Trim and my Uncle Toby, of Don Quixote and Sancho and Dapple, of Gil Blas and Dame Lorenza Sephora, of Laura and the fair Lucretia, whose lips open and shut like buds of roses. To what nameless ideas did they give rise, – with what airy delights I filled up the outline, as I hung in silence over the page! – Let me still recall them, that they may breathe fresh life into me, and that I may live that birthday of thought and romantic pleasure over again! Talk of the ideal! This is the only true ideal – the heavenly tints of Fancy reflected in the bubbles that float upon the spring-tide of human life. (xii, 223)

The fact that books should be so instrumental to the frankly masturbatory reverie depicted in these lines reminds us that Hazlitt was always an unorthodox disciple of Rousseau, who is probably the most significant presence in this essay despite his quip in the Preface to *The New Eloise* that 'novels are necessary to corrupt nations.'⁷ And of course, the conjunction of reading and eroticism points, besides Rousseau, to the more general vogue for 'romances,' which, although it was observable through every quarter of eighteenth-century Europe, originated in and was specifically identified with French culture. In the same essay, Hazlitt voices his early fondness for French practitioners of the genre (Rousseau being obviously included in 'French philosophy and romances'), and elsewhere sympathetically quotes Gray's wish to have nothing to do but endlessly 'read new romances of Marivaux and Crébillon' ('On Swift, Young, Gray, Collins, &c.:' v, 118). Here Hazlitt is, as it were, at his most Gallic: compare, for example, De Quincey's damning verdict on 'the spurious and defective sensibility of the French' early in his *Confessions*.⁸ That sensibility, in Hazlitt, is quite easily conveyed back into the French language, grammatically as well as semantically. In particular, its tone is aptly rendered by the specific graces of the *imparfait* past tense, a simple form with a half-open vowel ending descriptive of habitual or ongoing states of being – the proper tense, as it were, for the pastness of the past. Proust famously commented on its use in Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*, where it seems to epitomize the

7 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (Paris: Garnier, 1988), 3 (my translation).

8 Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings*, ed. Grevel Lindop (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 1.

sense of dreary vacancy pervading the novel.⁹ In translating the above passage from Hazlitt, however, this elementary, indeed ineluctable resource of the French language takes on more languid, sensuous overtones, well adapted to the kind of sentimental, elegiac melancholy Hazlitt deliberately enjoys and keeps up. It allows the translator to retain something of the yearning ‘gaze’ which signals both the child’s absorption in the pictures and the autobiographer’s longing recollection of days gone by. The blend of arousal and loss which characterizes these lines finds a ready place in the French language, as may be illustrated by a few lines from the translation:

Ah! jamais plus je ne connaîtrai le ravissement enthousiaste qui me prenait tandis que je contemplais les figures, et que j’anticipais l’histoire et les aventures du major Bath et du commodore Trunnion, de Trim et de mon oncle Toby, de don Quichotte, de Sancho et de Dapple, de Gil Blas et de dame Lorenza Sephora, de Laura et de la belle Lucretia, dont les lèvres s’ouvrent et se referment comme un bouton de rose. Quelles pensées ineffables elles faisaient naître – de quelles aériennes voluptés j’étoffais leurs contours, penché en silence au-dessus de la page !

Barbariser le français

So far, we have seen that some elements of Hazlitt’s rhetoric, expressive of various Enlightenment moods, were not unamenable to a classical French rendering. Elsewhere, however, the copiousness of his vocabulary, the sense of proliferation induced by his prose might recall the translator to that sense of Renaissance ‘fatness’ I mentioned earlier. Here, too, one might be tempted to unearth a French genealogy, to find in the English essayist the uncanny flavour lost to French letters after the sixteenth century. Charles Lamb’s relish for the ‘marrow’ of words found ample nourishment in seventeenth-century humourists like Burton and Browne, who were themselves heavily indebted to Montaigne; and Hazlitt, when he writes that poetry ‘describes the flowing, not the fixed’ (‘On Poetry in General’, *Lectures on the English Poets*; v, 3), sounds much like the latter saying ‘Je ne peins pas l’être, je peins le passage’ (roughly, ‘I do not paint being, I paint passage’).¹⁰ One could thus opt for a deliberate archaism in order to achieve a sort of foreign familiarity, but that would be a mistake. Hazlitt is not Lamb; he does not go in for the quaint and uncouth. Although his addiction to quoting fills his prose with the echoes of earlier idioms, his own sentences are generally free from conspicuous archaism; rather, these quotations, juxtaposed with his own prose, create within his essays a sense of discontinuity, of the loss of a more naive tongue. What a translator needs to convey is the historicity of Hazlitt’s English, rather than the simple-minded fiction of an aboriginal abundance of language. This, indeed, is generally possible;

9 À propos du “style” de Flaubert, in *Sur Baudelaire, Flaubert et Morand*, ed. Antoine Compagnon (Paris: Complexe, 1987), 61-88 and especially 68-71.

10 See *Essays*, III.2, ‘On Repentance’.

one may, for instance, render Chaucer's dictum that Love will not be 'constrained by mastery' (which Hazlitt often quotes) by using the medieval French *maîtrise* (found in, among other texts, François Villon's 1462 'Ballad of the Hanged Men') instead of the modern *maîtrise*.

The entrenched Englishness of Hazlitt's style, however, stems in a large part from certain habits of oratory that cannot be described as specifically archaic, yet are singularly alien to the French idiom of that period. A remarkable characteristic, which he seems to have in common with Burke, is the powerful alternation of short, rapid sentences with long sweeps of passionate declamation (recall that Hippolyte Taine, for instance, despite his admiration, considered Burke as 'still half a barbarian'¹¹). This is Hazlitt at his most vehement, and at those times his compelling gyrations, for which one is definitely at a loss to find anything even remotely analogous in French literature, often erupt into a cascade of doublets whereby his discourse seems continually to branch out in a rage of definition. To some extent this constant use of double characterization is something Hazlitt shares with Johnson, yet the impatience and vigour with which he invests it runs radically counter to the sonorous stateliness of his neo-classical predecessor. And this, as I have suggested, is where the gap between tongues – the *défaut des langues*, their defaulting from each other – becomes nearly insuperable. To some extent a translator must have the Quixotic ambition of bringing the author he or she is engaged with into the native canon – more precisely, of carving out, in Hazlitt's words, a stylistic 'niche' by the side of existing ones, a niche that did not exist yet might have been there.¹² But here finding some inspiration or model in contemporary French authors is extremely difficult. Stendhal's gusto, for instance, often lies in his relinquishing the topic at hand and moving on rather than exhausting it; insofar as he departs from the harmonious concision of classical ideals, it is in so systematic an avoidance of formality and periodicity that his sentences often appear carefully 'unfinished' or untidy. He never seems to stretch the boundaries of prose. On the other hand, Chateaubriand (Stendhal's political as well as literary opposite), who is the most 'Romantic' of French prose writers and breaks most clearly from the classical mould, achieves that effect by even greater terseness. His reliance on archaic phrases and words seems to lay bare former strata of language in an effort to recapture a richer, more pungent idiom, but his style is so abruptly paratactic that it often resembles fragments or ruins of ancient oratory standing at some distance from each other, rather than Hazlitt's raging eddies.

This rapid, unpredictable motion of Hazlitt's proved extremely difficult to convey, largely because the syntactical structures of French are often more cumbersome than those of English: the quasi-imperative repetition of definite articles and of some prepositions (such as *de*, 'of'), for example, frequently makes for a much heavier sentence in French. What I call Hazlitt's rage of definition (which is akin to the gloating over deformity theorized in the lecture 'On Poetry in

11 See Hippolyte Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 4 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1863), III, 92.

12 See 'On Reading Old Books' again: 'The niches are occupied, the tables are full' (xii, 229).

General¹³) is, moreover, reliant on an infallible sense of rhythm and scansion, on a cunning mobilization of both Saxon and Latin elements of the English lexicon. To take a random example: '[scandal-mongers in a country town] continue to make enemies *by some smart hit or sly insinuation* at every third word they speak, because with every new enemy there is an additional sense of power' ('On Depth and Superficiality'; xii, 349, my italics). 'Some smart hit or sly insinuation': the alliteration, the coupling of concise yet muscular Saxon monosyllables with a long, rapid Latinate word gives this simple phrase a powerful vividness which, in a French translation, unavoidably loses much of its pungency and runs the risk of falling into 'mere lumbering prose', into pedantry.

As a recourse, one finds oneself constantly relapsing into long-winded periods that are vaguely meant to sound 'nineteenth-century' or emphatic, finding refuge in a makeshift regularity or assonantal harmony. This, of course, is betraying the very essentials of Hazlitt's style, what one would like to call his passionate prosaism: the deliberate rawness and asperity which correspond to his insistence that prose should be a demystifying complement or corrective to the smoother strains of poetic enthusiasm. The translator must aim at those 'fits and starts' which in Hazlitt's writing make for a kind of anti-poetical poetry. But, again, those fits and starts are dependent on the rhythmic energy of the English language, on its stresses and strong consonantal quality (all features which have had considerable appeal in post-classical France). Some of the energy is necessarily lost.

What one *can* do, however, is to eradicate from the French text all the easy echoes or internal 'rhymes' one keeps groping for almost unconsciously, to counter the sonorous, measured trimness its clauses will acquire from a general attempt at classicism by making them more jagged and irregular. In that respect 'polishing' the present translation actually meant, in a large part, roughening it, making it more jarring, going against the grain of the target text. Through such an effort one may do partial justice to the intriguing sense of simultaneous (or rather alternate) familiarity and foreignness Hazlitt's style easily generates in a French reader: a sense of the historical convergence and separation between national idioms. The 'touching' or contact between the original and its translation (between separate languages) invoked by Benjamin as the translator's proper concern¹⁴ is here, more than elsewhere, an actual, historical phenomenon.

ÉCOLE NORMALE SUPÉRIEURE, PARIS

13 'Not that we like what we loathe; but we like to indulge our hatred and scorn of it; to dwell upon it, to exasperate our idea of it by every refinement of ingenuity and extravagance of illustration; to make it a bugbear to ourselves, to point it out to others in all the splendor of deformity' (v, 7).

14 See Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator' in *Illuminations*, transl. H. Zohn (New York: Jonathan Cape, 1970), 80.

HAZLITT'S LEARNING

A Real and Negative Education

David Halpin

... boys who shine at school do not make the greatest figure when they grow up and come out into the world. The things, in fact, which a boy is set to learn at school, and on which his success depends, are things which do not require the exercise either of the highest or the most useful faculties of the mind.

(‘On the Ignorance of the Learned’, *Table-Talk*; viii, 71)¹

Introduction

This essay seeks to clarify Hazlitt’s views on education, relating them to his own experience of particular educational institutions. Drawing selectively on Hazlitt’s essays, it provides, in the first place, an outline of his conception of a real education, showing that such an education consists in being able freely and imaginatively to link book-knowledge with experience and vice versa. As background, it constructs, from letters written by Hazlitt to his father and brother, and from other historical and biographical sources, a summary description of his formal education, initially undertaken during his early adolescent years in Wem, and subsequently at Hackney College, where he studied for two years, or thereabouts, from September 1793.

Hazlitt’s schooling in Wem was as different from his conception of a genuine education as can be imagined, for it was highly regulated and narrowly traditional, emphasizing grammar exercises, basic ciphering and the close study of the Bible and classical texts. Learning by rote rather than from experience was the rule during Hazlitt’s time in Wem. His education at Hackney, on the other hand, was far more in keeping with his mature views on being learned. Offering a broad and general ‘university’ education, and using for its time very novel teaching methods, Hackney College helped to develop Hazlitt as a Dissenting intellectual,

1 All quotations from Hazlitt’s works 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.

while encouraging him, simultaneously and crucially, to pursue his own academic interests in a largely self-directed way.

Hazlitt's education at Hackney, then, and his later views about what counts as being genuinely learned, coincide significantly. In this connection, this paper goes on to argue the relevance of Rousseau's educational treatise, *Emile* (1762), which Hazlitt was familiar with at Hackney, and which, among many things, describes and commends a form of 'negative education': an education through which children are enabled actively to contribute to their own development, learning through first-hand experience rather than books and formal instruction.

A 'real' education

Despite his deeply-held views about what counts as being educated, Hazlitt draws only indirect attention in his writings to the actual world of schooling. Indeed, it is not at all clear that he was convinced, unlike some of his radical contemporaries, of the need in his lifetime for a national system of free state-funded education.² For instance, in his *Round Table* essay 'On Common-Place Critics,' first published in November 1816, he writes disparagingly of people who follow fashions uncritically for the sake of it, citing 'the new Schools for All' movement as an example of this tendency (iv, 139).³ Hazlitt's objection to the movement, however, was not prompted by the conservative view, expressed often enough during his adult years by Tories and other reactionaries, that providing schooling for the masses would contribute to the development among them of less servile attitudes towards their 'betters'. Rather, his opposition was to the illiberal nature of the education advocated by many of its supporters, whose emphasis was on a purely mechanical instruction in no more than the basics of reading, writing and counting. In Hazlitt's mind, this represented far too limiting a vision for education, one which was merely utilitarian, this last being a philosophical attitude to which he was always radically opposed.⁴ For him, the main stuff of a 'real' education came, not from being schooled in the 'basics', and for the narrow purposes of utility, but rather from a lively combination of reading, reflection and observation, none

2 See A.C. Grayling, *The Quarrel of the Age: The Life and Times of William Hazlitt* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2000), 115.

3 Hazlitt is here referring to the 'Monitorial System' or the 'Bell-Lancaster Method' named after the British educators Andrew Bell (1753–1832) and Joseph Lancaster (1778–1838) who both developed it independently. The method was based on abler pupils being used as 'helpers' to the teacher, passing on the information they had learned to others in the class. The Monitorial System was found very useful by nineteenth-century educators, as it proved to be a cheap way of increasing the average class size.

4 Duncan Wu draws attention to an incident in 1814 when Hazlitt learnt that a 'Chrestomathic' school, dedicated to the teaching of what is 'useful', had been commissioned to be built on a plot of land adjacent to where he was living – see Duncan Wu, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 167. Hazlitt's dismissive attitude to this utilitarian project is indicated in the essay 'On People of Sense', first published in the *London Magazine* in 1821, and afterwards reprinted in *The Plain Speaker* (1826): 'They propose to erect a Chrestomathic school ... to introduce a rabble of children, who ... are to be taught to do every thing, and to see and feel nothing' (xii, 249).

of which was complete without the other, and each of which was the lifelong responsibility of the individual. The aim of such an education is not simply to acquire elementary skills and useful information, but instead to refine judgment and sensibility generally through imaginative engagement.

True, Hazlitt commends, in a letter to his ten-year-old son as he embarks on his own schooling, a disciplined grounding in the classics ('It gives men liberal views; it accustoms the mind to take an interest in things foreign to itself; to love virtue for its own sake'⁵), which might be taken to be the antithesis of his conception of a 'real' education, with its stress on learning from experience and observation. But this would be to misunderstand Hazlitt's position. His admiration of a classical education was largely due to what he saw as its lack of faddishness, and in particular, its celebration of a way of thinking that, crucially for him, has an established rather than ephemeral value ('it fix[es] our thoughts on the remote and permanent, instead of narrow and fleeting objects'⁶). When Hazlitt does criticize a classical education, it is to draw attention to the totally inadequate version of it provided by the universities of his time, which he considered far too narrowly book-based and insufficiently linked to experience, making it a poor substitute for the sort of general education that he judged to be the hallmark of a genuinely thoughtful individual. As he puts it amusingly in 'Conversations as Good as Real' (1829),

I do not wish to speak against a classical education; it refines and softens, I grant ... But surely it often gives a false estimate of men and things. Everyone brought up in colleges, and drugged with Latin and Greek for a number of years, firmly believes *that there have been about five people in the world, and that they are dead* ... the classical standard turns shadows into realities and realities into shadows. (xx, 296)

Although mostly a bookish autodidact himself, Hazlitt thus saw through the limitations of an education in which reading for its own sake is highly valued. To be sure, he was more than once minded in his life to think that nothing existed in the world comparable to reading books. But he was never convinced this was enough. On the contrary, he believed passionately in the need always to relate book knowledge to life and to search out avidly additional means to aid and develop understanding. So, in the letter to his son to which I referred, he writes, 'Books are but one inlet of knowledge; and the pores of the mind, like those of the body, should be left open to all impressions.'⁷ Elsewhere, in similar vein, he remarks that 'the world itself is a volume larger than all the libraries in it' ('On the Conversation of Authors', *The Plain Speaker*; xii, 27).

5 William Hazlitt, *The Letters of William Hazlitt*, ed. H.M. Sikes, W.H. Bonner and G. Lahey (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 223. The date of this letter is February or early March, 1822.

6 Ibid, 223.

7 Ibid, 222.

Hazlitt's ambivalent opinions about the benefits of reading, including the problems of how successfully to relate it to experience, are anticipated in a further way in his letter to his son, where, at another point, he alerts him to the dangers of assuming a close correspondence between real life and what an author writes about, particularly where women are concerned: 'Do not fancy every woman you see [to be] the heroine of a romance, a Sophia Western, a Clarissa, or a Julia; and yourself the potential hero of it, Tom Jones, Lovelace, or St Preux. Avoid this error as you would shrink back from a precipice.'⁸ Although these particular comments can be related to a biographical source – the notorious affair with Sarah Walker – similar oppositions to other forms of book-based sentimentalism are expressed in writings of Hazlitt's that considerably predate that relationship.⁹ In his *Round Table* essay, 'On the Literary Character', for example, first published in 1813, several years before he met Sarah Walker, he advances the proposition that too many authors of his time had become pallid men-of-letters, lacking the qualities of mind that constitute authentic genius (iv, 131–6). Subsequently, writing of the sixteenth-century French essayist, Michel de Montaigne, in *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (1819), Hazlitt clarifies unambiguously what such authenticity entails:

[H]e had the power of looking at things for himself, or as they really were, instead of blindly trusting to and fondly repeating what others told him that they were... In treating of men and manners, he spoke of them as he found them, not according to preconceived notions and abstract dogmas;... He was, in a word, the first author who was not a book maker, and who wrote not to make converts of others to established creeds and prejudices, but to satisfy his own mind of the truth of things.

(‘On the Periodical Essayists’; vi, 92)

Similar sentiments are found in Hazlitt's lauding of the parliamentarian Edmund Burke's prose style, of which he became first aware in his teenage years, in 1796. According to Duncan Wu, Hazlitt was 'struck immediately by Burke's "familiar, inimitable, powerful prose-style";'¹⁰ later, in that most remarkable of his *Plain Speaker* essays 'On the Prose-Style of Poets', Hazlitt describes Burke's power as a writer in terms similar to those of his account of Montaigne

It has always appeared to me that the most perfect prose style, the most powerful, the most dazzling, the most daring, that which went the nearest to the verge of poetry, and yet never fell over, was Burke's ... Burke's style is airy, flighty, adventurous, but *it never loses sight of the subject; nay, is always*

8 Ibid, 231. I was alerted to this important issue by one of this journal's anonymous readers.

9 As they are, of course, in contemporary texts, such as Philip Larkin's 'A Study of Reading Habits', his poetic warning that literary escapism makes life less fulfilling.

10 Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 62. The quotation is from Hazlitt's 1823 essay 'The Periodical Press' (xvi, 222).

in contact with, and derives its increased or varying impulse from it (xii, 10; my italics).¹¹

Book-learning and book-making, then, are ultimately of little use if they fail authentically and powerfully to connect with real experience and ‘the truth of things’. Failure of this kind always leads, Hazlitt concludes, to ignorant and inadequately educated states of mind. In his *Table-Talk* essay ‘On the Ignorance of the Learned’, he cynically makes this point in a series of ironic observations about an individual who clearly reads a lot, but whose judgment is hardly the better for it:

Such a one may be said to carry his understanding about with him in his pocket, or to leave it at home on his library shelves. He is afraid of venturing on any train of reasoning, or of striking out any observation that is not mechanically suggested to him by passing his eyes over certain legible characters; ... He has no ideas of his own, and must live on those of other people ... He knows as much of what he talks about as a blind man does of colours ... He is expert in all the dead and in most of the living languages; but he can neither speak his own fluently, nor write it correctly (viii, 70–3).

These comments also resonate with Hazlitt’s attack, in *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), on William Gifford, editor of the Tory *Quarterly Review*, and one of Hazlitt’s fiercest critics. Gifford shows

an utter want of independence and magnanimity in all that he attempts. He cannot go alone; he must have crutches, a go-cart and trammels ... He cannot conceive of anything different from what he finds it, and hates those who pretend to a greater reach of intellect or boldness of spirit than himself. He inclines, by a natural and deliberate bias, to the traditional in laws and government, to the orthodox in religion, to the safe in opinion, to the trite in imagination, to the technical in style, to whatever implies a surrender of individual judgement into the hands of authority, and a subjection of individual freedom to mechanic rules (xi, 117).

Opposite in every way to Gifford, Hazlitt is imaginative, unorthodox, and a confident taker of intellectual risks. He eschews ‘mechanic rules’, that is, the straightforward application of closed systems of thought, whether empirical or metaphysical, to those aspects of human experience – to him, the majority – where they do not belong. Indeed, for Hazlitt, abstruseness of almost any kind constitutes the gravest threat to the quality of people’s response to life, which requires rather

11 For Burke’s influence on Hazlitt, see, for instance, H. Baker, *William Hazlitt* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 50–60; D. Bromwich, *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 288–300; T. Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt’s Radical Style* (London: Faber, 1998), 122–8, 139–45, 147–50, 164–8; U. Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense: Criticism, Morals, and the Metaphysics of Power* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 44–5, 105; Grayling, *The Quarrel of the Age*, 17, 45–6.

an alignment of fact with feeling. As he puts it in the *Table-Talk* essay 'On Genius and Common Sense', 'In art, in taste, in life, in speech, you decide from feeling, and not from reason' (viii, 31). Feelings thus always direct thought, or more snappily, 'I say what I think; I think what I feel' ('Preface', *A View of the English Stage*; v, 175). Consequently, Hazlitt is utterly resistant to the application of scientific and rationalist attitudes and techniques to most areas of public life – the arts and politics especially, and, we can safely assume, education too. Accepting that facts are the basis of cognition, he insists, equally, that they have no moral or intellectual value unless they are articulated with passion and emotion:

To judge of things by reason or the calculations of positive utility is a slow, cold, uncertain, and barren process – their power of appealing to and affecting the imagination as subjects of thought and feeling is best measured by the habitual impression they leave upon the mind, and it is with this only we have to do in expressing our delight or admiration of them, or in setting a just mental value upon them. They ought to excite all the emotion which they do excite; for this is the instinctive and unerring result of the constant experience we have had of their power of affecting us ... Fancy, feeling may be very inadequate tests of truth; but truth itself operates chiefly on the human mind through them.

(‘On Egotism’, *The Plain Speaker*; xii, 161–2)

The modern philosopher of education, Richard Peters, concludes similarly, arguing that good teachers have a ‘genuine concern for the Truth, which they know is a passionate business.’¹² Hazlitt could easily have written those words himself. He might also have added to Peters’s account by arguing strongly in favour of teachers allowing, even encouraging, opportunities for pupils to learn new Truth via experiences that take them suddenly by surprise by their inspirational force and liveliness. These are the experiences that are likely to be eliminated altogether or, at best, compromised, by systems of education in which the subject matter and methods of teaching are centrally mandated, and restricted to learning ‘the basics’ by rote.¹³

We can all identify such unplanned-for ‘moments’ in which, quite out of the blue, our minds are made aware of and become open to new kinds of knowledge and fresh ways of experiencing the world. For Hazlitt, one such occasion was his sensational first meeting with Coleridge. You have only to read his account of this experience in ‘My First Acquaintance with Poets’ (1823) to appreciate why. He writes of being mesmerized by Coleridge’s lucidity, erudition and intelligence: ‘I could not have been more delighted if I had heard the music of the spheres. Poetry and Philosophy had met together, Truth and Genius had embraced,

12 R.S. Peters, *Reason and Compassion* (London: Routledge, 1973), 101. For a development of this line of argument, see my *Romanticism and Education: Love, Heroism and Imagination in Pedagogy* (London: Continuum, 2007), 71–90.

13 The importance of such occasions for Hazlitt was brought to my attention in the same reader’s report mentioned in note 8.

under the eye and with the sanction of Religion' (xvii, 108). As Wu observes, 'it was a revelation, and was to change [Hazlitt] forever'.¹⁴ While sudden epiphanies of this kind resist well-laid plans, there remains the possibility of their being allowed for nonetheless by some formal processes of education. Hazlitt's bequest to contemporary educational theory, then, is his anxiety that highly systematic forms of pedagogy and overly-prescribed and narrowly-conceived designs for the curriculum are unlikely to allow for teaching and learning experiences that bring about the intellectual and emotional outcomes associated with genuinely educated people, those who are able to respond imaginatively to life and the world.¹⁵

Hazlitt at Wem

The primacy of imaginative sensibility that Hazlitt applauded was not an aspect of the education he himself received in his early adolescent years at Wem, a small town in Shropshire to which, in 1787, his father had moved his family, having accepted there a poorly-endowed pastorate. The Rev. Hazlitt's new clerical responsibilities included the running of a very small school, which he turned into a model Dissenting crammer.¹⁶ The young Hazlitt attended this school, and possibly was formally taught there by his father from time to time. The school's curriculum was chiefly confined to the so-called 'trivium' – grammar, rhetoric and logic, emphasizing the teaching of Latin and Greek. These subjects constituted not just the core curriculum of Hazlitt's 'grammar' schooling, but by far its largest part; little stress, if any, being placed on the learning of science-related and other practical subjects. Simple ciphering (basic arithmetic), verse-writing, spelling, some drawing, and themes and disputations were the sole exercises. Hazlitt's schooling at Wem, in other words, offered him a version of a 'mediaeval' curriculum, as far removed from the more 'modern' one he was subsequently to experience at Hackney as can be imagined.

This general account of Hazlitt's 'grammar' schooling is largely confirmed by the contents of a well-known letter he wrote in March 1788, aged ten, to his older brother, John. After some familiar preliminaries, he tells his brother that, like him, he has been very 'busy', particularly with school work: 'Next Monday I shall begin to read Ovid Metamorphosis and Eutropius. I shall like to know all the Latin and Greek I can ... I began to cypher a fortnight after Christmas and shall go into the rule of three next week ... I shall be through the whole cyphering book this summer, and then I am to learn Euclid.' He goes on to recount his daily routine:

We go to school at nine every morning. Three boys begin with reading the Bible. Then I and two others shew our exercises. We then read the Speaker. Then we all set about our lessons and those who are first ready say first. At

14 Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 67.

15 For a detailed defence of the relevance of Romantic conceptions of the imagination for contemporary educational practice, see my 'Pedagogy and the Romantic Imagination', *British Journal of Educational Studies* 55.1 (2008), 59–75.

16 Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 43.

even we write and cypher. In the afternoon we stand for places at spelling and I am almost always first.¹⁷

Most of the ingredients of a typical grammar school curriculum are highlighted in this letter: the study of classical texts, ciphering, writing, and spelling. *The Speaker: Or, Miscellaneous Pieces, Selected from the Best English Writers* (1774) was a volume used in many grammar schools of the time, surviving until after the middle of the nineteenth century (it was reprinted as late as 1858). This work comprised introductory essays 'On Elocution' and 'On Reading Works of Taste,' followed by a selection of prose and verse intended to provide practical spoken exercises to improve speech. Passages from the book would have been read aloud in class by Hazlitt and other pupils and, where possible, memorized, either then and there or later.

The import of all of this is perhaps more significant than it might seem, because Hazlitt in later life possessed a prodigious literary memory enabling him to quote at length (sometimes accurately, on other occasions, less so) without reference to the original source, an ability he might have begun to acquire at school in Wem, though it was probably encouraged at home too.¹⁸ The emphasis on memory shows the persistence of the 'mediaeval' element, inasmuch as a good memory was a highly valued cognitive faculty in that earlier historic period. Indeed, in the mediaeval era, the training of the memory, rather than the communication and understanding of information, was the hallmark of a good education.¹⁹ No wonder, then, that the elite schools and universities of Hazlitt's time, steeped in past verities, especially promoted this aspect of human learning, a tendency, we can infer, that was less pronounced at Hackney College, but not altogether absent.

Choosing Hackney

The decision in 1793 by Hazlitt's father to continue his son's education at Hackney College was informed by the former's wish that his son should train for the Unitarian ministry, an education only available in one of the Dissenting academies that had sprung up to meet precisely this need. But why the Rev. Hazlitt chose the New Unitarian College at Hackney for this purpose is not entirely clear. The biographer Ralph Wardle, in fact, suggests that it was an odd selection, given the poor reputation into which the college had fallen at the time. According to him, 'Many people looked upon it as breeding ground of sedition and heresy ... [and] even men who sympathized with the liberal objectives of the college deplored many of the policies of its "managers"; they charged that too much money had

17 Hazlitt, *Letters*, 45–6.

18 Wu's discussion of Hazlitt's early journalistic career as a parliamentary reporter refers to his 'vice-like memory' which enabled him 'to retain an hour's debate in his head before writing it up' (Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 145–6).

19 On this topic, see M. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and F. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1966).

been invested in buildings and too little in faculty, that its financial structure was unsound, that it overreached itself in its attempt to provide a broad education for its students.²⁰ Hazlitt's father's choice of Hackney may have been influenced by the fact that one of its founding tutors, the Rev. Richard Price, was a personal friend, as was its most famous teacher, Joseph Priestley. The knowledge that the college was less than five miles from London may also have been a consideration; Hazlitt, while in residence, could easily visit his older brother, John, who by this time was living in the capital. The fees, at £60 a year, were double Hazlitt Senior's annual salary, but his links with Price may have assisted him to obtain charitable funding to support his son's studies, although Stanley Jones conjectures that a wealthy relative may have helped out, while Wu identifies the Presbyterian Fund as the main source of assistance.²¹ About this, however, we do not precisely know either way.

What we do know is why an *academy* was selected. Hackney College, because it was a Dissenting academy, was a place where Hazlitt would receive the training his father desired for him. But, equally, like other middle-class parents of his time, the Rev. Hazlitt was anxious, we can reasonably guess, to obtain as good an education as possible for his son, which he rightly judged was more likely to be found in an academy. Because the academies required no oath of belief in any religious doctrine, and were open in theory to everyone, they increasingly became the schools of choice among relatively well-off middle-class families, eventually overtaking the popularity of the Oxbridge colleges.

Set up by leading Nonconformists in England, over seventy of these academies sprang into existence in the fifty years before 1800, though their history extends back as far as 1660.²² Constituting a heterogeneous collection of day- and boarding-schools, from the genteel to the rough, these later academies operated for varying periods of time in different localities in and around London (Cheam, Hoxton, Hackney, Peckham) and in the provinces (Wakefield, York, Daventry, Northampton, Warrington, Manchester). They differed markedly in size, some having fifty or more pupils, others fewer than twenty, with staff numbers proportionately low.²³

Their relatively small size did not inhibit the Dissenting academies' capacity for innovation. This was most evident in what they taught. Their curricula were 'relevant' and 'broad'; 'relevant' because they sought directly to engage with the realities of life, including its industrial, commercial, and political aspects, and

20 R.M. Wardle, *Hazlitt* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), 40. R. Watts quotes Burke on Hackney College's reputation as 'the new arsenal in which subversive doctrines and arguments were forged.' – see R. Watts, 'Revolution and Reaction: Unitarian Academies, 1780–1800', *History of Education* 20.4 (1991): 307–23, 321. Hackney's financial problems are also discussed in detail by Watts (311).

21 S. Jones, *Hazlitt: A Life* (1989; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 346; Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 61.

22 For details, see H. McLachlan, *English Education under the Test Acts; being the History of Nonconformist Academies, 1662–1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1931).

23 For details, see Irene Parker, *Dissenting Academies in England: Their Rise and Progress and their Place among the Educational Systems of the Country* (1914; repr. New York: Octagon Books, 1969).

'broad' because they included studies that went well beyond the basics and the classics, offering the first ever general education featuring modern scientific subjects. Raymond Williams, writing in 1961, was surely not exaggerating when he concluded that the Dissenting academies had 'worked out and put into practice a new definition of the content of a general education'.²⁴ In an earlier commentary, Fred Clarke was of much the same opinion, that the academies 'cut loose from the tradition of classical training and aristocratic accomplishments, looked at their own actual world with open eyes, and worked out a curriculum which would prepare for effective living in such a world'.²⁵ Some academies, additionally, were pedagogically highly progressive, the ones at Chelsea and Hackney, for example, using teaching methods influenced by Rousseau's *Emile*, a source on which I will base a significant conclusion in due course.²⁶

Mention of the Warrington and Hackney Dissenting academies draws attention to the significant personality of Joseph Priestley, who taught at both at different times in his career. In addition to being an eminent scientist, Priestley was a keen public advocate of educational reform at the turn of the eighteenth century, calling for more liberal views of education that would entail fundamental changes to the sort of curriculum on offer in the grammar schools. Besides wanting students to learn new subjects, such as history, chemistry, and economic and commercial geography, Priestley had pronounced views about methods of teaching, which he thought should encourage students to engage actively in their own learning, by discussing ideas in class and asking questions so as to examine all sides of an issue, including general theological and specific scriptural ones. For Priestley, education had a liberalizing and humanizing role, to be achieved by combining, as Watts puts it, 'literary and scientific excellence with a proper moral development'.²⁷

Hazlitt at Hackney

Hackney College was in its sixth year of existence when Hazlitt began his studies there. Housed in a large mansion which stood in fifteen acres of grounds, it accommodated pupils of all Christian denominations, despite its status as a training ground for Unitarian clergymen. Hackney's students preparing to enter the ministry followed a course lasting five years; lay students underwent a shorter, three-year programme.²⁸

24 R. Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), 133.

25 F. Clarke, *Education and Social Change: An English Interpretation* (London: Sheldon Press, 1940), 16.

26 My picture of the academies as being in the vanguard of curricular revolution is countered by others. For a contrary view, see, for example, M. Mercer, 'Dissenting Academies and the Education of the Laity, 1750–1850', *History of Education* 30.1 (2001), 35–58. Watts's 'Revolution and Reaction', however, comes down more on my side of the argument.

27 Watts, 'Revolution and Reaction', 314. For more detail, see R. Watts, 'Joseph Priestley and Education', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 2 (1983), 83–100.

28 This section of my essay is influenced significantly by H.W. Stephenson's *William Hazlitt and Hackney College* (London: Lindsey Press, 1930).

In its first year, the college enrolled a mere fourteen students, all of whom were residential. It is not clear how many were attending when Hazlitt joined, although, given that at least six tutors worked there in 1793, we can assume that they were responsible for the education of a larger number, possibly up to fifty. These tutors were first-rate; in Baker's words, 'men of great eminence and ability, the very elite of late eighteenth-century Dissent'.²⁹ Drawing chiefly on Hazlitt's correspondence, Baker and Paulin both provide a list of the members of staff he would have encountered.³⁰ In addition to the brilliant scientist, Priestley, and the inspired revolutionary, Price, the college's faculty at the time included Dr Gilbert Wakefield, a distinguished classicist; the expert Unitarian theologian, the Rev. Thomas Belsham; the famed preacher and mathematician, Dr Andrew Rees; and the prolific biographer, Dr Andrew Kippis.

Price defined the primary aim of the college as 'promoting such a spirit of inquiry and candour, as shall form worthy citizens for the state, and useful ministers for the church'.³¹ Elsewhere, writing in the college prospectus in 1787, he states that

the best education ... impresses the heart with the love of virtue, and communicates the most expanded and ardent benevolence; which gives the deepest consciousness of the fallibility of the human understanding, and preserves us from that vile dogmatism so prevalent in the world; which makes men diffident and modest, attentive to evidence, capable of proportioning their assent to the degree of it, quick in discerning it, and determined to follow it; which in short, instead of producing acute casuists, conceited pedants, or furious polemics, produces fair enquirers.³²

Hackney's aim to produce 'fair enquirers' found explicit expression in the ambitious curriculum it offered its students, which included a large number and wide range of subjects. Hazlitt, in fact, was spoilt for choice at the college, having access not only to the subjects that made up the then staple diet of a classical education, but also to ancient and modern geography, universal grammar, rhetoric and composition, chronology, civil and ecclesiastical history, the principles of law and government, mathematics, astronomy, natural and experimental physics and chemistry, logic, metaphysics, ethics, natural and revealed religion, theology, critical lectures on the scriptures, and elocution. For additional payment, he could also receive tuition in French and other modern languages, as well as in drawing.

Hackney's curriculum was not the only aspect of its profile which set it apart as a liberal seat of learning. As one would expect, given the presence of Priestley on its staff, whose pedagogical theories, as I mentioned earlier, encouraged student participation and debate, the college was daringly experimental in many other ways, with freedom of expression being central to its philosophy of

29 Baker, *William Hazlitt*, 25.

30 Ibid, 25; Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty*, 10–11.

31 Quoted in Wardle, *Hazlitt*, 63.

32 Quoted in Grayling, *The Quarrel of the Age*, 32.

teaching and learning. This philosophy encouraged a form of radical political intellectualism among students, who were encouraged by their tutors and guest lecturers (including, on one occasion, Thomas Paine) to challenge generally accepted opinion, an outcome, predictably, which offended that section of England's governing class at which much of this criticism was directed. Thus while the college was undoubtedly positioned at the cutting edge of education in late eighteenth-century England, it managed, not surprisingly, to bring down upon itself considerable opprobrium from those less liberally inclined observers who denounced it as a hotbed of sedition. Worse still, there is evidence that the college was suffering some internal indiscipline around the time Hazlitt began his studies there, some of which concerned allegations of moral laxity among a section of its boarders. As the biographer Catherine Maclean observes,

it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the students [at Hackney] needed the rein rather than the spur, that they were too full of crude life for those set in authority over them, that they were inclined to intervene mischievously in matters in which as yet they had no power to intervene usefully, and that the tolerant idealism and generous liberalism of the founders were being abused rather than used, to an extent that imperiled the usefulness and came near to endangering the existence of the college.³³

Of these matters Hazlitt tells us absolutely nothing in the first letters he sends home after joining the college, which are instead full of comments about how much he is missing his family and the studies he is embarking upon.³⁴ This absence in Hazlitt's early correspondence makes it difficult to judge with any certainty if the antics of some students at the college had any influence on the decision to withdraw him from its roll after only two years' study. We can speculate, however, that his father would not have been pleased by reports of its descent into immorality, and would not have wished his son to remain there long enough to be implicated in or influenced by such conduct. Another factor that we can be sure encouraged Hazlitt's father to withdraw his son prematurely was the knowledge that William had lost whatever vocation he once had to become a clergyman, an ambition that underpinned his family's intention to send him to the college in the first place.³⁵ There may have been a financial reason as well, given the difficulties the Hazlitts always had in finding enough money to pay the college's annual fees, despite the charitable assistance William enjoyed.

33 C.M. Maclean, *Born Under Saturn: A Biography of William Hazlitt* (London: Collins, 1943), 65. These irregularities are discussed in A. Steinhof, 'New College Hackney – A Dissenting Academy, 1786–1796' (University of Leicester MA Dissertation, 1978), 25–6, 79–80. Other problems at Hackney College are briefly discussed by Stephenson in *William Hazlitt and Hackney College*, 14–16

34 Hazlitt, *Letters*, 60–70.

35 Wu concludes that 'it was thanks partly to the college's openness to atheistic philosophies that Hazlitt lost his faith' (Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 60). Stephenson's *William Hazlitt and Hackney College* anticipates this conclusion (51–2).

Considering the brevity of Hazlitt's time at the college, there is not much to work with in terms of gauging its impact on him, although one incident – recounted in a letter to his father, dated 6 October 1793³⁶ – is very instructive, in terms of revealing much both about Hackney's stance on autonomous learning and about Hazlitt's already highly developed independence of thought and spirit. The incident is well known, and reported in all the standard biographies. It concerns Hazlitt and his classics teacher at Hackney, John Corrie, who, we are told, set him the task of writing within the week an essay on a given theme. At the end of this period, Corrie asked Hazlitt to read out his theme, only to be told by him that it had not been written. Corrie dismissed Hazlitt, demanding that he complete the theme within the hour. Hazlitt still dithered, being preoccupied with another more pressing demand on his time, leading him again to fail to complete the set task. Upon this, he was confronted by the annoyed Corrie who asked him, gently but sarcastically, if he had ever written anything in his life. Hazlitt replied that he most certainly had, producing on the spot the manuscript on which he had been working instead: a still incomplete 'Essay on Laws.' Instead of venting further irritation on the wayward Hazlitt, Corrie encouraged him to go away and finish the law essay, telling him to forget the theme he had originally set.

This incident is revealing in two obvious ways. First, it tells us a lot about the college's educational priorities, as mediated through Corrie's actions, which centred on seeking to meet the needs of students, sometimes even at the expense of tutors' expectations. Second, it tells us equally about the young Hazlitt's ambitions. While he was undoubtedly happy for much of the time to attend satisfactorily to the routine work demanded of him at the college, he had an educational agenda of his own, from which he was resolved ultimately not to be distracted by the requirements of book-learning as set down by others.

Apart from this story, we also learn, not surprisingly, that Hazlitt did well at Hackney, despite overworking, and engaging in private study on top of what was prescribed officially by his tutors.³⁷ This included ploughing through 'with great avidity' (xix, 304) William Godwin's classic study in philosophical anarchism, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) just then published, and the work of other 'modern' philosophers, such as David Hartley, whose 'associationist' psychological theories Hazlitt went on eventually to reject, and which at Hackney pushed him towards his own 'metaphysical discovery' of the 'natural disinterestedness of the human mind,' eventually published twelve years later as his *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805).³⁸ Hazlitt at this time no doubt also kept in touch with

36 Hazlitt, *Letters*, 60–1.

37 '[His] day begins at seven in the morning, and goes on, with little relaxation, except an hour and a half walking, until seven o'clock at night. It is difficult to see ... when he takes time to eat and drink ... Preparation for his lectures takes up much of his time. In addition, there is his writing; and he spends the last hour and half of the day, from half-past nine until eleven, which is supposed to be his bedtime, reading' (Maclean, *Born Under Saturn*, 72). By any estimate, this is a very long school day.

38 Just exactly when Hazlitt made his 'discovery' however is a matter of doubt. Baker suggests it happened while he was at Hackney (*William Hazlitt*, 28); Grayling concurs (*The Quarrel of the Age*, 43); while Wardle indicates it took place shortly after he left (*Hazlitt*, 47). Wu

revolutionary events as they unfolded in France, although, as Howe notes, his reflections on them do not feature at all in the letters he wrote home to his father, which contained 'a minimum of external allusion',³⁹ suggesting that, while he was not undisturbed by developments in Paris, he was not overly distracted by them from his own chosen studies.⁴⁰

Negative education

Mention of Hazlitt's philosophical opus, the *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, occasions a reflection about the nature and import of his short time at Hackney, which, I want finally to speculate, provided him with an education within which he could pursue his own enquiries 'negatively', alongside and sometimes despite those encouraged by his tutors. The link between this conclusion and Hazlitt's opus is Rousseau, specifically, the latter's landmark manifesto *Emile*, first issued in 1762. Hazlitt must have read this treatise while at Hackney because its argument about the nature of self-regard – which Rousseau insists is as necessary for thought and action as sympathy – is a central plank of his own 'metaphysical discovery'; in fact, Hazlitt explicitly acknowledges Rousseau in a footnote to the published version of the *Essay* (i, 26).

In *Emile*, Rousseau's notion of self-regard is linked to an argument about the nature of childhood and child rearing. He insists that children have their own egotistical ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling, which are innate and self-interested, and which should be allowed to develop naturally, without too much external interference. Providing young children with love and nourishment is fine, says Rousseau; imposition and direction isn't. The implications of this view for formal education are far reaching. In particular, it suggests that Locke's then widely regarded rationalist approach to teaching and learning, which rightly stresses the importance of learning from experience, wrongly over-emphasizes the work of the teacher, who is allocated too central a role in the educational process. Instead of seeking to imprint on the minds of children the habits of thinking that will help them to become adult gentlemen (Locke's position), Rousseau concludes that they should be allowed and encouraged by their teachers to discover for themselves, and in their own terms, the secret of true happiness. Hence his concept of a 'negative education', one in which pupils, rather than their teachers, significantly determine

refers to a letter written by Hazlitt to his father in October 1796, over a year after he had left Hackney, in which he reports beginning to write up his discovery (Hazlitt, *Letters*, 69–70), suggesting that he had not committed anything to paper about it while at the college (*William Hazlitt*, 63). My own view is that it is difficult to imagine that Hazlitt did not consider at all his thesis on 'disinterestedness' at Hackney, given the large amount of background reading he was undertaking on this topic in his final year there.

39 P.P. Howe, *The Life of William Hazlitt* (New York: Doran, 1922), 13.

40 However, in his essay 'On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth' (1827), Hazlitt declares that 'the French Revolution ... had considerable influence on my early feelings ... It was the dawn of a new era, a new impulse had been given to men's minds, and the sun of Liberty rose upon the sun of Life in the same day, and both were proud to run their race together' (xvii, 196–7). This sentiment is repeated in Stephenson, *William Hazlitt and Hackney College*, 40–1, 43–4.

the form, content, direction, and pace of their own learning: 'Let childhood ripen in children. And what if some lesson finally becomes necessary to them? Keep yourself from giving it today if you can without danger put it off until tomorrow.'⁴¹ This sentiment of Rousseau's is in accord with John Corrie's treatment of Hazlitt at Hackney, and with Hazlitt's approach to his studies there.

There is a further coincidence between Hazlitt's thinking and Rousseau's, to do with the latter's advocacy of 'time-wasting' in education: 'Dare I expose the greatest, the most important, the most useful rule of all education? It is not to gain time, but to lose it.'⁴² Rousseau's paradoxical approval of time-wasting derives entirely from his conviction of the importance of offering an unsystematic and informal 'negative' education to children, one in which the natural order of things takes precedence over teachers' urgings; urgings that may justifiably be ignored because they do not necessarily make the best use of scarce educational time. More than a hint of the value of 'wasting time' in this fashion is to be found in one of Hazlitt's famous remembrances, in the essay 'On a Sun-Dial'(1827):

What I like best is to lie whole mornings on a sunny bank on Salisbury Plain, without any object before me, neither knowing nor caring how time passes, and thus 'with light-winged toys of feathered Idleness' to melt down hours to moments. Perhaps some such thoughts as I have here set down float before me like motes before my half-shut eyes, or some vivid image of the past by forcible contrast rushes by me ...; then I start away to prevent the iron from entering my soul, and let fall some tears into that stream of time which separates me farther and farther from all I once loved! At length I rouse myself from my reverie, and home to dinner, proud of killing time with thought, nay even without thinking. (xvii, 245)

While Hazlitt might not much have 'killed time' in this way at Hackney, the approach he adopted to his studies there would have been approved of by Rousseau. Like the latter's *Emile*, he was led chiefly by his own curiosity, and was encouraged to do so by his tutors. The value of such a negative education also resonates with Hazlitt's views on book-learning, which we encountered near the beginning of this article. Like Rousseau, Hazlitt is eloquent in his denunciation of those forms of book-learning that fail to connect with real life experience. But unlike Rousseau, he does not take this to mean that children should largely be kept from reading books altogether till their pre-adolescent years. On the contrary, book-learning of a particular kind was, for Hazlitt, always essential learning, although not the only kind worth pursuing.

41 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, transl. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 94.

42 *Ibid.*, 93.

Conclusion

The New College at Hackney, although small, and in some ways, undisciplined, was probably the only educational establishment of its day at which the young Hazlitt could have thrived, and at which he could have chosen freely to work hard both at his own studies and those set down by his tutors. His gains from such industry were great, enabling, to borrow his own words, his 'first perilous and staggering searches after truth' ('On Novelty and Familiarity'; xii, 307). Not only did Hazlitt have access at Hackney to a form of general education unheard of outside the Dissenting academies, including at the two universities, he also had the opportunity to pursue to the full his own personal passions, which were already radical and oppositional. The college's extensive library amply supplemented the mass of literature available to him at his father's house, and there, as at home, he read voraciously, even obsessively. Hackney College, moreover, embodied a philosophy of educational practice that was wholly in accord with the adult Hazlitt's conception of what counted as being genuinely learned and educated.

In addition, at Hackney, Hazlitt came into contact with tutors who were all, if not men of genius, at least of significant intellectual calibre. Above all, the freedom of thought they encouraged, if it sometimes endangered the college's reputation and very existence, was the best thing in the world for a mind like Hazlitt's. All he needed at the time was to be left free to develop, without too much interference from those in authority over him; and this freedom, it seems, was enjoyed and taken full advantage of, with the result that the leaning of Hazlitt's special Dissenting intellect, if it was not initiated, was certainly confirmed during his brief spell at Hackney College.

In adulthood, Hazlitt reflected on his Dissenting background with a somewhat critical air, cautioning his son about the limitations of an education of the kind he had received in his formative years:

It was my misfortune (perhaps) to be bred up among Dissenters, who look with too jaundiced an eye at others, and set too high a value on their own peculiar pretensions. From being proscribed themselves, they learn to proscribe others; and come in the end to reduce all integrity of principle and soundness of opinion within the pale of their own little communion. Those who were out of it and did not belong to the class of *Rational Dissenters* I was led erroneously to look upon as hardly deserving the name of rational beings ... You will (from the difference of education) be free from this bigotry, and will, I hope, avoid every thing akin to the same exclusive and narrow-minded spirit.⁴³

On the one hand, this might suggest that Hackney's influence on Hazlitt was less productive than I have suggested. From another perspective, however, these comments of Hazlitt's are entirely in keeping with the college's historic mission to 'produce fair enquirers preserved from vile dogmatism'. Its tutors translated this

43 Hazlitt, *Letters*, 218–9.

aim into a culture of learning from which Hazlitt clearly derived great benefit, if mostly indirectly and 'negatively'. His 'negative' mode of learning at Hackney is perhaps why, in later life, he could not recall its positive effects unequivocally, for they were ambiguously rather than explicitly experienced at the time.⁴⁴

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44 I would like gratefully to acknowledge the helpful comments made on an earlier version of this essay by its two anonymous readers. In addition, both John White (Emeritus Professor of Philosophy of Education, Institute of Education, University of London) and Ruth Watts (Emeritus Professor of History of Education, School of Education, University of Birmingham) clarified my thinking about the significance of the Dissenting academies movement. Finally, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to the editor of *The Hazlitt Review*, Uttara Natarajan, for the considerable and always constructive advice she gave to me as I prepared the final version of my manuscript.

BOOK REVIEWS

Duncan Wu, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man*
pp. xxvi + 557. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press,
2008. Cloth, £25.

'Romanticism is where the modern age begins, and Hazlitt was its most articulate spokesman.' Duncan Wu's bold opening statement illustrates Hazlitt's emergence as a key protagonist of the literary culture of his day. It is now widely acknowledged that his writings on art, theatre, literature, philosophy, and politics not only influenced his contemporaries, but left an intellectual legacy that endures to the present day. The work of scholars such as Stanley Jones, David Bromwich, Michael Foot, Tom Paulin, Uttara Natarajan and Wu himself has done much to rehabilitate Hazlitt's reputation, and to establish him as a figure of considerable significance in the history of English Romanticism. This excellent new biography will do more to affirm the essayist's place among the great thinkers of the time. It is at once a lively and readable introduction to Hazlitt's life and writings, and a work of real scholarship. Filled with new material and fresh insights, Wu brings Hazlitt into sharper focus than ever before.

Despite the rapid advances in Hazlitt's reputation a number of awkward issues persistently confront his biographers. The vituperative nature of Hazlitt's writings on Coleridge, Southey, Stoddart and others; his reputation as a bitter misanthrope or, as John Carey has recently put it, as a man whose 'rancour was implacable';¹ and his behaviour in the Sarah Walker affair, chronicled in that most challenging of publications, *Liber Amoris*, continue to divide readers of Hazlitt's work. These have certainly had an impact on Hazlitt studies in recent decades: in 1994, for example, Sonia Hofkosh called into question the sexual politics of Hazlitt scholarship, criticizing the ways in which the Keswick incident and the Sarah Walker affair have been represented by Hazlitt's biographers; and in 1996 Hazlitt was virtually excluded from the popular student anthology, *British Literature 1780-1830*.² To

1 John Carey, 'William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man by Duncan Wu', *The Sunday Times*, 19 October 2008.

2 See Sonia Hofkosh, 'Sexual Politics and Literary History: William Hazlitt's Keswick Escapade and Sarah Hazlitt's Journal' in Mary A. Favret and Nicola J. Watson (eds), *At the Limits of Romanticism: Essays in Cultural, Feminist, and Materialist Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 125-42, and *British Literature 1780-1830*, ed. by Anne Mellor and Richard Matlak (Boston: Heinle, 1995). Wu takes issue with these publications in 'Hazlitt's Sexual Harassment', *Essays in Criticism* 50 (2000), 199-214.

this day Hazlitt remains a deeply controversial writer and Wu sets out to resolve these difficulties, confronting Hazlitt's detractors whilst refusing to gloss over his faults. Both bold and candid in his approach, Wu presents a shrewd and timely defence of one of England's great prose writers.

Wu has, of course, been responsible for many of the key developments in Hazlitt scholarship in recent years: *Selected Works* (9 vols, 1997), his edition of *The Plain Speaker* (1998), *New Writings* (2 vols, 2007), and numerous articles in newspapers and academic journals have done much to extend the parameters of Hazlitt scholarship. This scholarship informs the new biography, which takes full account of the history of Hazlitt studies, whilst adding much new material. Wu, for example, is Hazlitt's first biographer to present a rich and detailed account of the Rev. Hazlitt's work in New England and Maine in 1783-6. He illustrates the Rev. Hazlitt's significance as an early missionary of Unitarianism, explaining the ecclesiastical controversies in which he became embroiled, and describing some of the eccentric figures that the Hazlitts encountered. These were crucial formative experiences in the intellectual development of the essayist, and Wu pays close attention to the culture of Rational Dissent that continued to inform Hazlitt's work long after he had renounced a career in the Unitarian ministry and left New College, Hackney, in 1795. He draws out the parallels between the careers of father and son, showing how the fiery, polemical qualities of the Rev. Hazlitt's anti-ecclesiastical writings were central to his son's intellectual inheritance.

Indeed, the biography presents many new insights that will delight the Hazlitt enthusiast. Wu sheds fresh light, for instance, on Hazlitt's relationship with Walter Savage Landor, Thomas Moore, John Stoddart, Stendhal, Godwin, and Bentham, and also introduces new characters, not previously mentioned in Hazlitt's biography. His friendship with Sir John Soane, Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy and Vice President of the Surrey Institution where Hazlitt delivered his *Lectures on the English Poets* early in 1818, is detailed for the first time. Wu shows how Soane was the vehicle by which Hazlitt was introduced to the artist J.M.W. Turner, detailing how Turner and Hazlitt admired each others' work. For a short time, they were on familiar terms before falling out, probably over politics. Such findings are the fruit of more than a decade's painstaking archival research, bringing us closer to Hazlitt the man, and the age in which he lived.

Hazlitt's intrinsic modernity, his status as 'the first modern man', is also a central theme, and the one perhaps which can be most easily misunderstood. Wu's concern is not to denounce the claims of Hazlitt's predecessors to modernity, but rather to show how Hazlitt's writings, and the society and culture from which they emerged, foreshadow the developments in journalism, media, and psychology that are most commonly associated with the modern age. Hazlitt was at the forefront of a number of writers who benefited from the explosion of print culture in the early nineteenth century. There are technological reasons for this: the steam press, first patented by Koenig and Bauer in 1810 and used by *The Times* from 1814, replaced Lord Stanhope's less efficient model at the very moment that Hazlitt entered the world of journalism. But it is also the content of Hazlitt's writings, his fascination with human psychology and his openness about sexuality, that mark him as a peculiarly

modern writer. Wu builds on Tom Paulin's analysis of the Proustian qualities of Hazlitt's later essays, arguing that works such as *Characters of Shakespear's Plays* (1817), *Liber Amoris* (1823), and *The Spirit of The Age* (1825) are key landmarks of modernity. He shows Hazlitt to be way ahead of his time in his understanding of the human mind, the psychology of obsession, and the growing cult of celebrity. This is an important point and one worthy of emphasis as it highlights Hazlitt's significance to the modern world, and to a new generation of readers.

Yet for all Hazlitt's affinities to the modern age, Wu is very keen to present him as a man of his time, reacting spontaneously to events as they develop, and recording his impressions in the newspapers of the day. What emerges is a vivid and intense portrait of the journalistic culture of the early nineteenth century, a culture full of scandal, in-fighting, bitterness and tragedy. Hazlitt was in the thick of this and his essays take sustenance from the dangers that he inevitably faced. Whilst his career suffered badly from the attacks of Lockhart and Wilson in *Blackwood's Magazine*, Hazlitt was also quite capable of lashing out in frustration, and Wu is not slow to highlight his subject's flaws and mistakes. Hazlitt's religious apostasy in rejecting his father's Unitarian faith, and his behaviour in disputes with William Godwin and Francis Jeffrey are subjected to rigorous scrutiny. His contemporaries, too, are not spared from censure: Coleridge is described as a 'drug-addled Judas' (p. 224), whilst De Quincey is denounced as an untrustworthy 'opium-guzzler' (p. 344). Wu, like his subject, is an adept 'plain-speaker' and he succeeds in capturing a sense of the complexity of Hazlitt's character, whilst portraying the colourful literary and political worlds that he traversed.

Hazlitt's life was indeed remarkably rich and varied, and he demands much from his biographers. He was, like Joseph Priestley or Benjamin Franklin, a polymath of the first order. As a metaphysician, artist, lecturer, art and theatre critic, biographer, literary scholar, grammarian, political essayist, and travel writer, the range and depth of his intellectual pursuits can be daunting. *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* brings together the disparate strands of Hazlitt's life in a thoughtful and sensible manner. The Hazlitt that emerges is a man who passionately engages with the world around him. He is at once a lover of theatre, books, fives, boxing, alcohol, and women, an idealist who is steadfast in politics but an apostate in religion, a warm friend but bitter enemy, and a doting father but negligent and unfaithful husband. The gusto with which he wrote and lived is vividly conveyed in this new biography. Wu presents much that is new about Hazlitt's life, but perhaps more than this, he argues passionately for Hazlitt's contemporaneity. He places him alongside the reader, and shows his relevance to the modern age. In this Wu has done great service to his subject and this book will be of lasting importance to readers of Hazlitt's work.

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**Maurice Whelan, *In the Company of William Hazlitt:
Thoughts for the 21st Century***
pp. ix + 206. London: Merlin Press, 2005. Paper, £16.99

This book rests on the assumption that a great writer like Hazlitt will take on new significance over time, and that one of the ways this will happen is by reading his work in relation to texts and intellectual movements that were unknown to him, or known through some uncanny anticipation that can only be discerned in retrospect.¹ The idea of ‘company’ in the title is intended to indicate that this process is not to be conducted at a scholarly or forensic distance from Hazlitt’s writing. There is a biographical and an autobiographical element in Maurice Whelan’s book. He wants to remind us that a writer like Hazlitt can dwell intimately in our minds, that his works are not necessarily best understood through a critical method but by the way they stay with us in remembered fragments and repeated readings, giving us counsel in ways that are both welcome and unexpected.

This seems a promising enough starting point. We have learnt a lot in recent years though the work of critics like David Bromwich, Tom Paulin and Uttara Natarajan, about Hazlitt’s relation to the intellectual and literary traditions that preceded him. And Duncan Wu’s recent biography gives us the best account so far of Hazlitt and his contemporaries. In the process we have come to understand the depths and engagements of his style and his continuing preoccupation with questions of the self and power and passion. Hazlitt’s stature has grown the more we have discovered about him historically. While these discoveries can also be implicit arguments about his continuing relevance, a book that takes this theme as its starting point would be welcome. It might do for Hazlitt what Geoff Dyer has done so brilliantly for D.H. Lawrence in his book, *Out of Sheer Rage* (1997). And, of course, doing that would mean breaking with many of the current conventions of academic style and literary theorizing.

Maurice Whelan’s book sets out with something like this plan in mind. On the first page, using Hazlitt’s ‘My First Acquaintance with Poets’ as comparison, he describes his first encounter with Hazlitt’s writing at a conference on imagination and creativity within psychoanalysis. This gives a clue to what is to come. The idea of ‘company’ at work in Whelan’s book mediates a personal encounter with Hazlitt’s work through the profession of psychoanalysis. The special relevance that Hazlitt might have for thoughts for the twenty-first century – if there are to be such thoughts – is to be discovered by putting him in the company of psychoanalysts. So Hazlitt’s work is returned to a movement that had its origins in the late nineteenth century to discern what he might have to say to readers today.

There are some familiar moves here as well as some engaging suggestions. Whelan gives Freud’s famous comment that ‘the poets and philosophers before me discovered the unconscious’ an airing, and shows that Hazlitt was, like other

1 Editor’s note: Although the policy of the *Hazlitt Review* is to review recent publications on Hazlitt, an exception was made in the present instance, on the grounds that members of the Society might not be aware of the book, since it was not widely reviewed on its first publication.

Romantic authors, someone whose moral psychology gave room to ideas of unconscious motivation. That seems a credible argument, as does the claim that Hazlitt was a searching analyst of the unconscious forces that might be at work in his own behaviour. Whelan invites us to read *Liber Amoris* as a 'psychology text book' that can educate us about personal breakdown. It's good to have an author trained in psychiatric social work making this kind of recommendation and going on to recognize Hazlitt's courage in writing the book. But the argument that follows indicates some of the problems of applying a homiletic version of psychoanalysis to the book. Perhaps *Liber Amoris* is about an 'immature' love affair, one in which 'vast areas of each person must not be brought into play.' But, somehow, that seems beside the point. It might have been a good idea for Hazlitt and Sarah Walker to sit down and have a therapeutic conversation. The book's stringency arises from the compelling way it shows the impossibility of any such talk taking place. Even the idea of the book as a document about a breakdown seems oddly misplaced. Instead of therapy, what *Liber Amoris* offers as a remedy for a bad dose of *amour fou* is a strange kind of distancing, an attempt to treat what was for Hazlitt a very recent experience as though it was already posthumous. These thoughts connect the book with at least two essays by Hazlitt, 'Why Distant Objects Please,' and 'On Great and Little Things.' Both are intricate mediations on the emotional psychology of perception. Taken together, they form one of the best commentaries we have on *Liber Amoris*, although, of course, neither was written with that purpose in mind. They show, too, how, in this century as in others, Hazlitt's writing can form itself into new constellations and juxtapositions, unburdened by the requirements of doctrine or monumental form.

Some kinds of psychoanalysis might call distancing disavowal and argue that it needs to be overcome if the self is to integrate its experiences. These efforts at integration are central to the humane and thoughtful tradition of psychoanalysis that Whelan summons in this book. But it can't be taken for granted that the psychoanalytic names for experiences are necessarily the better names. Whelan is in danger of taking the value of certain therapeutic techniques too much for granted. He reminds us of some valuable things about Hazlitt's work – its courage, its intellectual dynamism, and its radicalism – but doesn't, in the end, tell us anything new. His book offers a series of starting points for a reading of Hazlitt's work without following any of them through in convincing detail.

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Gregory Dart, *Liber Amoris and Related Writings by William Hazlitt*
pp. 247. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2008. Paper, £12.95

In his introduction to this new edition of *Liber Amoris and Related Writings*, Gregory Dart proposes that Hazlitt's unnervingly 'honest portrayal of romantic obsession' offers 'the most powerful account of unrequited love in English literature' (1). It is a bold claim, and one which attempts to secure the status of a notoriously unstable text. Comprised of 'a paradoxical amalgam of the artful and the abject' (1), Hazlitt's painfully candid record of his relationship with Sarah Walker, the teenage daughter of his landlord, has provoked extremes of opinion since its publication in 1823. Its first reviewers quickly saw through the work's thinly disguised pseudonyms and identified Hazlitt as the author. Tory publications such as *Blackwood's* and *John Bull* mercilessly exploited the opportunity to land a blow upon a political opponent; in their eyes, *Liber Amoris* was 'an abomination', suffused with 'Cockney mawkishness' (7, 6). Furthermore, as Dart acknowledges, even contemporary discussions of Hazlitt's 'book of love' have struggled to free themselves from the legacy of this politically driven, moralistic censure. Recent editions of Hazlitt's work illustrate the continuing ambivalence towards *Liber Amoris*: Jon Cook's *Selected Writings* includes a brief excerpt, drawn from its conclusion; Tom Paulin and David Chandler's edition of *The Fight and Other Writings* omits it altogether.¹ Some balance has been restored by Duncan Wu's nine-volume *Selected Writings*, which includes the text in full.² Dart's achievement is to present *Liber Amoris* in a scholarly yet accessible format, alongside a selection of the essays Hazlitt worked on throughout the Sarah Walker affair.

When placed in the context of these 'related writings', *Liber Amoris* looks less like the anomalous product of 'a temporary personal crisis' (163); instead, it can be viewed as an amplification of the prejudices which appear throughout Hazlitt's work. This edition establishes the implicit connections between these essays: behind their 'fascinatingly disagreeable' meditations on 'social, sexual and intellectual difference' Dart identifies 'the image of Sarah Walker ... lurking in the background' (3, 4). Nowhere is this more evident than in 'The Fight' – an essay which, as this edition's footnotes illustrate, originally included several anguished references to Sarah Walker. The judicious restoration of the excised passages offers a glimpse into the way Hazlitt exchanged the 'bleeding words' (239) of romantic discourse for the blood spilled in the boxing ring: an attempt, perhaps, 'to cure himself of effeminacy' (3).

If, however, these writings represent 'ingenious attempts at self-therapy' (4), their success was dubious to say the least. Hazlitt remained 'bewitched by an alternating vision' of Sarah 'as an angel or a whore' (4). Dart negotiates the troubling persistence of Hazlitt's reversion to these stereotypes by exploring the

1 See *William Hazlitt: Selected Writings*, ed. Jon Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), and *The Fight and Other Writings*, ed. Tom Paulin and David Chandler (London: Penguin, 2000).

2 See *Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu, 9 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998).

aesthetic and literary contexts within which *Liber Amoris* can be placed. With reference to the work of Leigh Hunt, he locates Hazlitt's depiction of Sarah Walker in relation to a democratic, Wordsworthian aesthetic, within which she can be viewed as 'a creature of revolutionary potential' (10). Alternatively, one of the relatively few positive reviews that *Liber Amoris* received on its original publication considered the text as an extension of the Rousseauvian confessional tradition. However, the persistent misogyny which punctuates Hazlitt's self-lacerating narrative complicates his participation in the 'democracy of feeling' suggested by this context (6).

Acknowledging the limited success of the text's egalitarian intentions, Dart proposes that a more productive approach to Hazlitt's depiction of Sarah Walker is to 'concentrate less on S's character in the book, enigmatic and intriguing though it is, and more on her social and spatial position within it' (11). This insightful method relates Sarah's liminal presence in *Liber Amoris* to her ambiguous class status. Indeed, her interactions with Hazlitt take on numerous forms: she is alternately the lower-middle-class daughter of his landlord, his friend, his lover, and his servant. This multiplicity of identities emphasises the disorientating blend of emotional and commercial transactions upon which their relationship is based. Dart's historicist line of enquiry extends to a consideration of the text's lodging-house setting, which appears as a 'morally elusive space', 'somewhere between the polite and the plebeian' (8). It is within this site of indeterminacy that Hazlitt's own radically unstable work emerges.

Yet *Liber Amoris* cannot be traced to any single, stable point of origin. Typically for Hazlitt, it is an allusive, self-consciously literary work, which includes references to a range of authors. The plays of Shakespeare make frequent appearances (particularly *Othello*, with its theme of sexual jealousy); Jacobean dramatists such as Thomas Dekker, John Ford, and Thomas Middleton are well represented, and contribute to Hazlitt's understanding of the inconstancy of women; there are also allusions to European Romantic writers including Rousseau and Goethe, underlining this work's roots in the effusive literature of sentiment.

Another voice which unexpectedly appears in the text, courtesy of this edition's footnotes, is that of Hazlitt's wife, Sarah Stoddart Hazlitt. Her journal includes details about Hazlitt's use of prostitutes (including the rather disturbing information that he was frequently accompanied by his son during these visits). While Sarah Hazlitt's journal is available in William Hallam Bonner's edition of 1959, it seems a shame that more of it could not have been included here, under the heading of 'related writings'.³ Although this might have risked grounding *Liber Amoris* too firmly within the context of Hazlitt's personal life, it would also have offered an alternative vision of marriage and domesticity, and provided a sobering contrast to his excessive account of romantic obsession.

In recent years, *Liber Amoris* has become increasingly central to discussions of Hazlitt's work, and Dart's volume will certainly aid such critical investigations.

3 See Sarah and William Hazlitt, *Journals 1822-1831*, ed. by William Hallam Bonner, *University of Buffalo Studies* 24.3 (1959), 161-281.

Bearing this in mind, its list of 'Selected Criticism' could perhaps have included references to some of the more recent scholarship on *Liber Amoris* (the most contemporary sources cited are from 1998). This would certainly have complemented the insightful lines of enquiry outlined in the book's excellent introduction. Nevertheless, Dart has produced an accessible edition of this enigmatic text, which should appeal to general readers as well as a scholarly audience. *Liber Amoris* can no longer be considered the guilty secret of Hazlitt studies, and this edition will be instrumental in shedding further light upon this most beguiling of texts.

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SURVEY OF HAZLITT STUDIES 2008

This is a brief overview of new work on Hazlitt published in other academic journals in 2008.

Hazlitt figures prominently in the special topic of the *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 'Regency reading', whose treatment here is very much part of the prevalent cultural-materialist emphases on readers and the reading public in the Romantic era. Anthony John Harding's essay takes as its starting-point recent investigations of the expanding book trade and increased periodical circulation as a defining phenomenon of Romanticism.¹ In this context, Harding adduces Hazlitt, along with Coleridge and Shelley, in the argument that a number of Romantic writers developed an 'ethics of reading', which sought to involve the reader in the construction of meaning. Such an ethics drew both on the discourses of imaginative sympathy available from David Hume and Adam Smith, as well as on an eighteenth-century model of the impact of education on character formation. Harding juxtaposes the view of imagination in the *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* with Hazlitt's awareness, manifest in a number of essays, of the critical role of the press in disseminating ideas, to present in his writings, the notion of 'a radical, strongly engaged ethic of reading', in which reading becomes a process of active engagement, rather than passive receptivity.

In the same issue, Bonnie Gunzenhauser's essay, the second in a group of three, also treats Hazlitt's construction of his readership.² Focusing first on Hazlitt's charges of 'apostasy' against the first generation of Romantic poets, Southey, Wordsworth and Coleridge, Gunzenhauser asserts the significance of these charges, beyond politics, for print culture more generally. As a counter to such apostasy, she argues, Hazlitt turns to the reading public, which he sees as 'the group best able to realize the civic potential of literature and print culture'. In Hazlitt's new sense of the reader and the reading public, and his development, especially in *The Spirit of the Age*, of new tools for readerly judgement, Gunzenhauser, like Harding, finds that Hazlitt departs from the traditional

1 Anthony John Harding, 'An Ethics of Reading: A Conflicted Romantic Heritage', *Keats-Shelley Journal* 57 (2008), 45-65.

2 Bonnie Gunzenhauser, "'A very rational animal": William Hazlitt on the Romantic-Era Reading Public', *Keats-Shelley Journal* 57 (2008), 66-88.

relation between writer and reader, instead decentralizing the author and at the same time bringing the reader to the fore.

An altogether less benign view of what is clearly a modish topic, Hazlitt's relationship to 'mass culture', is presented in Gavin Budge's article on Hazlitt in *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*.³ Budge's emphasis is on the qualities of weakness or ill-health in Romantic delineations of artistic genius, as a counter to what he sees as the 'traditional' focus on Romantic celebrations of creative power. In Hazlitt's (and other Romantics') writings, Budge finds that the artist is characterized by a nervous 'irritability' which, self-motivating, is conceived of as opposite to the 'sensibility' that characterizes popular culture, and is dependent on perpetual external stimulus. In literature, this sensibility is associated with novels; in the visual arts, with the picturesque. The underlying model here is the Brunonian scheme (the theory of medicine propounded by the eighteenth-century physician, John Brown) of nervous under- and over-stimulation: artistic irritability exemplifies the first condition, popular sensibility the second. The instability of the distinction between the two, and the possibility of the first lapsing into the second, is a persistent source of anxiety in the Romantics' (and Hazlitt's) approach to creativity.

Marcus Tomalin's research continues to expand our understanding of an under-studied area of Hazlitt's thought: linguistics, especially the connections between philology and philosophy. In an essay in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Tomalin focuses on the complex intellectual relations between Hazlitt and the eighteenth-century philologist, John Horne Tooke, author of *The Diversions of Purley* (1786, 1798), in the context of a wider argument about the importance of late eighteenth-century linguistics to Romantic thought.⁴ Tomalin details Hazlitt's admiration of Tooke on two counts: first, his 'etymological' method by which indeclinable words may be broken down into verbs or nouns, and second, his arguments about linguistic abbreviation, which influence Hazlitt's own view of idiom as abbreviated language, accelerating communication. On both counts, Tooke's achievement, as Hazlitt celebrates and absorbs it, is the simplification of existing linguistic schemes. On the other hand, Hazlitt rejects Tooke's etymological method for abstract nouns, not only because it lacks the advantage of simplification, but also because it furnishes, for Tooke, the basis of an extreme empiricist position, antithetical to Hazlitt's: the denial of abstract ideas. Outlining Hazlitt's ambivalence towards Tooke, Tomalin elucidates, too, the latter's radical political agenda, an aspect with which Hazlitt, curiously enough, does not engage.

Finally, in the December issue of *Notes and Queries*, Stephen Burley contributes a small but useful detail to Hazlitt's relationship with another of his intellectual

3 Gavin Budge, "Art's Neurosis": Medicine, Mass Culture and the Romantic Artist in William Hazlitt, *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net* 49 (2008). <http://www.erudit.org/revue/ravon/2008/v/n49/017856ar.html>

4 Marcus Tomalin, "'The New-Invented Patent-Lamp of Etymology': Hazlitt, Horne Tooke, and the Philosophy of Language", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42.1 (fall 2008), 61-90.

sources, Walter Scott.⁵ Burley argues that the declaration, 'I am no politician', in the opening sentence of Hazlitt's *Political Essays*, is an allusion to the identical words used by a character (the Old Major) in Scott's *Old Mortality*. By repeating the phrase, which in Scott's novel is followed by a statement of royalist belief, to preface his own republican position – 'I have a hatred of tyranny and a contempt of its tools' – Hazlitt confirms at once both his opposition to Scott's politics and his admiration for Scott's novels, expressed elsewhere throughout his work.

5 Stephen Burley, 'Hazlitt's Preface to *Political Essays* and Walter Scott's *Old Mortality*', *Notes and Queries* 253.4 (December 2008), 437-9.



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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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