

THE HAZLITT REVIEW

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

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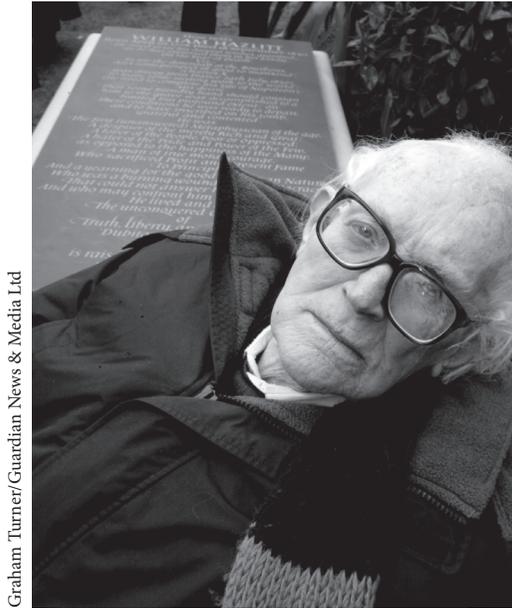
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MICHAEL FOOT (1913–2010)



Graham Turner/Guardian News & Media Ltd

Michael Foot at the unveiling of the Hazlitt's restored tombstone,

Michael Foot, founding president of the Hazlitt Society, died on 3 March 2010

***Ian Mayes* recalls Mr. Foot's devotion to Hazlitt**

I doubt that anyone was more pleased to hear of the revival of a plan to restore Hazlitt's grave in St Anne's churchyard in Soho than Michael Foot. His passion for Hazlitt went back to the time when he first told his father, Isaac Foot, a prominent and lifelong member of the Liberal Party, of his intention to join the Labour Party. His father wasted no breath on reproach or argument. 'Then you had better read Hazlitt,' he said, and presented Michael with a volume of Hazlitt's essays. Michael Foot liked to tell this story and I heard it from him when I went to Pilgrim's Lane to tell him of the progress of the appeal for the new headstone, and of how we hoped to provide a continuing focus for Hazlitt scholars and enthusiasts in the Hazlitt Society. This was to be formed initially from those who had donated to the appeal fund, and Michael eagerly signed a letter of thanks which we were able to send to all subscribers. I had never met him before. We sat in his study surrounded or cocooned by his library. Failing eyesight meant that he relied quite heavily on habit

and memory for the precise location of each volume. I was directed unerringly to pick out a couple for him, which he then scanned by moving the page backwards and forwards an inch or two from his eyes. He was, in his advanced age, I thought, a quite beautiful man, his skin stretched and transparent on his head, full of enthusiasm for anything that might stimulate the study or discovery of Hazlitt. The magic of his own first encounter with Hazlitt never left him.

A short sequence of events had led me to his home in Hampstead. I was the reader's editor, the ombudsman, at the *Guardian*, when in 2000 I read A. C. Grayling's biography of Hazlitt, *The Quarrel of the Age*, which had just come out. I realized I had never visited Hazlitt's grave, and under the influence of Grayling's book, I went to St Anne's but failed to find it. Grayling himself directed me to the right spot and subsequently we met and decided that the grave should be restored. That led us to Tim Miller who was a church warden at St Anne's and had been involved in the earlier attempt to restore the grave, and who therefore knew of Michael Foot's interest in the project which on that occasion had faltered and failed. Tim knew Lida Kindersley, the lettercutter, and she was quickly involved. There was a memorable day, it must have been in 2000, when the four of us, Anthony Grayling, Tim Miller, Lida Kindersley, and I, stood beneath our umbrellas in the rain in St Anne's and decided the restoration should and would go ahead. The appeal was conducted largely through the *Guardian*, most effectively by running edited extracts from Hazlitt essays in the space vacated by my usual column when I was away on holiday. Michael Foot was kept up to date on the progress of the work in Lida Kindersley's workshop in Cambridge, and with the equally painless progress of the appeal fund to its target of a little over £25,000. His association with this was invaluable.

Hazlitt Day and the unveiling of the restored grave on 10 April 2003, was a happy day for Mr Foot. In his own speech, following those of Anthony Grayling and Tom Paulin, he discovered a characteristic impassioned eloquence that seemed to sweep aside all physical frailty. Several hundred people were there to hear him, and to hear Bill Nighy read the restored inscription, and a brass quartet play the Marseillaise.

Happily, Michael Foot was able come to the first two of our annual Hazlitt lectures in Conway Hall, by A. C. Grayling in 2005 and Duncan Wu in 2006, but was too frail to attend more recently. One of our thoughts in asking him to become the founding president of the Hazlitt Society was that his name and Hazlitt's would be linked so long as the society exists, in recognition of a debt of honour.

Duncan Wu describes Mr. Foot's contributions to Hazlitt scholarship

The death of Michael Foot on 3 March 2010 was a cause of grief not just for those who believe in progressive causes, but for Hazlittians. Michael was a friend to Hazlitt until the end. He was also a passionate supporter of Byron, about whom he wrote an energetic and provocative book, *The Politics of Paradise* (1988), which

contains much on Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt. Other essential works must include his essay, 'The Shakespeare Prose Writer: William Hazlitt', in *Debts of Honour* (1980), as well as 'Stanley Jones's Hazlitt' and 'Jonathan Bate's Hazlitt' in *The Uncollected Michael Foot* (2003), which appear alongside essays on Montaigne, Wordsworth, Burke, and Coleridge.

The many tributes to Foot since his death have underlined his rhetorical expertise, his wit, and fearlessness in debate – all qualities he admired in Hazlitt. It wouldn't be inappropriate to think of him as a latter-day inheritor of Hazlitt's mantle. Like Hazlitt, Michael worked as a journalist, and never stopped composing commentaries of various kinds. He was always aware of the power of the printed word.

To Hazlittians, he was a first port of call for encouragement, scholarly insight, and good chat. There was a perfectly serious reason for visiting him, for he possessed many of the items that had been auctioned during the Second World War from the library of P. P. Howe. Howe's collection included not just first editions, but manuscript materials of all kinds, including correspondence, essays, and fragments. Michael secured many, though not all, of these – enough to make his collection of Hazlittiana one of the best in private hands. He once told me that, during the War, he protected it by storing it in the basement of the offices of the *Evening Standard*, where he then worked.

Michael and his wife, Jill Craigie, were friends with the Hazlitt scholar, Stanley Jones and his wife Dorothea, and throughout work on *Hazlitt: A Life* (1989), Michael had given Stanley full access to his collection, and some significant clues as to the solution to a number of scholarly conundrums. When, years later, I found myself at work on another biography of Hazlitt, he came to my assistance in ways too numerous to mention – providing me with regular lunches at his home in Hampstead, to which I would bring six-packs of Guinness, a favourite lunchtime tippie.

Michael was a scholar. In another lifetime, he would certainly have written more extensively, and in greater detail, about Hazlitt. As it was, I was the fortunate recipient of his insights into Hazlitt's relations with Stendhal, something that preoccupied Michael greatly. He had strong views too on Wordsworth's blackballing of Hazlitt, and Hazlitt's close but ultimately failed relationship with his father, the Reverend William Hazlitt. He would discourse on these topics with animation, citing chapter and verse when referring to the evidence. It was a *tour de force* of scholarly expertise.

That Michael was better known for other things goes only to underline what an extraordinary man he was. But I knew him best as a Hazlittian, and was fortunate in doing so. I always found it heartening that a man so frail in body could stand as the protector of the reputation of an almost-forgotten writer such as Hazlitt, and remember how moving I found it when, already in his ninetieth year, Michael unveiled Hazlitt's newly-carved tombstone in St Anne's churchyard, Soho. He was a great man and will be sorely missed, particularly by Hazlittians.

‘IN THIS INTOLERANCE I GLORY’

William Hazlitt (1737–1820) and
the Dissenting Periodical

Stephen Burley

I

In November 1787 the Hazlitts reluctantly set out for Wem. Having recently returned from the United States, Hazlitt Sr. had been trying to secure a ministerial appointment for several months, but his luck had not been good. His applications to the large, prosperous Presbyterian congregations in Norwich and Shrewsbury had been unsuccessful and he had been overlooked in favour of Pendlebury Houghton (1758–1824) and John Rowe (1764–1832), both young ministers in their twenties. Despite his important contribution to the Unitarian cause in Britain in the 1770s, and his pioneering work in New England and Maine, where he preached, lectured, and published on the doctrine of the divine unity, he began to realize that his career was in rapid decline. As a result, he had to accept the ministry of a small rural congregation in Wem in Shropshire. Reflecting on this experience in the late 1830s, Margaret Hazlitt wrote that ‘it was my father’s ill-fate to settle [in Wem] and bury his talents until old age prevented his further usefulness.’¹ William, in ‘My First Acquaintance with Poets’, confirms that his father ‘had been relegated to an obscure village, where he had to spend the last thirty years of his life, far from the only converse that he loved, the talk about disputed texts of Scripture and the cause of civil and religious liberty.’²

These first-hand accounts give an insight into what must have been an intense disappointment for Hazlitt Sr., but it would be wrong to accept Margaret’s suggestion that the move to Wem marked the death of his career. On the contrary, this essay argues that Hazlitt Sr.’s years at Wem from 1787 to 1813 were among his most productive. Not only did he produce three well-received volumes of sermons

1 Margaret Hazlitt, *The Journal of Margaret Hazlitt*, ed. Ernest J. Moyne (Lawrence, KA: Kansas University Press, 1967), 102.

2 William Hazlitt, *The Selected Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu, 9 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), ix, 98.

which enjoyed 'a rapid and extensive sale',³ but he was also a prolific contributor to dissenting periodicals. Drawing on new evidence, this essay discusses his previously unattributed writings for the *Protestant Dissenter's Magazine* and the *Universal Theological Magazine*. Despite his geographical isolation in rural Shropshire, the dissenting periodical offered Hazlitt Sr. a means of engaging with established currents of Unitarian thought, providing a much-needed outlet for his ecclesiastical scholarship and sharp polemical skills.⁴

The substantial body of extant writings by Hazlitt Sr. represents a largely untapped resource for Hazlitt scholars and much remains to be discovered about the intricate literary interplay between the careers of father and son. Ernest Moyne was the first scholar to pay detailed attention to Hazlitt Sr.'s career as a writer, establishing his contribution to Irish newspapers in the early 1780s, American journals later in the decade, and the *Monthly Repository* at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Over the last decade, Duncan Wu has been able to extend this scholarship considerably, writing a series of important essays on various aspects of Hazlitt Sr.'s life and career. Wu has demonstrated the full extent of Hazlitt Sr.'s work for the *Theological Repository*, *Boston Magazine*, *American Herald*, and *Monthly Repository*.⁵ More recently, I have been able to add to this by establishing Hazlitt Sr.'s authorship of three pseudonymously published volumes in the 1770s, *The Methodists Vindicated* (1771), *Letters to the Reverend Doctor Benjamin Dawson* (1771), and *Letters on the Worship of Christ, Addressed to the Rev. George Horne* (1776),⁶ whilst the present essay demonstrates that Hazlitt Sr. contributed to the *Protestant Dissenter's Magazine* and the *Universal Theological Magazine* during his years at Wem. Gradually, the parameters of an extensive literary career are beginning to emerge. He is now known to be the author of eleven separate volumes of printed publications, and to have contributed to at least seven magazines and newspapers in England, Ireland, and America.⁷ The new findings

3 G. P. Hinton, 'Obituary – Rev. William Hazlitt', *The Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature* 25 (1820): 677–9, 678.

4 I am very grateful to Isabel Rivers and Duncan Wu for their comments on earlier versions of this essay. I would also like to thank Dr. David L. Wykes and the trustees and librarians of Dr. Williams's Library for their help and support, and the Arts and Humanities Research Council for the funding that has enabled me to undertake this research.

5 Duncan Wu, "'Polemical Divinity": William Hazlitt at the University of Glasgow', *Romanticism*, 6 (2000), 163–77; 'William Hazlitt (1737–1820), The Priestley Circle, and *The Theological Repository*: A Brief Survey and Bibliography', *Review of English Studies*, 56/227 (2005), 758–66; 'The Journalism of William Hazlitt (1737–1820) in Boston, 1784–5: A Critical and Bibliographical Survey', *Review of English Studies*, 57/229 (2006), 221–46; and 'William Hazlitt (1737–1820) and the *Monthly Repository*: A Bibliographical Study', *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, 136 (2006), 133–43.

6 Stephen Burley, 'The Lost Polemics of William Hazlitt (1737–1820)', *Review of English Studies* 61/249 (2010), 259–75.

7 For a complete bibliography of all Hazlitt Sr.'s writings, printed texts and periodical publications, see Stephen Burley, 'A Bibliography of the Writings of William Hazlitt (1737–1820)', online at Dr. Williams's Centre for Dissenting Studies, March 2009,



Portrait of Rev. William Hazlitt, c. 1802, painted by his son (© Maidstone Museum and Bently Art Gallery).

at once illustrate his prominent role as a religious writer in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and call for a thorough reappraisal of the creative dynamics that inspired his son's more famous work.

Hazlitt Sr.'s contributions to liberal dissenting periodicals spanned almost half a century, beginning in the 1770s with his work for Joseph Priestley's *Theological Repository* and ending in 1818 with his last piece for Robert Aspland's *Monthly Repository*. This period witnessed a rapid proliferation of religious journals as the book trade responded to the variety of theological opinion that was emerging. Vigorous politico-religious debates inspired by contentious issues such as clerical subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles, the repeal of the Test and Corporations Acts, and calls for Catholic emancipation, took place both within the Church of England and in the ranks of dissent. Consequently, a rich and vibrant theological discourse emerges from religious periodicals that sought to reflect the vast array of Protestant opinion from High Anglicanism to heterodox dissent. Orthodox High Church sentiment, for example, was represented by the *British Critic* (1793–1826) and, later, by the *Orthodox Churchman's Magazine* (1801–8), whilst the views of evangelical Anglicans such as William Wilberforce and Hannah More found expression in the *Christian Observer* (1802–77). Although these magazines focused on a clearly-defined denominational identity, others were able to cross theological boundaries: the *Evangelical Magazine* was founded in 1793 by a group of evangelical Anglicans and Calvinist dissenters, and became the most widely circulated religious periodical in the country. In 1805 the founding of the *Eclectic Review* again demonstrated the degree of cooperation between orthodox dissent and the established church. The *Protestant Dissenter's Magazine*, which ran from 1794 to 1799 was equally inspired

<<http://www.english.qmul.ac.uk/drwilliams/pubs/William%20Hazlitt%20Sr%20Bibliography%20rev%20March%202009.pdf>>

by a spirit of ecumenical cooperation, and was produced by ministers of the three dissenting denominations, the General Baptists, Independents, and Presbyterians. The religious miscellanies of the period thus reveal much about the concerns and interaction between various denominational groups, providing a sharp insight into their corresponding theological and political identities.

As a Unitarian, Hazlitt Sr. contributed to liberal dissenting periodicals that were willing to publish radical and heterodox material. The circulation of these journals tended to be smaller than that of their orthodox and evangelical counterparts, but Unitarianism was well represented in secular as well as religious periodicals. Unitarians exerted substantial influence in the *Monthly Review* (1749–1845), the *Analytical Review* (1788–99), the *Monthly Magazine* (1796–1843), and the *Annual Review* (1802–8), and despite the fact that the expression of anti-Trinitarian views was prohibited by law until the Unitarian Relief Act of 1813, Unitarians were also well represented in religious periodicals of their own. Joseph Priestley's *Theological Repository* ran in two separate series (1769–71 and 1784–8), but its narrow appeal meant that it was a disastrous financial venture for both Priestley and the publisher, Joseph Johnson. In 1792 Benjamin Kingsbury and John Holland attempted to establish a more popular liberal dissenting journal in the form of the *Christian Miscellany; or Religious and Moral Magazine*, but this ran for only eight numbers before its collapse. The *Universal Theological Magazine and Impartial Review*, founded in 1804 by William Vidler (1758–1816), was yet another short-lived journal of radical dissent that experienced persistent financial and editorial difficulties until it was purchased by Robert Aspland in 1806. Aspland successfully transformed Vidler's troubled journal into the *Monthly Repository*, which went on to become a highly influential vehicle for Unitarian views. New evidence reveals that, with the exception of the *Christian Miscellany* (1792), Hazlitt Sr. contributed to each of the liberal dissenting periodicals listed above, and to the tri-denominational *Protestant Dissenter's Magazine*. For nearly half a century he contributed regularly to magazines and newspapers and, after settling in Wem in 1787, he drew increasingly on the culture of nonconformist periodicals in his attempts to engage with and respond to the contentious currents of religious thought in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁸

II

Hazlitt Sr. became a contributor to the *Protestant Dissenter's Magazine* in 1794, nearly seven years into his ministry at Wem. This was a monthly periodical that ran from January 1794 until December 1799 'with the Assistance of several Dissenting Ministers of the Three Denominations.'⁹ It was established at a difficult period for British dissenters. Following the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, and

8 My discussion of religious periodicals 1770–1820 is indebted to Francis E. Mineka's *The Dissidence of Dissent: The Monthly Repository, 1806–38* (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 47–84.

9 See title-page, *The Protestant Dissenter's Magazine*, 6 vols (London: T. Knott, 1794–9). (Hereafter *PDM*)

the subsequent counter-revolutionary campaign of William Pitt's government, they were increasingly subjected to the hostility and occasional violence of loyalist 'Church and King' mobs. In the preface to the first number of the magazine, the editors demonstrated a deep sensitivity to the repressive political climate and were keen to emphasize the quietist, loyalist principles of the new journal:

It is our wish, as loyal subjects of the KING, and true friends to our country, and the present constitution, to contribute our part towards promoting peace and good order. In the present crisis, when anything inflammatory would be peculiarly criminal, we feel ourselves more particularly bound, in duty to ourselves and the public, to avow our determination to admit of nothing of this kind into our work.¹⁰

In addition, a cautionary note to prospective contributors was added, warning that 'inflammatory' articles of a political or theological nature would not be welcome.

Hazlitt Sr. can be identified as a contributor to the *Protestant Dissenter's Magazine* from a letter written to him by Joshua Toulmin on 9 May 1797, published in the late 1830s as part of 'The Hazlitt Papers' in *The Christian Reformer*. Here Toulmin, who was one of the magazine's principal editors, discusses the 'Memoirs of our respected friend Mr. Wiche' and confirms that this article was written 'by your pen'. He writes, 'They have at last, by the means of his son-in-law, Mr Evans, appeared, with a print, in the Protestant Dissenter's Magazine for April ... The article, you will perceive, is chiefly formed by your pen.'¹¹ In addition to the memoirs of John Wiche, a series of four articles on the subject of ministerial ordination appeared under the initials 'W. H.', all contributed by Hazlitt Sr. The fact that we can establish that Hazlitt Sr. was a contributor to the *Protestant Dissenter's Magazine*, that no other liberal dissenter wrote under the initials 'W. H.' until William Hincks began contributing to the *Monthly Repository* in 1817, and that the contributions all examine the subject of ministerial ordination, a key (and controversial) concern, as I set out below, of Hazlitt Sr. during his time at Boston in the mid-1780s, are unmistakable proofs of authorship.

In spite of the precautions of the editors, the political tenor of the magazine was liberal and the contributions of Hazlitt Sr. were deeply resistant to the editorial policy set out in the magazine's preface. His writings for the *Protestant Dissenter's Magazine* demonstrate his refusal to submit to the repressive political climate of the 1790s, instead presenting provocative and controversial arguments urging radical reform of the dissenting ministry and celebrating the political dissidence of his deceased friend, John Wiche. The reformist, egalitarian tenor of his contributions was decidedly at odds with the conservative, loyalist spirit of the times. His first contribution, entitled 'Essay on Ordination', appeared in two separate numbers in

¹⁰ PDM 1 (1794), 3.

¹¹ *The Christian Reformer*, 5 (1838), 511. The memoir of John Wiche in the *Protestant Dissenter's Magazine* has frequently been attributed to Toulmin (see for example the entry on Wiche in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*). Toulmin's letter of 9 May 1797 clearly establishes, however, that Hazlitt Sr. was the author.

December 1794 and January 1795, and it aroused such controversy that he was compelled to write 'A Defence of the Essay on Ordination', which was published in two parts in May and June 1795. His opening essay argued passionately for the abolition of the practice of ministerial ordination. Using a wealth of scriptural evidence, he set out to prove that ordination 'cannot possibly be obligatory upon Christians.'¹² In effect, Hazlitt Sr. was proposing the abolition of a sacred ritual that would divest the clergy, both dissenting and Anglican, of much of its inherent power and authority. Instead he posited a more egalitarian system whereby a clergyman's power would be derived directly from the congregation, which would be invested with the authority to appoint and dismiss the minister as it saw fit. His argument was not, however, a merely theoretical foray into an aspect of ministerial life. Rather it was the culmination of many years' effort in Boston in the mid-1780s where he worked closely with James Freeman (1759–1835) to undermine the authority of the Episcopal Church in order to convert the King's Chapel, Boston to Unitarian forms of worship.

Hazlitt Sr.'s involvement with the King's Chapel began on 15 May 1784, at a meeting of the Boston Association of Ministers. Here he declared that 'the people, or the congregation, who chose any man to be their minister, were his proper ordainers.'¹³ This immediately secured him the friendship of Freeman, a lay reader at the King's Chapel who was seeking to be appointed as minister. A brilliant scholar who had graduated from Harvard in the late 1770s, Freeman was frustrated that his appointment as the chapel's minister was being blocked by Bishop Seabury, who was opposed to Freeman's Arian theology. From May 1784 onwards, Hazlitt Sr. worked closely with him, encouraging him to revise the chapel's Trinitarian liturgy and adopt a prayer-book modelled on Theophilus Lindsey's Essex Street Chapel edition of 1774. Years of agitation finally resulted in the severance of the chapel's affiliation with the Episcopal Church and Freeman was ordained on 18 November 1787.¹⁴ Hazlitt Sr. played a central role in this ecclesiastical revolution and, when writing for the *Protestant Dissenter's Magazine* in the 1790s, he was drawing heavily upon his practical experiences of democratic models of church governance in Boston.

In the first part of the 'Essay on Ordination', Hazlitt Sr. begins his critique of standard practices of ordination, employing a range of scriptural evidence in support of his argument. He writes that ordination 'has no part in the Christian scheme' and suggests that the honour and reputation of the ministerial profession would be greatly advanced 'by divesting it of every thing meretricious, and exhibiting it before men in its amiable, in its attractive, in its unrivalled simplicity'.¹⁵ It is, however, in the second part of the essay that the rhetorical power of Hazlitt Sr.'s essay begins to emerge:

12 *PDM* 1 (1794), 498.

13 *Monthly Repository* 3 (1808), 303.

14 For a detailed account of Freeman's appointment, see Duncan Wu, 'The Journalism of William Hazlitt (1737–1820) in Boston', 226–8.

15 *PDM* 1 (1794), 493.

Such are the palliatives by which the advocates of ordination endeavour to exculpate themselves! Such is the foundation on which this darling innovation rests! What then shall I say more? Let me only further appeal to you, is it not justly conceived to be the peculiar glory and felicity of that dispensation which we enjoy, that by it we are released from the cumbrous load of ceremonies which neither ‘our fathers nor we were able to bear’? ... That it despises the pageantry of human ornament? That it disdains to avail itself of the ignorance and incredulity of mankind? That it addresses itself to the noblest powers of our nature? – challenges enquiry – defies confutation – and irresistibly arrests the conviction of those who impartially examine it? – Why then should we seek to enlist into the service of such a dispensation? ... What has been the experience of every age from the commencement of Christianity to the present? Has not every attempt to brighten its lustre, served rather to obscure and disfigure it?¹⁶

These lines capture a sense of the combative polemical vigour of Hazlitt Sr.’s prose. He employs a range of rhetorical devices to invest his writing with a spontaneous, extempore quality that was central to his son’s literary inheritance. After a sequence of rhetorical questions and anaphoric clauses, he rejects more formal punctuation and uses instead a series of dashes to mark out the breaths in the line. The oratorical vigour, the sophisticated awareness of technique and effect, give an indication of his sharp polemical skills. But despite the vehemence of Hazlitt Sr.’s writing, some of the magazine’s readers from the old dissenting denominations were reluctant to embrace such radical, heterodox views. In the following months, two contributors submitted their criticisms: in February 1795 ‘some strictures’ on the ‘Essay on Ordination’ were published by J.T.,¹⁷ and in March ‘The Enquirer’ condemned ‘your warm Correspondent’ and his ‘latent intolerance of temper’.¹⁸

This opposition only served to provoke a more spirited response from Hazlitt Sr. in the form of his ‘Defence of the Essay on Ordination’, published in the summer of 1795. This is a striking piece of prose, characterized by an accumulating sense of indignation that erupts in the final paragraphs. He begins by responding to his two adversaries, satirically dismissing J.T.’s criticism (‘Alas, the foundation of this ... is without foundation’¹⁹), before moving on to address the strictures of the Enquirer: ‘The Enquirer smiles at the warm reflections of the Essayist, the Essayist in return smiles at the logic of the Enquirer.’²⁰ The essay, however, builds towards a crescendo in which Hazlitt Sr. takes issue with the Enquirer’s accusation of intolerance:

... is it intolerant to rescue mankind from the cumbersome trappings with which they have been loaded? To lay the ax at the root of the usurpations of

16 *PDM* 2 (1795), 21.

17 *Ibid.*, 75. J.T. may well have been Joshua Toulmin, the General Baptist minister of Taunton who was one of the magazine’s editors, and a close friend of Hazlitt Sr.

18 *Ibid.*, 115.

19 *Ibid.*, 234.

20 *Ibid.*, 235.

the priesthood? Aye there is the rub – this it is which rings the bells backwards – be it so – in this intolerance I glory – my great Lord and Master was here as intolerant as myself – and countenanced, by his example, the censures of the craft are to me like the sounding of brass and the tinkling of cymbals.²¹

Once again, the repeated dashes illustrate the spontaneous forms of oral expression that Hazlitt Sr. is drawing upon: the breathless immediacy of 'The Defence' is indebted to the rhetorical strategies of the eighteenth-century dissenting sermon. The passage also appears to draw on the conventions and language of the dramatic soliloquy: the theatrical 'Be it so', enveloped within the fragmenting syntax, shows an astute awareness of stage oratory. This is further developed through the richly allusive qualities of the passage. There are the biblical references to Matthew 3:10 ('And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees'), and Paul, the most plain-speaking of the apostles, in his letter to the Corinthians 1:13 ('I am become as sounding of brass or a tinkling cymbal'). But Hazlitt Sr. is also working within a secular as well as sacred frame of reference: he alludes to *Hamlet* ('Aye there is the rub'), and also, it seems, to John Cleveland's poem 'The Rebel Scot' (1644). Cleveland's poem reads, 'Ring the bells backwards. I am all on fire, / Not all the buckets in a country quire / Shall quell my rage.' Thus Hazlitt Sr. is perhaps making a self-conscious reference to the incendiary qualities of his work.

The passage ends with a bold embrace of its own provocative radicalism. The phrase 'in this intolerance I glory' is suggestive of Hazlitt Sr.'s unyielding determination to express his opinions freely, regardless of the political climate of the times or the views of his colleagues in the dissenting ministry. In July 1795, the *Enquirer*, still smarting from Hazlitt Sr.'s latest contribution, wrote, 'If your correspondent W.H. who wrote the 'Essay on Ordination', was warm in his former effusions, in his last he is fiery and flaming.'²² This acknowledgement of the inflammatory fervour of Hazlitt Sr.'s prose was in fact the final word in the controversy.

Hazlitt Sr.'s last contribution to the *Protestant Dissenter's Magazine*, the memoir of John Wiche (1718–94) mentioned in Toulmin's letter, appeared nearly two years later in April 1797. He and Wiche had been colleagues in the dissenting ministry in Maidstone in the 1770s, Wiche working as minister of the General Baptist congregation whilst Hazlitt Sr. preached to the Presbyterians in the town. Wiche died in Maidstone on 7 April 1794 and some time afterwards Hazlitt Sr. composed the biographical memoir of his old friend for the *Protestant Dissenter's Magazine*. The article that appeared in 1797 is a celebration of Wiche's theological heterodoxy and political dissidence. Toulmin, who inserted a brief prefatory letter, drew attention to the unusual qualities of the memoir. He notes that it 'furnish[es] a more *characteristical* account, than biographical panygerics [sic] frequently supply'.²³ Hazlitt Sr. was keen to present a candid and intimate memoir of Wiche, but in addition, the portrait that appeared had considerable political resonance in the 1790s.

21 Ibid, 236.

22 Ibid, 284.

23 *PDM* 4 (1797), 121.

Wiche is portrayed as ‘a most strenuous advocate for civil and religious liberty’, a man with an ‘invincible attachment ... to truth, liberty, and the best interests of the whole human race.’²⁴ His commitment to libertarian values is starkly contrasted with the tyrannical, corrupt practices of British governments throughout his lifetime. Wiche’s belief in the need for urgent and comprehensive political reform is expressed through extracts from his correspondence. In a letter of 29 September 1780, for example, Wiche writes, ‘I must say, parliaments, of late, have given me so little satisfaction, they have appeared so greedy and sordid, that ... nothing short of ruin will be our cure.’²⁵ The theme of parliamentary corruption is combined with similar condemnation of the pernicious influence of government ministers. Hazlitt Sr. writes that ‘during the American war, he [Wiche] could never speak, without horror, of the infatuated ministers in whom it originated.’²⁶ But Hazlitt Sr. was not content simply to historicize the political commentary within the memoir: as he progresses towards Wiche’s death in 1794, the discussion of ministerial tyranny moves ever closer to the present moment and to the repressive measures of William Pitt’s presiding administration. Hazlitt Sr. uses Wiche’s correspondence to highlight the despotic nature of any attempt ‘to restrain the liberty of the press.’ At a time when authors and publishers feared the threat of legal prosecution, Hazlitt Sr. was keen to denounce any attempt to curtail freedom of expression:

About a month before he [Wiche] died, and when under the most serious conviction of his speedy dissolution, he expressed to a friend as anxious a concern for the cause of liberty as at any period of his life ... and mourned over the grovelling state of stupidly tasteless despots, and persecuting wickedness in high places ... His indignation was ever roused to an high pitch at any attempt to restrain the liberty of the press. ... He abhorred this engine of despotism, exercised by kings and priests, and justly imputed to the present ignorance, slavish acquiescence, and wretchedness of the world.²⁷

In 1794 the magazine’s editors had expressed their determination that ‘all controversy of *the present state of affairs* will be excluded’, but this injunction is here circumvented by Hazlitt Sr. as he uses the biographical memoir of his deceased friend to express displeasure at the repressive measures enacted by Pitt’s government.

Thus, the memoir of John Wiche reveals much about Hazlitt Sr.’s concerns in the 1790s. Despite the best efforts of the magazine’s editors, provocative political comment and spirited controversial writing would characterize his contributions to the *Protestant Dissenter’s Magazine*. Daniel White has recently argued that the *Protestant Dissenter’s Magazine* ‘can be read as an epitaph to the active phase of late-eighteenth-century dissenting public life’, seeing it as an embodiment of the

24 Ibid, 128.

25 Ibid, 127.

26 Ibid, 127.

27 Ibid, 128.

'increasingly retrospective' nature of liberal dissent at the end of the century.²⁸ In many respects this is true, but Hazlitt Sr.'s contributions suggest that the magazine was a vehicle for liberal political commentary despite its cautious editorial policy.

Like several dissenting periodicals before it, the *Protestant Dissenter's Magazine* was a transient enterprise, finally folding in 1799. But in its place other journals emerged that proved to be more successful channels of liberal dissenting thought, allowing Hazlitt Sr. and his colleagues to revive and sustain the discourses and traditions of Protestant dissent in the early nineteenth century.

III

The *Protestant Dissenter's Magazine* had been a journal of broad liberal dissent, representing the opinions of the three denominations, as well as becoming a vehicle for the Unitarian views of Hazlitt Sr. and others. There had been, however, no specifically Unitarian journal since the unsuccessful attempts of Kingsbury and Holland to establish the *Christian Miscellany* in 1792. It was left to William Vidler early in the nineteenth century to begin the revival of the Unitarian periodical. Vidler was an eccentric character whose authority in religious matters was not helped by the endless oscillation of his theological views. In addition, he is described as having 'excelled in nothing so little as in the office of editor of a magazine'.²⁹ A self-educated man who in early life had been apprenticed to a stonemason, he began his career as an editor in 1797 with the publication of the *Universalist's Miscellany; or Philanthropist's Museum*. In 1802, however, he became a Unitarian and changed the title of the journal to the *Universal Theological Magazine: Intended for the Free Discussion of Religious Subjects* and then, two years later, to the *Universal Theological Magazine and Impartial Review*. As Francis Mineka observes, Vidler's 'conversion to Unitarianism lessened the circulation of the periodical, but by moving it into the orbit of that denomination he acquired abler contributors'.³⁰ One of those new contributors was Hazlitt Sr.

This is confirmed by Hazlitt Sr.'s first contribution in January 1805. Here he congratulated Vidler 'on the appearance of your Magazine', adding that, 'To testify my approbation of such a work, I propose to be an occasional contributor'.³¹ The article that followed, entitled 'Of the Fallen Angels' and signed 'W. H.', was reprinted as the final essay in Hazlitt Sr.'s *Sermons for the Use of Families* (1808).³² In total, he made four contributions to the magazine under these initials before Robert Aspland bought Vidler's periodical and transformed it into the *Monthly Repository*. As Duncan Wu has shown, Hazlitt Sr. continued to contribute pieces to Aspland's

28 Daniel E. White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 87.

29 *Monthly Repository* 12 (1817), 134.

30 See Mineka, *The Dissidence of Dissent*, 81.

31 *Universal Theological Magazine and Impartial Review* 3 (1805), 10. (Hereafter *UTM*)

32 William Hazlitt, *Sermons for the Use of Families*, 2 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1808), II, 350–67.

journal from its inception in 1806 until 1818, only two years before his death.³³ The new findings, therefore, ought to be read alongside his twenty-one contributions to the *Monthly Repository* as the forerunners to this larger body of work.

Hazlitt Sr.'s writings for the *Universal Theological Magazine* demonstrate a deep concern to undermine and reject Calvinist theology. As a young student at Glasgow University in the late 1750s, he had turned away from his parents' orthodox Calvinism as a result of his exposure to the Hutchesonian philosophy that had taken hold of the university.³⁴ Instead he was an early convert to Unitarian theology which focused on the benevolence of the deity, rather than on the sinfulness of man and the pains of hell. By the early 1800s, Hazlitt Sr. had for many decades worked to expose Calvinist theology as a corruption of Christianity and his writings for the *Universal Theological Magazine* are part of a broader effort to restore Christianity to its primitive, apostolic state, and cleanse it of doctrinal corruptions and practices.

His first essay, 'Of the Fallen Angels', takes as its theme the reference in the Epistle of Jude to the punishment of the fallen angels who rebelled against God's authority in heaven: 'And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, until the judgment of the Great Day.'³⁵ Hazlitt Sr. rejects the standard Calvinist interpretation, instead presenting an alternative Unitarian exegesis based on evidence from the Old Testament book of Numbers where Moses sends twelve spies into the land of Canaan, ten of whom are unfaithful and return with a false report. According to Hazlitt Sr. these men are the 'angels' referred to by Jude who 'lost their first estate'. Using a wealth of scriptural evidence to support his hypothesis, he demonstrates that in the New Testament the word 'angel' is used to describe humans as well as 'superior beings'. In addition to the obviously anti-Calvinist thrust of Hazlitt Sr.'s argument, his resistance to the Miltonic myth of the fallen angels is also evident. He argues that if 'so signal a catastrophe' had occurred, as 'Milton, and the majority of Christians' believe, then surely these events would have been described in detail by a number of the apostles, and not related in so cursory a manner by Jude. Hazlitt Sr.'s Unitarian exegesis argues for a rational study of the Bible and cautions against popular reinterpretations of scriptural events. He thus explains his alternative reading of Jude's epistle, working against the Miltonic myth of the fallen angels whilst attacking the Calvinist emphasis on God's wrath and eternal punishments.

'Of the Fallen Angels' is of particular interest for its engagement with, and resistance to Milton's representation of biblical history in *Paradise Lost*. Hazlitt Sr.'s rejection of Milton ought to be seen as part of a broader attack on the primacy of secular literature in the early nineteenth century. It appears that he had a deep and

33 Duncan Wu, 'William Hazlitt (1737–1820) and the *Monthly Repository*', 133–43.

34 For a detailed account of the dominance of Francis Hutcheson's ideas at Glasgow University in the eighteenth century, and of Hazlitt Sr.'s experiences there in the 1750s, see Duncan Wu's "'Polemical Divinity": William Hazlitt at the University of Glasgow'. For the importance of Hutcheson's ideas to Hazlitt the essayist, see Tom Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style* (London: Faber, 1998), 64–90.

35 *UTM* 3 (1805), 10.

astute knowledge of classical and English literature and his 'Anecdote of Sterne', published in the *Monthly Repository* for July 1808, demonstrates his genuine enthusiasm for the eighteenth-century novel.³⁶ His contributions to the *Universal Theological Magazine*, however, reveal an anxiety about the relegation of sacred literature to a secondary or inferior status below the secular classics. He ends 'Of the Fallen Angels' with a passionate plea for the primacy of biblical criticism, combining this with a vehement condemnation of the vogue for literary, rather than scriptural or ecclesiastical scholarship:

But those who inconsiderately accustom themselves to farther doctrines upon the scriptures which are totally foreign to them, and to pronounce certain passages contained in them, explained according to the inventions of men, irrational, absurd, and derogatory to the divine wisdom, should learn, from what has been said, not to be so rash and precipitate, but to be diffident of their false guides, to lay aside their random guesses, and make a fair and full inquiry; and they will soon be convinced that they have been much mistaken. Let them only consult this book [The Bible], as the admirers of Shakespear consult him when they meet with any intricate passages in his works, or, as the admirers of Homer, consult him when they ransack whole libraries, to ascertain which is to be preferred as genuine, amongst many various readings. Let them consult this book with that eager attention they would bestow upon any other book in which they were assured that their own essential interests were deeply concerned.³⁷

Hazlitt Sr. took great pleasure in reading secular literature and there can be little doubt that his own literary tastes helped to shape and foster his son's enthusiasm in this respect. But after William's rejection of a career in the dissenting ministry in 1795, and his developing passion for art, literature and metaphysics, Hazlitt Sr. became increasingly disillusioned by the secular nature of his son's life and work.³⁸ It is impossible to determine whether the above passage is an attempt to address William's neglect of Christian revelation, but it certainly responds to a broader trend of secular scholarship in which William was involved.

'Of the Fallen Angels' is one of three contributions by Hazlitt Sr. that address what he considered to be Calvinist misrepresentations of scriptural evidence. The other two pieces, 'On the Popular Notion of the Devil' and 'On the Torments of Hell', published in March and April 1805, continue his ongoing effort to expose the shortcomings of a Christianity founded on powerful conceptions of human evil and divine punishment. He describes the popular notion of the devil as 'so

36 *Monthly Repository* 3 (1808), 376-7.

37 *UTM* 3 (1805), 16-17.

38 For an account of Hazlitt Sr.'s sense of intense disappointment following his son's rejection of a career in the Unitarian ministry, and the enduring breach that it caused between the two men, see Andrew Kippis's letter to Hazlitt Sr. of 14 August 1795, published in *The Christian Reformer*, 5 (1838), 763, and Hazlitt's autobiographical account of 'the schisms, coldness, and incurable heart-burnings in families' in his essay 'On the Knowledge of Character' (*Selected Writings* vi, 179).

shocking to common sense, and so destitute of any foundation in Scripture, that we may well wonder how it can still obtain so general a reception amongst Christians.³⁹ He demonstrates that the word 'devil' 'literally means the *false accuser*, and *his messengers, spies or informers*,⁴⁰ arguing that a belief in an all-powerful, supernatural figure is a vulgar superstition. The existence of evil in the world, he urges, is part of God's providential plan for mankind and is not the product of the malevolent machinations of evil spirits. In developing the argument he also reveals the fundamental materialism of his Christian faith which was no doubt indebted to Joseph Priestley's writings of the 1770s.⁴¹ Hazlitt Sr. portrays the popular notion of the devil as part of a larger 'groupe [sic] of other curious particulars, respecting essences and substances, things which mystically are and rationally cannot be at the same time.'⁴² 'On the Popular Notion of the Devil' is notable for its clear rejection of immaterialist ideas, its anti-Catholicism, anti-Calvinism, and its strident attack on the reformed Anglican Church. It is not, however, simply a polemical argument exposing the corruptions of Christianity. Hazlitt Sr. concludes with a practical point about the relentless progress of gospel truth:

notwithstanding the pride and selfishness of false brethren, and their contemptuous treatment of sufferers who are thrown into obscurity, and notwithstanding all the prejudices and mistakes of weak and honest men, the genuine doctrines of the gospel will be gradually gaining ground, will finally prevail and triumph over all opposition, and banish all vice and ignorance from the face of the world.⁴³

He ends on a note of Unitarian optimism, indulging in the millenarian spirit that came to characterize rational dissent in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁴⁴

IV

The dissenting periodical thus played an important role in Hazlitt Sr.'s life and literary career, especially after his move to Wem in 1787. His sense of marginalization

39 *UTM* 3 (1805), 158.

40 *Ibid*, 160.

41 Priestley's *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit* (1777) was one of the most influential expressions of the materialist argument in the late eighteenth century, and Hazlitt Sr. would certainly have been familiar with it. William, however, developed a strong aversion to the materialist philosophy of Locke, Hartley, Condillac, and Helvetius and expressed this in his *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805), published in the same year as his father's contributions to the *Universal Theological Magazine*.

42 *UTM* 3 (1805), 158.

43 *Ibid*, 161.

44 In addition to the contributions already discussed, Hazlitt Sr. wrote one further essay for Vidler's *Universal Theological Magazine* before it was taken over by Aspland. 'On the Nature of the Death of Moses' (December 1805) is a shorter polemical response to the comments of two readers on his work.

from key intellectual centres of liberal dissent was assuaged by his reading of, and contributions to, journals such as the *Protestant Dissenter's Magazine*, *Universal Theological Magazine*, and *Monthly Repository*. In the pages of these miscellanies, he was able to reconnect with the currents of religious thought that dominated his life's work, debating the important issues facing the nonconformist ministry with his colleagues around the country. His contributions demonstrate his considerable skills as a polemical and practical writer, working in a range of forms such as the biographical memoir, biblical criticism, sermon, essay, epistle, and polemic. This body of work helps to establish Hazlitt Sr.'s importance as a literary figure in his own right within dissenting circles of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and it allows us to understand why he was recognized on his death as 'one of the fathers of the modern Unitarian church.'⁴⁵

In addition, however, the new findings also provide an important insight into his son's Unitarian inheritance, illustrating many of the central ideas that Hazlitt was exposed to during his upbringing in Wem and beyond. Hazlitt Sr.'s polemical opposition to prevailing orthodoxies, his determination to oppose vociferously any measures that infringed the freedom of the press, his underlying idealism, informed as it was by his belief in the fundamental benevolence of God and man, and his rigorous critique of Calvinist theology, were all significant aspects in his son's intellectual development. Indeed, whilst the question of literary influence is notoriously problematic, it is still possible to uncover some of the more specific aspects of Hazlitt's debt to his father's writings. As Tom Paulin has shown, a richly allusive technique and 'muscular pulpit eloquence' are defining characteristics of Hazlitt's radical prose style:⁴⁶ as we have seen, these find apt precursors in his father's periodical writings. Such suggestive instances of literary interplay point towards a much larger, more rigorous intellectual relationship between the dissenting minister and his son. Over the last decade, Hazlitt scholarship has made considerable progress in uncovering some of the nuances and complexities of Hazlitt's paternal literary inheritance, but much remains to be understood about its scope and significance. As William Carew Hazlitt commented in 1869, Hazlitt Sr. 'was not merely the father of his son William, but the parent of his son's genius.'⁴⁷

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45 *Monthly Repository*, 25 (1820), 677.

46 Tom Paulin, 'General Introduction' to *Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, i, xi. For a further discussion, see *The Day-Star of Liberty*, 142–70.

47 W. C. Hazlitt, *Memoirs of William Hazlitt*, 2 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1867), I, 269.

Bibliographical list of Hazlitt Sr.'s writings for the *Protestant Dissenter's Magazine* and the *Universal Theological Magazine*:

Date	Publication Details	Name / Pseudonym	Title
December 1794	<i>The Protestant Dissenter's Magazine</i> , 1 (1794), 487–93.	W. H.	'Essay on Ordination' [first part]
January 1795	<i>The Protestant Dissenter's Magazine</i> , 2 (1795), 17–23.	W. H.	'Essay on Ordination' [second part]
May 1795	<i>The Protestant Dissenter's Magazine</i> , 2 (1795), 207–9.	W. H.	'Defence of the Essay on Ordination' [first part]
June 1795	<i>The Protestant Dissenter's Magazine</i> , 2 (1795), 233–6.	W. H.	'Defence of the Essay on Ordination' [second part]
April 1797	<i>The Protestant Dissenter's Magazine</i> , 4 (1797), 121–32.	[no signature]	'A Sketch of the Character of the Late Rev. John Wiche'
January 1805	<i>The Universal Theological Magazine and Impartial Review</i> , 3 (1805), 10–18.	W. H.	'Of the Fallen Angels'
Mach 1805	<i>The Universal Theological Magazine and Impartial Review</i> , 3 (1805), 158–61.	W. H.	'On the Popular Notion of the Devil'
April 1805	<i>The Universal Theological Magazine and Impartial Review</i> , 3 (1805), 173–6.	W. H.	'On the Torments of Hell'
December 1805	<i>The Universal Theological Magazine and Impartial Review</i> , 4 (1805), 298–301.	W. H.	'On the Nature of the Death of Moses'

‘IN THEIR NEWEST GLOSS’

Hazlitt on Reading, Gender, and the Problems of Print Culture

Richard de Ritter

In his *Life of Napoleon Buonaparte* (1830), William Hazlitt sketches a familiar Enlightenment narrative, in which social progress is inextricably linked to developments in print technology:

The French Revolution might be described as a remote but inevitable result of the art of printing. The gift of speech, or the communication of thought by words, is that which distinguishes man from other animals. But this faculty is limited and imperfect without the intervention of books, which render the knowledge possessed by every one in the community accessible to all (xiii, 38).¹

Like many commentators on the French Revolution, Hazlitt saw the influence of the press as ‘a salutary sign of democratization.’² Over thirty years prior to the publication of the *Life of Napoleon*, Hazlitt’s friend William Godwin had also enthusiastically described the redistribution of knowledge facilitated by ‘the discovery of printing’, claiming that the press had enabled ‘vast multitudes’ to possess at least ‘a superficial knowledge of most of the discoveries of the learned’. ‘By the easy multiplication of copies, and the cheapness of books,’ Godwin states, ‘everyone has access to them.’³ As Hazlitt’s retrospective account of the French Revolution attests, the idea that the press could enfranchise large sections of the population remained, long after the revolutionary decade of the 1790s, a cause

1 All references to Hazlitt’s works are taken from *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols (London: J. M. Dent, 1930–4). Citations are by volume and page.

2 Andrew Franta, *Romanticism and the Rise of the Mass Public* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 137.

3 William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness*, 3rd edn, 2 vols (London: G. G. & J. Robinson, 1798; repr. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946), I, 282, 283. As Stanley Jones notes, Godwin was probably ‘an old family acquaintance’ and had met Hazlitt as early as 1794. See Stanley Jones, *Hazlitt: A Life: From Winterslow to Frith Street* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 6.

for optimism among radicals, many of whom adhered to the idea that '[c]ulture progresses because print frees knowledge for a new, extensive circulation'.⁴

Frequently, however, Hazlitt's discussions of print culture fail to conform to this narrative of progress and are characterized instead by anxiety and ambivalence. If 'print frees knowledge', it is also responsible, at least in Hazlitt's opinion, for unleashing a range of regressive impulses among the newly enfranchised reading public. At various points in his work, the possibility of 'vast multitudes' gaining 'superficial knowledge' is synonymous not with social progress, but with intellectual degradation. 'The taste for literature,' he writes, 'becomes superficial, as it becomes universal and is spread over a larger space' ('On Reading New Books', xvii, 207).

Similarly, while the press is capable of inspiring revolution, Hazlitt remains aware of the danger that it may topple one form of tyranny only to replace it with another: an infatuation with the new. This is the fear expressed in 'On Reading New Books', an essay of 1827 (published in *The Monthly Magazine*), in which he observes that '[f]rom an implicit faith and overstrained homage to antiquity, we of the modern school have taken too strong a bias to what is new' (xvii, 209). Gregory Dart has noted how many writers of this period were 'mistrustful' of a publishing culture which saw the 'fetishization of novelty as an index of "progress"'. This tendency was dictated by 'the logic of fashion: a logic that valorized contemporaneity and surface form above true taste and durability'.⁵ In the case of Hazlitt, 'progress' is suspended, as readers focus only upon the immediate future in anticipation of 'the next new work, teeming hot from the press' (xvii, 200). Rather than revolution, the press proves conducive to a consumerist model of immediate gratification which encourages self-absorption and a vain disregard for the past.

Some six years prior to the publication of 'On Reading New Books', Hazlitt had presented this preference for the new as a specifically gendered phenomenon. In 'On Reading Old Books' (1821), he focuses on the practices of female readers: 'A lady, the other day, could not refrain from expressing her surprise to a friend, who said he had been reading *Delphine*: – she asked, – If it had not been published some time back? Women judge of books as they do of fashions or complexions, which are admired only "in their newest gloss"' (*The Plain Speaker*; xii, 220). As Lucy Newlyn has noted, when it comes to the issue of literary tradition Hazlitt demonstrates an attachment to ideas of 'survival, legacy and continuity'.⁶ Indeed, as if to emphasize the solid foundations upon which his own prose rests, his critique of women's reading habits concludes with an allusion to *Macbeth*.⁷ The literary past

4 Jon Cook, 'Introduction' in *William Hazlitt: Selected Writings*, ed. Jon Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), x.

5 Gregory Dart, 'Romantic Cockneyism: Hazlitt and the Periodical Press', *Romanticism* 6 (2000): 143–62, 149.

6 Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 285.

7 *Macbeth* I, vii, 34. Hazlitt may also have in mind Godwin's use of the phrase in his 1797 essay 'Of Servants'. There, Godwin describes the indulgent habits of the upper classes: 'They are attired with everything that fashion or taste can prescribe and all in its newest gloss'. See *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, ed.

is obscured, however, by the focus on novelty exhibited by female readers, who treat works ‘published some time back’ – just nineteen years in the case of de Staël’s *Delphine* – with suspicion, and even contempt. Exactly this attitude is recognizable in ‘On Reading New Books,’ where the stabilizing influence of literary tradition, which provides continuity between the past and the present, is superseded by an ephemeral ‘fashion in reading ... which lasts only for the season’ (xvii, 200).

Hazlitt’s relationship with print culture has provided several critics with a means of interrogating his construction of the ‘romantic self’. As James Mulvihill has observed, ‘[t]he book as an object of private reverie is a characteristic motif in Hazlitt’s writings.’⁸ But this retreat into privacy is itself a political act, which sees Hazlitt exchanging his optimistic view of the press for an inherently conservative nostalgia – a substitution that demonstrates the ‘conflict between aesthetic and political power’ that frequently emerges throughout his work.⁹ Indeed, the ideals of ‘survival, legacy and continuity’ that govern his dedication to old books are easily translated into a Burkean reverence for the past.¹⁰

This article’s exploration of the ‘problems of print culture’ considers both the political and the personal resonances of the act of reading. Specifically, it asks why Hazlitt chooses to articulate the failure of the press’s emancipatory potential through the figure of the female reader. Sonia Hofkosh has noted how ‘[f]or Hazlitt women’s reading profoundly vitiates the proper distinctions and standards governing the logic of authorial empowerment.’¹¹ But his hostility can also be placed within a long-established discourse of admonitory writing on women’s reading, which has little to do with ideologies of authorship.¹² Focusing upon Hazlitt’s identity as a reader, I explore how his taste for ‘old books’ is defined in opposition to women’s reading habits, which he associates with superficiality and contingency – the aberrant side-effects of advances in ‘the art of printing’. At the same time, instances exist in which Hazlitt reveals himself to be susceptible to the ‘bias to what is new’, destabilizing the distinction he asserts between himself and female readers. Such moments liberate Hazlitt from the weight of tradition – an experience he finds both pleasurable and deeply disturbing. This conflicted response is, I argue, typical of his ambivalence towards the press. Even as he

Mark Philp and others, 7 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1993), V: *Educational and Literary Writings*, ed. Pamela Clemit, 169.

8 James Mulvihill, ‘William Hazlitt and the “Impressions” of Print Culture’, *Keats-Shelley Journal* 40 (1991): 127–45, 140.

9 John Whale, ‘Hazlitt on Burke: The Ambivalent Position of a Radical Essayist’, *Studies in Romanticism* 25.4 (winter 1986): 465–81, 465.

10 As Lucy Newlyn notes, ‘in the domain of poetics’ it is difficult ‘to distinguish democratic from elitist ideals’ (*Reading, Writing and Romanticism*, 285).

11 Sonia Hofkosh, *Sexual Politics and the Romantic Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 22.

12 For one of the most recent and comprehensive accounts of the problematic status of women’s reading in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century culture, see Jacqueline Pearson, *Women’s Reading in Britain, 1750–1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

celebrates its capacity to temper an 'overstrained homage to antiquity', he fears that it leaves no alternative other than to focus upon the present moment: a tendency he associates with a feminized taste for novelty.

Hazlitt, Burke and personal identity

The fetishization of novelty is conspicuously absent when Hazlitt discusses his own reading habits in 'On Reading Old Books'. As he pointedly reminds us, while female readers 'judge of books as they do of fashions or complexions', such superficial practices are 'not [his] way'. Renouncing the clamour for novelty, he strikes a distinctly conservative tone as he emphasizes his taste for 'old books': 'I am not one of those who trouble the circulating libraries much, or pester the booksellers for mail-coach copies of standard periodical publications. ... I do not think altogether the worse of a book for having survived the author a generation or two. I have more confidence in the dead than the living' (xii, 220).

In what might be considered a gesture of capitulation, Hazlitt retreats from the frontline of contemporary print culture and returns to the security of the past. His faith in tradition comes to the fore as he turns to the sense of stability offered by 'old books', which he imagines in startlingly personal terms, placing them at the very core of his identity. Claiming to find sustenance in the 'twenty or thirty volumes that [he has] read over and over again' (xii, 220), he constructs a personal genealogy based upon the repeated reading of books. As Ina Ferris notes, these works become 'fully entwined in his own consciousness', producing a sense of depth intended to function as an antidote to the superficial taste for novelty.¹³ The process of re-reading allows Hazlitt to assert the continuity of the self over a period of time: 'Standard productions ... are links in the chain of our conscious being. They bind together the different scattered divisions of our personal identity. ... They are pegs and loops on which we can hang up, or from which we can take down, at pleasure, the wardrobe of a moral imagination' (xii, 221). In Tom Paulin's vivid phrase, 'standard productions' function 'like stepping stones or signature phrases' in Hazlitt's work, helping to connect past and present selves.¹⁴ As such, they fulfil a similar function to that of nature and memory in Romantic lyric poetry.¹⁵ Like a material manifestation of William Wordsworth's 'spots of time',

13 Ina Ferris, 'Bibliographic Romance: Bibliophilia and the Book-Object', *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, <<http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/libraries/ferris/ferris.html>> (para. 6 of 13, accessed 22 October 2008).

14 Tom Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style* (London: Faber, 1998), 261.

15 For Ina Ferris, 'On Reading Old Books' represents 'a bookish re-writing of Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode"' ('Bibliographic Romance', para. 6 of 13). Similarly, James Mulvihill draws attention to the way in which the essay 'resets, as it were, Wordsworthian "natural piety" in the special terms of print culture' ('William Hazlitt and the "Impressions" of Print Culture', 141).

they 'retain / A vivifying Virtue':¹⁶ their covers alone enable Hazlitt to recall 'the pleasures with which [he] dipped into them' many years previously (xii, 227).

But this homage to old books also contains a more explicit allusion, in the form of Hazlitt's engagement with Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). There, 'the wardrobe of a moral imagination' represents the accumulated benefits of civilization, from which we can draw 'super-added ideas ... to cover the defects of our naked shivering human nature.'¹⁷ In 'On Reading Old Books', 'standard productions' take precedence in matters of both social progress and individual development, establishing the 'pegs and loops' upon which the 'wardrobe of a moral imagination' rests. Here, the Burkean reverence for the past is displaced onto an admiration for old books. And, just as Burke's 'super-added ideas' help 'raise' us 'to dignity in our own estimation', the reading of 'standard productions' performs an ennobling function, providing the basis of a genealogical model of identity which achieves coherence in the present by drawing upon the past.

This sense of continuity is disrupted by the perpetual cycle of production and consumption that Hazlitt identifies with contemporary print culture. As Deidre Lynch has noted, the 'expansion of the book trade' contributed towards increasingly impersonal relationships between readers and their books, something which is apparent in the sense of alienation Hazlitt experiences when he turns from old to new texts.¹⁸ The year before the publication of 'On Reading Old Books', Hazlitt had surveyed the present state of book production, and concluded that 'we have lost the art of reading': 'As authors multiply in number, books diminish in size, we cannot now, as formerly, swallow libraries whole in a single folio: solid quarto has given place to slender duodecimo, and the dingy letter-press contracts its dimensions, and retreats before the white, unsullied, faultless margin' ('On Miscellaneous Poems etc.', *Lectures on the Age of Elizabeth*; vi, 319). Within this period, technological improvements meant that 'lesser printers could achieve better printing standards ... using better quality ink, new machines, and fresh, unworn type'.¹⁹ While these are the conditions which should enable the propagation of knowledge across society, Hazlitt's response is a sense of estrangement. Previously, books could be 'swallow[ed]' whole: a phrase which suggests a physically intimate act, that blurs the boundaries between reader and text. In contrast, the dazzling

16 *The Prelude* (1805), Book xi, ll. 209–10. See William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, corr. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 213.

17 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event. In a Letter Intended to have Been Sent to a Gentleman in Paris* (1790), ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (London: Penguin, 1968), 171.

18 Deidre Lynch, "'Wedded to Books": Bibliomania and the Romantic Essayists', *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, <<http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/libraries/lynch/lynch.html>> (para. 16 of 21, accessed 22 October 2008).

19 Julie Stone Peters, *Theatre of the Book: Print, Text, and Performance in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 73.

appearance of newly-printed publications resists assimilation into the self. While old books become bound up with Hazlitt's consciousness, allowing him to recall 'the same feelings and associations which [he] had in first reading [them]' ('On Reading Old Books'; xii, 221), new books fail to be legible in the same way. With their gleaming white margins, they bear no such personal significance. Instead, they gesture towards a model of identity which exists in the present, and fails to anchor itself in relation to the past.

'Passive impressions': fashion and female subjectivity

It is this focus on the present moment that paves the way for Hazlitt to discuss print culture in terms of fashion. In contrast to the sense of permanence and stability promised by the palpable presence of the 'solid quarto', the 'slender duodecimo' is representative of instability and change. The sense of uncertainty fostered by the unceasing quest for novelty is also the organizing principle of the discourse of fashion which, Hazlitt asserted in an essay of 1818, consists of 'the perpetual setting up of a certain standard of taste, elegance and refinement, which has no other foundation or authority than that it is the prevailing distinction of the moment' ('On Fashion', *The Edinburgh Magazine*, September 1818; xvii, 52).

Hazlitt here provides a paradigmatic example of the way in which 'the traditional genealogy-based model of identity' was usurped by what Andrea K. Henderson describes as 'a commercial model of identity', concerned with 'extrinsic signs, and indeterminate value – qualities associated with the feminine but also associated with an aspect of market relations'.²⁰ As Henderson's account would suggest, in Hazlitt's work this mode of selfhood is embodied by a specifically female subjectivity which is depicted as radically contingent. Writing in *The Examiner* in 1815, he proposed that women are

the creatures of the circumstances in which they are placed, of sense, of sympathy and habit. They are exquisitely susceptible of the passive impressions of things: but to form an idea of pure understanding or imagination, to feel an interest in *the true* and *the good* beyond themselves, requires an effort of which they are incapable' ('Education of Women', xx, 41).

This conception of female identity reads like a distorted version of the Lockean *tabula rasa*, in which the mind is imagined as 'white Paper, void of all Characters, without any *Ideas*'. But while Locke goes on to investigate the question of how the mind 'comes ... to be furnished',²¹ Hazlitt is clear that, in the case of women, the

20 Andrea K. Henderson, *Romantic Identities: Varieties of Subjectivity, 1774–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7, 56–7.

21 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 104. Hazlitt's critique of female identity is typical of this period; similar concerns are frequently voiced by contemporary educationalists. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft constructs her case for improvements in female education by describing how women 'become the

furnishing of the mind is achieved by chance and accident: they are incapable of 'form[ing] an idea of pure understanding ... beyond themselves'. Female sensibility engenders solipsism, highlighting the way in which women's reading practices make a fetish not just of the new, but of the superficial. Indeed, while Nancy Armstrong describes the rise of the 'domestic woman' in this period, who is distinguished by possessing 'depths far more valuable than her surface',²² Hazlitt flattens female identity into an aberrant surface manifestation, blurring the boundary between inner and outer, mind and body: 'The surface of their minds, like that of their bodies, seems of a finer texture than ours; more soft, and susceptible of immediate impressions' ('Standard Novels and Romances', *The Edinburgh Review*, February 1815; xvi, 22).

If the malleable surface of the female mind, with its susceptibility to impressions, reminds us of Locke's 'white paper', it is also reminiscent of the 'white, unsullied, faultless margin' of new books. Deidre Lynch describes how the Lockean *tabula rasa* 'links the getting of ideas, the techniques of typography, and the process of individuation – the process of developing a self that will be ... separable and distinguishable from other selves'.²³ For Hazlitt too, it is the accumulation of ideas over a period of time which coheres into an image of individuated, inviolable selfhood. As he notes in 'Self-Love and Benevolence' (1828): 'I remember and can dwell upon my past sensations (even after the objects are removed) also in a way and by means of faculties which do not give me the smallest insight into or sympathy with the past feelings of others' (xx, 173). Thus the assertion that women are especially susceptible to 'immediate impressions' implies that they are unable to reflect upon 'past sensations'. Instead, their sense of self is located in the present moment: they are 'the creatures of the circumstances in which they are placed'. Rather than developing a self which is 'separable and distinguishable from other selves', female sensibility emphasizes 'the generic – the similar and the contiguous – over the particular'.²⁴ In this sense, women are aligned with the image of new, mass-produced books, which, with their 'white, unsullied, faultless margin[s]', are characterized by a uniform anonymity.

The association between the book and the female body is, as Jacqueline Pearson has observed, a standard image from the anti-novel discourse of the period.²⁵ But

prey of their senses ... and are blown about by every momentary gust of feeling. ... [T]heir conduct is unstable, and their opinions are wavering – not the wavering produced by deliberation or progressive views, but by contradictory emotions'. See *A Vindication of the Rights of Men, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Hints in The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1989), v, 129–30.

22 Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 76.

23 Deidre Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 34.

24 Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 187.

25 In particular, this analogy was frequently drawn by critics of circulating libraries. See Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain*, 165.

the specificity of Hazlitt's deployment of this identification deviates significantly from other examples of its use. For Hazlitt, the book and the female body are analogous by virtue of their blankness; more typically, women are associated with physically worn books, whose surfaces bear the traces of their having been read. A notable example of this tendency can be found in Charles Lamb's 'Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading' (1822). Here Lamb exhibits an attachment to 'the sullied leaves, and worn-out appearance, nay, the very odour', of circulating library volumes.²⁶ At first glance, Lamb's preference recalls Hazlitt's distaste for 'white, unsullied, faultless' pages. On closer inspection, however, the bibliophilic pleasures that these authors enjoy are clearly distinguishable from one another. As we have seen, Hazlitt has recourse to old books as a means of shoring up his identity: they trigger memories and consequently reinforce a personal narrative of development. As such, they confirm the inviolability of personal identity. By contrast, Lamb's appreciation of the sensuous materiality of the circulating library volume enables him to share in the joys and sorrow of previous, predominantly female, readers:

How they speak of the thousand thumbs, that have turned over their pages with delight! – of the lone sempstress, whom they may have cheered (milliner, or hard-working mantua-maker) after her long day's needle-toil, running far into midnight, when she has snatched an hour, ill-spared from sleep, to steep her cares, as in some Leathean cup, in spelling out their enchanting contents! Who would have them a whit less soiled? What better condition could we desire to see them in?²⁷

According to Sonia Hofkosh, Lamb's position here is '[i]mplicitly appropriate'. She argues that he takes an exploitative pleasure in the dishevelled condition of both books and the women who read them, in order to assert his 'proprietary privilege'.²⁸ An alternative reading, however, might see this passage as reiterating another version of the self-loss with which the essay commences when Lamb states, 'I love to lose myself in other men's minds'.²⁹ Considering both possibilities, Lamb occupies an ambiguous position here, one which confirms his detached self-possession while simultaneously promising to erode the boundaries between self and other. While Hazlitt's encounters with 'old books' result in an introspective retreat into the self, Lamb finds the circulating library volume to be legibly inscribed with the histories of past readers; as such, it functions as a repository of shared experience. The democratic possibilities presented by Lamb's conceptualization of the book as a communal object appear at odds with Hazlitt's solitary, interiorized reading experiences. It is an opposition that illustrates the

26 Charles Lamb, *Selected Prose*, ed. Adam Phillips (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 150.

27 *Ibid.*, 150.

28 Hofkosh, *Sexual Politics and the Romantic Author*, 21.

29 Lamb, *Selected Prose*, 149.

way in which the act of reading helps to explore the limits of individual sympathy. Nevertheless, Hazlitt remains acutely aware of the diverse imaginative reactions that the material composition of books can provoke.

'Oh delightful!': the tendency to bibliophilia

In Hazlitt's work the physical form of the book is not viewed as 'an accidental circumstance of transmission' but as a crucial component in the formation of genealogical subjectivity.³⁰ In 'On Reading Old Books', bibliographic surfaces alone are capable of prompting him to revisit imaginatively the scenes of his youth: 'sometimes the sight of an odd volume of these good old English authors on a stall, or the name lettered on the back among others on the shelves of a library ... revives the whole train of ideas. ... Twenty years are struck off the list, and I am a child again' (xii, 222). Hazlitt proves himself to be a connoisseur of covers, as much as of literature: a position which, despite his repeated assertions regarding his depth of character, places him in a similar position to those women readers whose reading practices are, in his opinion, defined by their superficiality. Throughout his bibliographic writings, however, he implies that his taste for the superficial is set apart from that of women by virtue of his preference for old books, rather than those 'in their newest gloss'. As we have seen, new books denote an emptiness which, for Hazlitt, is equivalent to a commercial model of selfhood. However, this lack of genealogy also signifies a sense of liberation from the past – a prospect which perhaps entices him rather more than he is willing to admit, as 'On Reading New Books' demonstrates.

The essay begins with Hazlitt assuming a familiar stance. He offers a critique of those who make a fetish of a book's novelty at the expense of its intrinsic qualities, as if 'books have a pleasure in being read for the first time' and 'the spirit of enjoyment wears out with the spirit of novelty' (xvii, 200). This stands in stark contrast to his comments in an earlier essay 'On Novelty and Familiarity' (1825), in which he concedes the thrilling allure of the prospect of the new and unknown:

No doubt, that with the opening of every new inlet of ideas, there is unfolded a new source of pleasure; but this does not last much longer than the first discovery we make of this *terra incognita*; and with the closing up of every avenue of novelty, of curiosity, and of mystery, there is an end also of our transport, our wonder, and our delight; or it is converted into a very sober, rational, and household sort of satisfaction.

(*The Plain Speaker*; xii, 296).

While the pleasure afforded by the new is, by its very nature, transitory, in this passage, Hazlitt maintains that it is a more appealing prospect than the deadened

30 James Mulvihill, 'Hazlitt and the Idea of Identity', in *Metaphysical Hazlitt: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. Uttara Natarajan, Tom Paulin and Duncan Wu (London: Routledge, 2005), 40.

enjoyment of the familiar, for 'from the moment that we can be said to understand any subject thoroughly, or execute any art skilfully, our pleasure in it will be found to be on the decline' (xii, 296). Following this logic leads him to the conclusion that 'No one reads the same book twice over with any satisfaction' (xii, 296). It is a startling departure from the aversion to novelty that he expresses elsewhere. As if to distinguish the pleasure produced by 'every new inlet of ideas' from the feminized taste for things 'in their newest gloss,' Hazlitt attempts to convey his enjoyment of novelty using masculine tropes of exploration and domination, which emphasize the 'discovery' of '*terra incognita*'. Yet the sense of self-possession that this implies remains precarious. For on the rare occasions that this enthusiasm for the new is permitted to infiltrate Hazlitt's writing on print culture, it ushers in an experience which is perilously close to self loss. Indeed, in this context, his feelings of 'transport,' 'wonder,' and 'delight' evoke what Peter de Bolla describes as 'the habitual trope' of 'the transported reader.'³¹

Returning to the later essay 'On Reading New Books,' here Hazlitt can be found identifying with the irrational appeal of the novelty, despite an initial display of resistance:

What is it to me that another – that hundreds or thousands have in all ages read a work? ... *Their* having read the work may be said to act upon us by sympathy, and the knowledge which so many other persons have of its contents deadens our curiosity and interest altogether. We set aside the subject as one on which others have made up their minds for us (as if we really could have ideas in their heads), and are quite on the alert for the next new work, teeming hot from the press, which we shall be the first to read, criticize, and pass an opinion on (xvii, 200-1).

Hazlitt's derision for the idea that 'we really could have ideas in [other's] heads' echoes the assertion of self-differentiation he would make a year later in 'Self-Love and Benevolence,' where he states that he has 'no nerves communicating with another's brain, ... transmitting to me either the glow of pleasure or the agony of pain which he may feel at the present moment by means of his senses' (xx, 173). Yet while the above passage begins with Hazlitt distinguishing himself from the 'hundreds or thousands' of readers who have preceded him, his introduction of the first person plural pronouns 'we' and 'us' gradually aligns him with those who are 'quite alert for the next new work.' As he moves on to a disquisition upon the sensual pleasures offered by new books, what had begun as condemnation now appears to have been replaced by swooning panegyric:

Oh delightful! To cut open the leaves, to inhale the fragrance of the scarcely dry paper, to examine the type, to see who is the printer (which is some clue to the value that is set upon the work), to launch out into regions of thought

31 Peter de Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 249.

and invention never trod till now, and to explore characters that never met a human eye before – this is a luxury worth sacrificing a dinner-party, or a few hours of a spare morning to (xvii, 201).

As the passage progresses, the exact tone and degree of irony become increasingly difficult to discern. Hazlitt provides an example of what Deidre Lynch identifies as the highly charged ‘language of fetishism’ associated with this period’s discourse upon ‘print, paper, and ink.’³² His initial transport is triggered by the almost sexualized excitement at the penetrative act of ‘cut[ting] open the leaves.’ However, while he registers the allure of the new, he simultaneously undermines it. He renders his own text resistant to the exploratory delights of readers by providing a self-conscious commentary on their reading practices and pleasures. Encountering this essay, individuals do not find the new, but the familiar: Hazlitt’s prose anticipates, and thus deflates, their reading experience, leaving little room for the ‘mystery’ and ‘delight’ of novelty described in the essay ‘On Novelty and Familiarity’ (xii, 296). Similarly, while he once more employs spatial metaphors of exploration and discovery, this time pitched as a sublime journey into the unknown, this act of imaginative transcendence remains resolutely grounded by the physical presence of the text. Indeed, it scarcely leaves the surface of the page – his pun on those ‘characters that never met a human eye before’ refers both to new fictional creations, and the typographic symbols printed upon the page. The pursuit of novelty, while initially exhilarating, ultimately remains a superficial experience of dubious value: a point further emphasized by the mundane ‘dinner-party’ and ‘spare morning’ that are ‘sacrificed’ in favour of reading a new book.

While Hazlitt demonstrates the ease with which one can submit to the scopophilic and olfactory appeal of new texts, he recognizes that their transporting powers are short-lived. Newly-published works soon become vulnerable to readers’ desire to reassert their mastery, to revel in the text’s subordinate status as ‘something in our power’ (xvii, 201). Indeed, their lack of any prior reputation allows readers to experience the proprietary thrill of becoming ‘the first to read, criticize, and pass an opinion on’ them: ‘a new book is the property, the prey of ephemeral criticism ...; there is a raw thin air of ignorance and uncertainty about it, not filled up by any recorded opinion; and curiosity, impertinence, and vanity, rush eagerly into the vacuum’ (xvii, 201–2).

In contrast to ‘old books’ which, as we have seen, are the ‘pegs and loops on which we can hang ... the wardrobe of a moral imagination,’ the unfamiliarity of new publications means that they offer no equivalent points of reference from which one can proceed to retrospective reflection. Similarly, the ‘vacuum’ by which they are surrounded insulates them, if only momentarily, from the *milieu* of the present. Instead, they are aligned with the unknowable potentiality of the future. Philip Davis has argued that, for Hazlitt, Shakespearian drama represents ‘the struggle of a life-force to create a future just ahead of itself – calling into being

32 Lynch, *The Economy of Character*, 149.

a space that its thinker can then occupy.³³ Something similar is at work here. The prospect of readers 'launch[ing] out into regions of thought and invention never trod till now' (xvii, 201) appears to be a distillation of what Hazlitt had described in 1805 as 'the imagination constantly outstripping the progress of time' (*Essay on the Principles of Human Action*; i, 41). But whereas Davis identifies the positive aspects of this form of 'disinterestedness in creative motion',³⁴ here Hazlitt is occupied with the negative possibilities that it produces.

In their desire to enter an imaginative space 'never trod till now', readers of new books are motivated by the prospect of self-aggrandizement afforded by being the first to 'damn or recommend [them] to others; and thus 'show our shrewdness and the independence of our taste before the world have had time to form an opinion' (xvii, 201). It is at this point that Hazlitt reasserts his distance from such readers. Dropping the inclusive first person pronouns, he reverts to the idea of gender-specific modes of reading, as if to deny his momentary lapse into complicity: 'Can we wonder, then,' he asks, 'that the circulating libraries are besieged by literary dowagers and their grand-daughters, when a novel is announced?' (xvii, 202). By reading new books, individuals can exist on the cusp of the present moment and propel themselves towards the future: an impulse which Hazlitt describes as exhibiting a kind of vanity. He expands upon the futility of reaching towards the future in 'Self-Love and Benevolence':

[The future] is a thing of air, a phantom that flies before us, and we follow it, and with respect to all but our past and present sensations, which are no longer any thing to action, we totter on the brink of nothing. The self which we project before us into it ... is but a shadow of ourselves, a bundle of habits, passions, and prejudices, a body that falls in pieces at the touch of reason or the approach of inquiry (xx, 179).

The idea of 'follow[ing]' the future recalls Hazlitt's description of women readers who thoughtlessly pursue the latest novel and 'pester the bookseller for mail-coach copies of standard periodical publications.' It is a slavish, and ultimately fruitless, pursuit of the new, which eschews the relative stability offered by genealogical foundations. Indeed, without the 'bind[ing]' provided by 'standard productions', the 'scattered divisions of our personal identity' fragment, falling into 'pieces at the touch of reason.' The future is never more than an imaginative prospect in Hazlitt's work; it remains 'a dull blank, opaque, impervious to sense ... did not the ray of reason and reflection enlighten it' (xx, 179). This image of blankness resonates with those which we encountered earlier: the 'white Paper' of the mind in the Lockean *tabula rasa*; and the 'white unsullied margin' of the modern, mass-produced book.

33 Philip Davis, "'The Future in the Instant": Hazlitt's *Essay* and Shakespeare', in *Metaphysical Hazlitt*: 43–55, 45.

34 *Ibid.*, 48.

While these images represent the way in which femininity becomes conjoined with the abject trajectory of print culture, they are also reflective of Hazlitt's political disillusionment. In 'On Reading New Books,' he turns his attention to those forms of revolutionary thought which indiscriminately dispense with the wisdom of past ages:

About the time of the French Revolution, it was agreed that the world had hitherto been in its dotage or in its infancy; and that Mr. Godwin, Condorcet, and others were to begin a new race of men – a new epoch in society. ... The past was barren of interest – had neither thought nor object worthy to arrest our attention; and the future would be equally a senseless void, except as we projected ourselves and our theories into it. There is nothing I hate more than I do this exclusive, upstart spirit. ... Where there is no established scale nor rooted faith in excellence, all superiority – our own as well as that of others – soon comes to the ground (xvii, 209–10).

The systematic disregard for prior knowledge and achievement that Hazlitt describes echoes the distaste of female readers for any book published 'some time back.' His fear that the press may bring about a cataclysmic break with the past is manifested in both his political and aesthetic anxieties. The removal of the 'established scale' and 'rooted faith in excellence' does not signal the ascendancy of democracy in matters of politics or taste; on the contrary, it triggers a descent into an indeterminate system of value – the 'indiscriminate flattening of distinctions' which Gregory Dart identifies elsewhere in Hazlitt's work.³⁵

Nevertheless, the possibility of temporarily shedding the burden of the past proves an enticing prospect, as Hazlitt's admission of the 'delightful' pleasure of being 'the first to read' a new book testifies. Here, the absence of an 'established scale' appears as liberation: any opposition between the sensual and the imaginative pleasures of reading is surmounted, as is the distinction between gendered codes of reading. Ultimately, however, sustaining such moments is untenable. Without 'rooted faith in excellence,' the arbitrary logic of fashion threatens to impose itself upon the scene of reading, causing Hazlitt to revert both to the degraded figure of the female reader and to the security offered by old books. I began by highlighting the enthusiasm that Hazlitt musters for the press in his *Life of Napoleon*. However, as I have demonstrated, his persistent inability to imagine women readers as anything other than passive 'creatures of ... circumstances,' desirous of the 'next new work' (xvii, 200), ensures that the democratizing power of the press can never truly be realized.³⁶

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35 Dart's discussion of the finely-balanced political ramifications of this formulation focuses on Hazlitt's construction of 'Romantic Cockneyism' in the essay 'On Londoners and Country People.' See Dart, 'Romantic Cockneyism,' 158.

36 I would like to offer my thanks to Professor John Whale for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this article.

‘THIS GO-CART OF THE UNDERSTANDING’

Contextualizing Hazlitt’s Criticisms of Logic

Marcus Tomalin

During the last few decades, Hazlitt’s status as a philosopher (in general) and as a metaphysician (in particular) has been extensively reassessed. His convictions concerning such topics as natural disinterestedness, personal identity, epistemology, empiricism, idealism, and the philosophy of language have all been carefully examined, and the present article seeks to contribute to this ongoing reappraisal by focusing in detail on his writings about logic.¹ Given Hazlitt’s well-attested interest in this particular branch of philosophy, it is intriguing that the subject has received only scant attention in the existing literature. Even critics who are especially well-placed to evaluate this aspect of his work have generally refrained from doing so. For instance, the philosopher and enthusiastic part-time Hazlittian, A.C. Grayling, published his excellent *An Introduction to Philosophical Logic* in 1997, only three years before his biography of Hazlitt, *The Quarrel of the Age*, appeared, but although Grayling examines many of Hazlitt’s philosophical interests in the latter publication (especially in Chapters 4 and 5), he does not discuss logic specifically. Similarly, Tim Milnes has written probingly about

1 Hazlitt’s views concerning metaphysics and morality are discussed in Roy Park, *Hazlitt and the Spirit of the Age: Abstraction and Critical Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), Chapters 1–3. His use of the word ‘power’ is examined in John Kinnaird, *William Hazlitt: Critic of Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), Chapter 3, and Uttara Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense: Criticism, Morals, and the Metaphysics of Power* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 27–31. His convictions concerning aesthetics are examined in E.W. Schneider, *The Aesthetics of William Hazlitt: A Study of the Philosophical Basis of his Criticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1933), David Bromwich, *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1983), Chapter 6, and John Whale, *Imagination Under Pressure, 1789–1832: Aesthetics, Politics, and Utility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Chapter 4. Topics such as selfhood and personal identity are considered in Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense*, Chapter 3, and Uttara Natarajan, Tom Paulin, and Duncan Wu (eds), *Metaphysical Hazlitt: Bicentenary Essays* (London: Routledge, 2005), 30–42. For a recent discussion of Hazlitt’s abiding interest in the philosophy of language, see Marcus Tomalin, *Romanticism and Linguistic Theory: William Hazlitt, Language, and Literature* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), especially Chapter 3.

Hazlitt's metaphysical preoccupations and, in particular, his 'immanent idealism'.² Nonetheless, he only refers in passing to Hazlitt's critiques of logic, alluding (rather cryptically), for instance, to the fact that 'logic represses rhetoric to the point of betraying its own metaphors'.³ Since such comments are rarely bolstered by quotations from Hazlitt's own writings, they generally tantalize rather than satisfy. Accordingly, this article seeks to show that if Hazlitt's various reflections on the purpose and significance of logic are scrutinized closely, they illuminate numerous anxieties which underlie his distinctive philosophy of mind.⁴

Hazlitt on logic

The main title of John Mahoney's influential monograph, *The Logic of Passion: The Literary Criticism of William Hazlitt* (1981), comes from Hazlitt's lecture 'On Shakespeare and Ben Jonson' – specifically, from a passage concerning *Every Man in His Humour*. With reference to the character of Kitely, Hazlitt comments that there is 'a certain good sense, discrimination, or logic of passion in the part, which affords excellent hints for an able actor, and which, if properly pointed, gives it considerable force on the stage' (Wu v, 39). The key phrase is self-consciously arch: logic and passion (often viewed as antithetical) are here brought into close and disconcerting association. Examples such as this appear to be in accordance with Hazlitt's declared intention to move away from the 'dry and meagre' style of cautious metaphysical speculation and instead write prose that is 'flighty and paradoxical' (Howe xvii, 312). Although other references to logic in Hazlitt's writings may be less familiar, they nonetheless provide similarly complex perspectives, and certain patterns of association quickly emerge. For instance, he often associates logic with various kinds of constraint and confinement. At the start of his *Spirit of the Age* essay 'Mr. Brougham – Sir F. Burdett', he draws a comparison between Irish and Scottish eloquence. The former, he maintains, is characterized by such qualities as 'enthusiasm, extravagance, eccentricity', while the latter is based primarily on 'logical deductions and the most approved postulates', an approach which causes it to become 'enviored in the forms of logic and rhetoric' (Wu vii, 199). The implication here is that logic (like rhetoric) can detrimentally circumscribe oratory, pinioning it within unhelpfully strict limits. For Hazlitt, discourse in this mode is merely a 'lifeless skeleton' (Wu vii, 200), since, being mechanical and rule-based, it lacks energy and vitality. In a similar manner, while summarizing Coleridge's

2 Tim Milnes, *Knowledge and Indifference in English Romantic Prose* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 105–44.

3 Milnes, *Knowledge and Indifference*, 108.

4 This article is based on a paper that was delivered at the 2009 Hazlitt Day-School. Whenever possible, all references to works by Hazlitt are taken from Duncan Wu's *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, 9 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998; from henceforth 'Wu'). All other references are from P.P. Howe's *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, 12 vols (London: J.M. Dent, 1930–4; from henceforth 'Howe'). Thanks are due to an anonymous reviewer for insightful suggestions which improved the argument presented here.

philosophical development, Hazlitt comments in *The Spirit of the Age* that ‘as an escape from Dr. Priestley’s Materialism, where he felt himself imprisoned by the logician’s spell, like Ariel in the cloven pine-tree, he became suddenly enamoured of Bishop Berkeley’s fairy-world’(Wu vii, 101). Here logic is figured as a form of Prosperoian authoritarianism, with a power to bind and restrain. In Hazlitt’s interpretation, Coleridge turned towards Berkeleyan idealism in order to liberate himself from Priestley’s unflinchingly physicalist theories.

Predictably, Hazlitt returned to Coleridge’s dalliances with logic on several occasions, and never with approbation. In an 1813 letter to the *Morning Chronicle*, he described Coleridge as:

a solemn mountebank ... a kind of wholesale dealer in logic – a sort of gentleman who stands ever ready to prove an incredible statement by a sophistical argument – who, by a doubt or two importantly stated here or there on some frivolous point, obtains thereby credit for his faith in some more monstrous absurdity.⁵

Coleridge is depicted as an untrustworthy market trader, a common salesman whose damaged goods are complex logical arguments that can be purchased to support any viewpoint, no matter how ridiculous it may be. In examples such as these, Hazlitt explicitly suggests that logic provides a set of techniques for beguiling and deceiving the gullible.⁶

If Hazlitt sometimes expresses disquiet concerning the way in which logic constrains and deceives, on other occasions he seeks to illuminate its crudity and bluntness. In an essay about the Scottish minister Edward Irving, he reflects upon the latter’s combative style and claims that ‘with the battering-ram of logic, the grape-shot of rhetoric, and the cross-fire of his double vision’ he would seek to ‘reduce the British metropolis to a Scottish heath’ (Wu vii, 109). Logic can be used as a military engine, a weapon primarily designed to pummel and destroy. Given such negative assessments, it is no surprise to find that Hazlitt sometimes praises particular individuals simply because they resist the temptation to present coldly logical deductive arguments. When evaluating Jonathan Edwards’s *The Freedom of the Will* (1754), in his 1812 lecture on ‘Liberty and Necessity’, he comments that ‘[h]e does not ... lead his readers into a labyrinth of words, or entangle them among the forms of logic’ (Howe ii, 261). In choosing not to devise formal logical

5 Duncan Wu, *New Writings of William Hazlitt*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press), I, 79.

6 Coleridge, of course, was far more enthusiastic about logic than Hazlitt, especially when the subject was viewed from a Kantian perspective. During the 1820s, he drafted a text about logic which remained unpublished until the 557 folios were finally edited by J.R. de J. Jackson in 1981. In effect, this text mainly seeks to present the approach to logic that had been outlined by Immanuel Kant, in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781; reprinted 1787). For detailed information about this revealing manuscript, see J.R. de J. Jackson (ed.), *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Vol 13, Logic* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), xxxiii–lxvii.

arguments, Edwards does not trap and snare his readers, and Hazlitt greatly appreciates the resulting lucidity. This predilection sometimes informs his literary criticism too, as when, for instance, Shakespeare is praised because '[n]othing is made out by formal inference and analogy ... all comes, or seems to come, immediately from nature' (Wu ii, 211).

Passing comments and asides such as these convey something of Hazlitt's sprightly scepticism concerning logic. Nonetheless, he was convinced that all self-respecting educated individuals should acquire a secure understanding of the subject. Indeed, he openly criticized Wordsworth because 'he hates logic [and] he hates metaphysics, which he says are unintelligible' (Wu iv, 135). So, logic may be a confining, untrustworthy, crude branch of philosophy, but it should not be dismissed in ignorance and without careful consideration. Before probing Hazlitt's more extensive criticisms of logic in some detail, though, it is necessary briefly to determine what exactly the word 'logic' connoted in the early nineteenth century. The emergence of Logicism as a philosophical movement in the 1870s, and the flurry of developments that resulted from the work of Frege, Russell, Whitehead, Wittgenstein, Quine and their followers, has established a distinctive framework for formal logical analysis.⁷ In the early nineteenth century, however, the subject still had a much more Aristotelian-Scholastic appearance. First-order logic, second-order logic, model-theoretic semantics, modal logic, quantum logic and the like, were yet to be formulated, and, as will be shown in the next section, the prevailing view of the subject was dominated by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century concerns.

Logic in the Romantic era

In April 1833, William Hamilton reviewed several recent texts about logic in an *Edinburgh Review* article. While offering detailed critical evaluations of these works, he also reflected at length upon the place of logic in the British education system. He suggested that the teaching of this once highly-regarded subject had suffered from 'perversion and neglect,' and he associated this unfortunate demise explicitly with the anti-logic stance adopted by Locke and other leading British empiricists.⁸ As Hamilton knew well, though, anxieties about logical deduction considerably pre-dated Locke, and conspicuous humanists such as Rudolph Agricola (1444–85), Lorenzo Valla (c.1406–57), Johannes Caesaris (fl.1406-1417), and Petrus Ramus (1515–72) had all proposed modified versions of the Aristotelian-Scholastic

7 For an overview of these developments, see Marcus Tomalin, *Linguistics and the Formal Sciences: the Origins of Generative Grammar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 32–8.

8 William Hamilton, 'Recent Publications on Logical Science,' *The Edinburgh Review* 57 (April 1833): 194–238, 194. Hamilton's discussion was part of a revival of interest in Logic in the 1830s which led to the publication of such important texts as John Stuart Mill's *A System of Logic* (1843) and Augustus De Morgan's *Formal Logic or the Calculus of Inference* (1847) in the following decade. For more information about these critical developments, see Dov Gabbay and John Woods (eds), *Handbook of the History of Logic: Vol.4, British Logic in the Nineteenth Century* (Amsterdam and London: Elsevier, 2008).

framework. Influenced in part by this long tradition of discontent, Francis Bacon expressed severe reservations in his *Instauratio Magna* (1620), and repeatedly sought to reveal the limitations of syllogistic reasoning, which he deemed to be (in Dennis Desroches' words) a form of 'tautological rationalist inquiry'.⁹ Descartes was equally unconvinced, noting that 'syllogismorum formae nihil juvant ad rerum veritatem percipiendam'.¹⁰ Despite such concerns, the traditional Aristotelian-Scholastic approach to logic, which gave considerable prominence to syllogistic reasoning, was re-energized by Henry Aldrich in the late seventeenth century. The first edition of Aldrich's *Artis Logicae Compendium* appeared in 1690, and it rapidly became the most influential introductory logic treatise of the eighteenth century. Aldrich focused on terms and propositions before introducing syllogisms, and, following Aristotle (as well as most pre-1690 treatises), he classified categorical syllogisms by identifying their moods and figures.¹¹ The available combinations of all moods and figures provide 256 syllogistic forms, the majority of which are invalid in that they do not guarantee that the conclusion follows infallibly from the premises. By an ironic coincidence, Aldrich's influential text appeared only a few months after John Locke had expressed his profound doubts concerning syllogistic reasoning in Book IV of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689). Locke argued that syllogistic arguments were far from being the epitome of rational deduction, and while he did not deny that they were valid, he certainly doubted their utility. He noted that people who had never been instructed in the dark arts of syllogism construction were perfectly capable of devising secure arguments, and he commented facetiously that 'God has not been so sparing to men to make them barely two-legged creatures, and left it to Aristotle to make them rational. ... He has given them a mind that can reason, without being instructed in methods of syllogizing'.¹² Further, he maintained that although syllogisms could sometimes helpfully present logical connections that had already been perceived, they did not serve to discover new ideas.

Locke's onslaught was both strident and potent, and it certainly ruffled feathers at Oxford where syllogistic logic remained a staple part of the curriculum until the mid-nineteenth century.¹³ Inevitably, disputes concerning the utility of syllogistic reasoning raged from the early 1700s onwards, and the Scottish Enlightenment

9 Dennis Desroches, *Francis Bacon and the Limits of Scientific Knowledge* (London: Continuum, 2006), 113.

10 'The forms of the syllogism are of no help in perceiving the truth of things'. René Descartes, *Regulae Ad Directionem Ingenii* (1619–29), ed. George Heffernan (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 178.

11 The 'mood' is determined by the order and type of propositions (e.g., universal affirmatives, particular affirmatives) used in the syllogism, while the 'figure' is determined by the order of the minor, middle, and major terms.

12 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), ed. Roger Woolhouse (London: Penguin, 2004), IV.17.5, 592.

13 For more information about the Oxford curriculum, see Dale Jacquette, *Philosophy, Psychology, and Psychologism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 23–5. Good general histories of logic during this period can be found in Wilbur Samuel Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), William Kneale and Martha Kneale, *The Development of Logic*

philosophers contributed to this process with particular vigour.¹⁴ While David Hume followed Bacon in emphasizing the importance of induction, Thomas Reid, George Campbell, and Dugald Stewart were largely dismissive of Aristotelian-Scholastic logic. In his 'A Brief Account of Aristotle's Logic', which first appeared as an appendix to Henry Home's (a.k.a. Lord Kames) *Sketches of the History of Man* (1774), Thomas Reid reflected upon the futility of the 'numberless disputes' that syllogistic reasoning had provoked amongst the Scholastic philosophers, and he pointed out that, by contrast, 'the art of induction' had produced 'numberless laboratories and observatories, in which Nature has been put to the question by thousands of experiments, and forced to confess many of her secrets, which before were hid from mortals'.¹⁵ Like Locke before him, Reid drew a distinction between syllogistic reasoning, in which 'we descend to a conclusion virtually contained in [the premises]', and induction, which involves 'an ascent from particular premises to a general conclusion'.¹⁶ For the same reasons as Bacon and Locke, Reid greatly favoured the latter methodology, and this view was shared by George Campbell who continued the assault on the syllogism in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776). Having discussed sources of evidence that can provide the basis for rational enquiry, Campbell outlined his doubts concerning the usefulness of syllogisms, and he presented four main concerns: (i) syllogistic arguments are 'unnatural and prolix'; (ii) 'syllogistic reasoning' and 'moral reasoning' are distinct since the former moves from universals to particulars, while the latter progresses in the opposite direction; (iii) induction (rather than deduction) is not amenable to syllogistic presentation, and (iv) syllogistic structures are always instances of *petitio principii* (which is conventionally, though inaccurately, translated as 'begging the question') – that is, syllogisms involve 'assuming in the proof the very opinion or principle proposed to be proved'.¹⁷ Criticism (iv) is of particular importance. The basic idea is that, in conventional syllogisms such as:

All men are mortal
Socrates is a man
Therefore Socrates is mortal,

(1962; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), and Gabbay and Woods, *British Logic in the Nineteenth Century*.

14 For a brief summary of the vast topic, see James Franklin, 'Artifice in the Natural World: Mathematics, Logic, Technology' in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. K. Haakonssen, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), II, 817–53.

15 Thomas Reid, 'A Brief Account of Aristotle's Logic' in Lord Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man*, 2 vols (Edinburgh and London, 1774), II, 236. For an insightful discussion of Reid's logical work, see Alexander Broadie, 'Reid in Context' in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, ed. T. Cuneo and R. van Woudenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 31–52.

16 Reid, 'A Brief Account of Aristotle's Logic', 236.

17 These quotations are scattered throughout Campbell's *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776), 164–74. *Petitio principii* is identified as a logical fallacy in Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*, II. xvi.

if the premise 'All men are mortal' is true, then this presupposes a knowledge of the conclusion: if Socrates (a man) were not mortal, then the first premise would be false. Campbell's largely negative views were shared by a number of his most influential contemporaries, and Dugald Stewart in particular took pains to distance himself from syllogistic reasoning in Chapter 2 of his *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1792).¹⁸

Despite the prominence of such trenchant criticism, logic textbooks continued to appear throughout the eighteenth century. While Aldrich's text remained popular, authors such as William Duncan and Isaac Watts published similarly expository works. In general, these were often based on Antoine Arnauld's and Pierre Nicole's *La Logique* (1662; a.k.a. the Port Royal Logic); they generally outlined the theory of terms or concepts, examined the way in which these are combined to create judgments or propositions, and discussed the composition of syllogisms from propositions. Any reflections upon whether concepts were inherent in the mind or derived from sensations and perceptions were generally confined to preliminary material. There was minimal innovation, and few glimmerings of the technical advances that would lead to the development of contemporary formal logic during the period 1830–1930.

Consequently, by the 1820s, many of the controversies that had surrounded logic in the eighteenth century had fallen into a state of comparative somnolence, but they were revived in 1826 when Richard Whately contributed an article about logic to Coleridge's *Encyclopedia Metropolitana* which was later expanded and published as *The Elements of Logic* (1827). Although Whately's text was very much in the tradition of Aldrich's, it outlined a markedly different view of the function and purpose of logic. For Whately, logic was an abstract science, not an engine of discovery, and it could be used to test the validity of a sequence of propositions. He rejected Locke's claim that logic was worthless since people who knew nothing about it could devise logical arguments, and he drew an analogy with language and the study of grammar: it is possible to speak and write English without having studied grammar, but a knowledge of the latter greatly facilitates the analysis of the structures used in discourse. In a similar fashion, he dismissed Campbell's assertion that syllogistic reasoning was distinct from moral reasoning, stressing that logic provides an abstract way of exploring *all* argument structures: "They have ... considered Logic as *an* art of reasoning, whereas (so far as it is an art) it is *the* art of reasoning".¹⁹

More importantly, though, Whately effectively redefined the term 'syllogism'. He did not equate it merely with 'argument' (as Aldrich had done). Rather, he considered a syllogism to be 'an argument stated in regular logical form' (and he suggested that this definition conforms to Aldrich's actual practice rather than

18 For an excellent overview of this broad field, see Alexander Broadie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Campbell's work in particular is assessed in Arthur Walzer's *George Campbell: Rhetoric in the Age of Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), especially Chapter 4.

19 Richard Whately, *The Elements of Logic* (London: Mawman, 1827), 22.

with the usage that he had recommended).²⁰ It is worth noting that Whately's reconsideration of the syllogism was much more probing than the kind of discussion that, say, Coleridge was simultaneously outlining in his *Logic* manuscript in the 1820s. Rather than reassessing the syllogism from a fresh perspective, Coleridge simply paraphrased the definition that Kant had offered in his 'Die falsche Spitzfindigkeit der vier syllogistischen Figuren' (1762). In fact, Coleridge seems to have felt that there was not much to say about syllogistic reasoning. In one of his *Table-Talk* remarks, he identified two kinds of logic – Syllogistic and Criterional – and he was at a loss to explain '[h]ow any one can by any spinning make out more than ten or a dozen pages about the first'.²¹

Whately patiently rebutted many of the anti-logic arguments that had been propounded by Locke, Campbell, Reid, Stewart and others, and his robust defense was profoundly influential. Several people (such as George Bentham) responded swiftly and critically, but as the nineteenth century progressed, later generations of philosophers, mathematicians and logicians – people such as Mill, George Boole, De Morgan, and, ultimately Frege, Russell and Whitehead – elaborated the vision that had been sketched out in *The Elements of Logic*, with the result that the narrow traditional Aristotelian-Scholastic syllogistic framework was modified beyond recognition.²²

Reconsidering syllogisms

Despite the fact that the teaching of logic had been marginalized in the British education system during the eighteenth century, it retained a conspicuous place in the Unitarian academies, and certainly Hazlitt was required to attend logic lectures while he was a student at Hackney New College. A letter written to his father in the autumn of 1793 provides the following information: 'We began the lectures on Logic on Friday last. These, I fancy, will be easy and entertaining, though the students who have gone through them say they are not. We have two lectures

20 Ibid, 88.

21 Henry Nelson Coleridge (ed.), *Specimens of the Table-Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: John Murray, 1835), September 1830, 22. Coleridge's discussion of the syllogism can be found in Jackson (ed.), *Logic*, 99–103.

22 The botanist George Bentham (the nephew of Hazlitt's *quondam* landlord, Jeremy Bentham) published his *Outline of a New System of Logic* in 1827. Although the text was mainly based on notes that he had acquired from his uncle, Whately's text is still subjected to close scrutiny. For further information about these complex developments, see James Van Evra, 'Richard Whately and the Rise of Modern Logic', *History and Philosophy of Logic* 5 (1984), 1–18, Raymie McKerrow, 'Richard Whately and the Revival of Logic in Nineteenth-Century England', *Rhetorica* 5.2 (spring 1987), 163–85, and Volker Peckhaus, 'Nineteenth-Century Logic between Philosophy and Mathematics', *Bulletin of Symbolic Logic* 5 (1999), 433–50. A summary of Whately's attempt to renovate induction can be found in Laura Snyder, *Reforming Philosophy: A Victorian Debate on Science and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 33–7.

a week on Logic, which are on Wednesday and Friday.²³ Hazlitt does not state which textbooks were used and who taught this subject, but it is possible partially to reconstruct these details. It seems most likely, for instance, that the lectures were delivered by Thomas Belsham, and his *A Compendium of Logic* (which was published in 1801 but which constitutes ‘the substance of a course of lectures’ that he delivered in the 1790s) gives some indication of the kind of approach that he is likely to have adopted at Hackney.²⁴ Belsham advocated a familiarity with traditional syllogistic methods, noting that while ‘[t]he formality of syllogistic reasoning is indeed justly laid aside in modern composition,’ a knowledge of the rudiments of logic ‘will always be of use.’²⁵ He discusses topics such as perception, judgment, and syllogisms, and the textbooks to which he refers most frequently are Isaac Watts’s *Logic: Or, the Right Use of Reason* (1724) and William Duncan’s *The Elements of Logic* (1748). It is highly likely, therefore, that the young Hazlitt was familiar with these works, as well as Aldrich’s *Artis Logicae Compendium*.²⁶

So Hazlitt had been familiar with logic since the early 1790s, and he referred to it in passing many times in his essays and lectures. However, it was not until 1829 that he offered his most sustained and detailed thoughts upon this topic, in an *Atlas* essay simply entitled ‘Logic.’ At the very outset, Hazlitt signals his awareness of the ongoing debates, noting that ‘[m]uch has been said and written of the importance of logic to the advancement of truth and learning, but not altogether convincingly’ (Howe xx, 227). He acknowledged that, for some people, logic is ‘a guide to the mind when first feeling its way out of the night of ignorance and barbarism,’ while for others it is viewed as ‘a curb to the willful and restive spirit that is a rebel to reason and common sense’ (Howe xx, 227). However, he doubts the accuracy of both these comparisons, and, in an attempt to clarify his own stance, both criticizes existing analogies and introduces others of his own devising. He notes that logic has been compared to the task of sharpening tools with which the mind works out the truth, but he suggests that this is a misleading image. He is adamant that logic should not be presented as a means of discovering *new* truths (a distinctly Lockean claim): ‘the mind cannot *make an instrument to make truth*’ (Howe xx, 228). In this respect, at least, his assessment also coincides with that of Whately, since the latter had repeatedly denied that logic facilitated discovery. Indeed, Whately had explicitly denigrated ‘the prevailing erroneous views’ which maintain that logic has ‘*the discovery of truth* for its object’, and he was adamant that such ridiculous convictions had led to ‘interminable confusion and mistakes.’²⁷ Concerning this matter, then, Hazlitt and Whately both seem to have been in general agreement with Locke.

23 Herschel Sikes, William Bonner, and Gerald Lahey (eds), *The Letters of William Hazlitt* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1978), 68.

24 Thomas Belsham, *Elements of the Philosophy of Mind, and of Moral Philosophy, to which is prefixed A Compendium of Logic* (London: J. Johnson, 1801), i.

25 *Ibid.*, v.

26 A fascinating overview of the teaching of philosophy in Dissenting academies can be found in Alan Sell, *Philosophy, Dissent, and Nonconformity, 1689–1920* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2004). Sell discusses Belsham at some length (177–80).

27 Whately, *Elements of Logic*, 135–6.

If there are points of contact between Hazlitt's essay and Whately's treatise, then there are several other tantalizing possible connections with contemporaneous philosophical movements. For instance, in his *Atlas* essay, Hazlitt describes logic as being 'the go-cart of the understanding' (Howe xx, 228), and this remark has a distinctly Kantian flavour. In texts such as the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781; *Critique of Pure Reason*), Kant had referred to the specific examples that provide the foundation for an argument as 'der Gängelwagen der Urteilskraft', where 'Gängelwagen' is a child's walker (or 'go-cart', in common eighteenth-century English usage).²⁸ The implication is that the tendency to focus excessively on particular instances without constructing more general examples is a distinguishing feature of those who lack the power of judgment. As Mika LaVaque-Manty and Beth Fleishman have noted, while Kant was 'curiously fond of "leading strings" (*Leitbande*) and "go-cart" or walker (*Gängelwagen*) as metaphors throughout his corpus ... his use of them is almost entirely negative.'²⁹ In many cases, Kant used these terms to imply a lack of 'cognitive autonomy',³⁰ and Hazlitt certainly deployed the word 'go-cart' in a comparable fashion on more than one occasion. For instance, he damns his old foe William Gifford in *The Spirit of the Age* because the 'character of his mind is 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, or he is timid, fretful and helpless as a child' (Wu vii, 182). Similarly, in his *Table-Talk* essay 'On Thought and Action', Hazlitt decries the mechanical existences of those who are 'put in a go-cart of business, and are harnessed to a profession' (Wu vi, 89). Once again the image is that of a powerless child toddling along with the assistance of a walker, and, like Kant, Hazlitt returns to this analogy in order to reveal the infant-like incapacity, the enervation, and the lack of autonomy that characterize particular cognitive or socio-political functions.

While moot terminological associations such as these are certainly of interest, Hazlitt's broader claims can be securely situated in the context of contemporaneous debates about logic. For instance, given the emphasis that had been placed on syllogistic reasoning in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it is to be expected that Hazlitt should devote a sizeable portion of his critique to this intricate topic, and the full extent of his scepticism is immediately apparent. Having noted

28 'The go-cart of the Judgment' – Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), trans. and ed. P. Guyer and A. W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A134/B174, 269. Of course, Kant had written extensively about logic in texts such as *Die falsche Spitzfindigkeit der vier syllogistischen Figuren erwiesen* (1762) and *Logik* (1800). The latter is a problematical text because it was compiled by Gottlob Benjamin Jäsche from Kant's lectures, notes, and annotations. Since there is no evidence that Hazlitt had read these texts they will not be discussed at length in this article.

29 Mika LaVaque-Manty and Beth Fleishman, 'The Hum(e)an Face of Kant's Political Judgment', *Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association* (September 2004), 25; see http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/5/9/1/2/pages59127/p59127-1.php

30 Mika LaVaque-Manty, 'Kant, Kids, and Körperkultur', *Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association*. (September 2004), 16; see http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/8/8/0/6/pages88066/p88066-1.php

that ‘the most important conclusions are not to be so easily enclosed in pews and forms of words and definitions,’ he states bluntly that ‘the commonest form of the syllogism is the worst of all, being a downright fallacy and *petitio principii*’ (Howe xx, 229). For clarity, he offers a particular example:

All men are mortal
 John is a man
 Therefore John is mortal

This syllogism is one of the admissible forms that Aldrich (and others) had so patiently catalogued. Undaunted by this, Hazlitt alleges that such arguments involve nothing more than mindless ‘parroting’ since they are effectively tautological. ‘The first branch of the premise takes for granted and supposes that you already know all that you want to prove in the conclusion’ (Howe xx, 229) – that is, to assert that ‘all men are mortal,’ it is necessary to know in advance that ‘John is mortal.’ By raising this concern, Hazlitt is positioning himself in direct opposition to Whately, since the latter had claimed explicitly that syllogistic reasoning is potent primarily because it enables a person ‘to admit in one shape what he has already admitted in another.’³¹ For Whately, this was in fact a characteristic feature of all logical deduction. Revealingly, though, Hazlitt sided with the Scottish philosophers in this instance. As far as he was concerned, syllogisms constitute ‘an unmeaning play upon words’ (Howe xx, 230), and (following Campbell in particular) he classifies them as instances of the logical fallacy, *petitio principii*.

Hazlitt’s use of the Latin phrase is significant, since this particular fallacy had been discussed and (re)defined in a range of subtly different ways by several philosophers. Campbell had explicitly identified syllogisms as instances of *petitio principii*, and he had suggested that argumentative circularity was ‘so essential to the art, that there is always some radical defect in a syllogism.’³² If this is so, then all syllogisms are pointless since they presuppose that which they seek to establish. Whately’s discussion of this topic is rather more nuanced than Campbell’s. Strictly, he classifies *petitio principii* as one of the ‘Non-logical (or material) Fallacies’ – that is, an erroneous form of reasoning in which one of the premises is either identical to the conclusion, or else depends upon it for its own acceptance.³³ Nonetheless, he equivocates a little, confessing that:

it is not possible to mark precisely the distinction between the Fallacy in question and fair Argument; since that may be correct and fair Reasoning to one person, which would be, to another, ‘begging the question’; since to one, the Conclusion might be more evident than the premise, and to the other, the reverse.³⁴

31 Whately, *Elements of Logic*, 216.

32 Campbell, *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 174.

33 Whately, *Elements of Logic*, 178.

34 *Ibid*, 143.

This startlingly relativistic assessment foregrounds states of knowledge in the context of argument construction, thereby undermining the universality of logical analysis. For Whately, although *some* syllogisms could be instances of *petitio principii*, he rejected the extreme conclusion that *all* syllogisms were fallacious. Not surprisingly, some of those who had responded directly to his treatise reconsidered this topic. George Bentham, for instance, reflected upon the difficulties that arise when syllogisms use synonyms. In these cases, 'the fact to be proved is indirectly assumed in the premises, by means of some term which implies it, but does not so openly assert it.'³⁵ In such examples, *petitio principii* is 'combined with artful diversion.'³⁶

As these few examples indicate, there was considerable anxiety about *petitio principii* in the 1820s. In this context, it is clear that Hazlitt was strongly disinclined to accept Whately's subtle and relativistic stance, and favoured instead the more extreme position that Campbell had propounded. In summary, Hazlitt was persuaded that *petitio principii* is a fallacy which afflicts syllogisms of every mood and figure:

Either the premises are hasty or false, and the conclusion rotten that way; or if they be sound, and proved as matter-of-fact to the extent which is pretended, then you have anticipated your conclusion, and your syllogism is pedantic and superfluous. (Howe xx, 230)

Comments such as this reveal the extent to which Hazlitt was willing to accept Campbell's jaundiced assessment of syllogistic reasoning, and this connection can be established with considerable security since Hazlitt knew Campbell's *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* well and it had directly influenced his thinking about several other subjects.³⁷ The indication, then, is that Hazlitt's philosophy of mind has its roots firmly in the work of the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers – a fact that has never received the sustained and focused attention that it deserves.

Inducing deduction

Circular reasoning was not the only concern that troubled Hazlitt, and one of his abiding preoccupations involved the difference between deductive and inductive reasoning. While the eighteenth-century followers of Bacon had drawn a clear distinction between these two methodologies (and had largely championed the latter), Whately suggested that the difference was artificial. Specifically, he deemed the word 'induction' to be ambiguous since it could refer either (i) to a process of investigation which involved observation and experiment, or else (ii) to the process

35 Bentham, *Outline of a New System of Logic*, 243.

36 *Ibid.*, 244.

37 For instance, Hazlitt's views concerning English grammar had been profoundly influenced by Campbell. For details, see Tomalin, *Romanticism and Linguistic Theory*, 102–8.

of deducing inferences from facts. Focusing on (ii), Whately had argued that '[i]nduction ... so far forth as it is an *argument*, may, of course, be stated syllogistically'.³⁸ Crucially, Hazlitt inverted this claim by arguing that all syllogistic reasoning *necessarily* involves induction: the truth of universal affirmatives (e.g., 'all men are mortal') can only be established by means of observation and experiment. With reference to the specific syllogism he had presented as a exemplum, he remarks that 'this form ... resolves itself into the merely probable or analogical argument, that because all other men *have died*, John, who is one of them, *will die* also' (Howe xx, 230). The use of the words 'probable' and 'analogical' here is replete with significance: syllogistic arguments that are (seemingly) deductive and which involve universal affirmatives, actually depend upon inductive processes. It is impossible to establish for certain that all men are in fact mortal. The best one can do is to claim that, since no immortal man has ever yet been encountered, it is reasonably safe to assume that all men must be mortal. But this is an example of inductive reasoning; it involves comparative judgments and probabilistic assumptions, and, as Hazlitt argues,

[t]he inference relating to historical truth, and founded on the customary connection between cause and effect, is very different from logical proof, or the impossibility of conceiving of certain things otherwise than as inseparable' (Howe xx, 230).

In order to establish this distinction securely, Hazlitt reflects upon an architectural example. If one were standing before a hundred pillars and if one were to state that '[t]hose hundred pillars are all of white marble; the pillar directly facing me is one of the hundred; therefore that pillar is also of white marble', then, for Hazlitt, this would be 'arrant trifling both with my own understanding and with that of any one who had patience to hear me' (Howe xx, 230). In this case, the universal affirmative which constitutes the major premise presupposes the particular affirmative reached in the conclusion, so nothing has been gained. By contrast, if no information about the one hundred pillars had been provided in advance, and if an examination of one revealed that it was made of white marble, then it would be reasonable to infer that the others were also made from white marble. Hazlitt comments of this latter process that 'there would be some common sense in this, but no logic' (Howe xx, 230).

This distinction is in keeping with Hazlitt's well-attested admiration for Bacon and the methodologies he had advocated. In his 1812 lecture 'On the Writings of Hobbes', he had contrasted Bacon, 'a man of clear and active spirit, of a most fertile genius', with the 'school-men' who indulge in 'labored analyses and artificial deductions' and who believed that truth only existed 'in their demonstrations and syllogisms' (Howe ii, 125). By contrast, Bacon was able to incorporate 'the abstract with the concrete, and general reasoning with individual observation, to give to our conclusions that solidity and firmness which they must otherwise always want' (Howe ii, 125). Most importantly, though, he maintained that, as a direct result of

38 Whately, *Elements of Logic*, 209.

Bacon's influence, we 'no longer decide physical problems by logical dilemmas, but we decide questions of logic by the evidence of the senses' (Howe ii, 126).

It is possible, of course, that Hazlitt's thinking about these topics had also been influenced by his awareness of Kant's philosophy. Although earlier in his career Kant had evinced a certain disdain for Aristotelian logic (preferring the kind of approach that Locke had outlined in his *Essay*), by the time he published his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* in 1781, he had shifted his position considerably, arguing that the origin of concepts, and psychological considerations, are not part of logic proper. While attempting to expound his notion of transcendental logic, he introduced a distinction between 'organon' and 'canon,' where the former denotes processes of discovery, while the latter indicates a method of evaluation, and he maintained that logic was a 'canon.' In addition, he focused on pure logic – that is, logic which abstracts away from all empirical conditions, and which therefore concerns itself strictly with *a priori* principles.³⁹ Since this analysis was central to Kant's later philosophy, logic inevitably became closely associated with the attempt to account for synthetic *a priori* judgments from the 1780s onwards (especially in the German tradition). Although the extent of Hazlitt's familiarity with Kant's work is unclear, at the very least he seems to have known Anthony Willich's somewhat unreliable translations that were presented in *Elements of the Critical Philosophy* (1798). Despite the fact that neither Whately nor Hazlitt include any overt quotations from Kant, several of the topics they address had been broached by the latter in his mature philosophical writings. In particular, the sustained focus on the relationship between deduction and induction has a distinctly Kantian flavour.

Whatever the exact origins of his thinking, Hazlitt was convinced that the task of establishing the validity of the premises in a syllogism is part of the process of logical deduction, but Whately had argued against this, claiming that 'the rules of Logic have nothing to do with the truth or falsity of the Premises, but merely teach us to decide (not, whether the Premises are *fairly laid down*, but) whether the Conclusion *follows fairly from* the Premises or not.'⁴⁰ In other words, while legitimate syllogisms simply need to be truth-preserving structures – if the premises are true, then the conclusion must also be true – the task of establishing the truth of the premises is an extra-logical activity. Whately's view proved to be influential, and most modern logicians still draw a distinction between validity and soundness: although the argument 'All men are elephants; Fred is a man; therefore Fred is an elephant' is *valid*, our extra-logical knowledge of the world tells us that the first premise is false and therefore the argument is *unsound*. In disagreeing with Whately, Hazlitt was adopting an older, eighteenth-century viewpoint, which suggests once again that his thinking about logic was firmly based in the late eighteenth century.

As mentioned above, Hazlitt associated 'common sense' with inductive reasoning, and this observation can be juxtaposed with remarks in publications such as his *Table-Talk* essay 'On Genius and Common Sense' and his 1829 *Atlas* essay on 'Common Sense'. As Uttara Natarajan has recently emphasized, Hazlitt's view

39 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A53/B77, 194.

40 Whately, *Elements of Logic*, 210.

of the epistemological basis of common sense privileges association and analogy, and thereby focuses on the ‘innately-generated and imaginative’ aspects of human knowledge.⁴¹ For Hazlitt, although common sense has a clear empirical basis, being simply the sum of ‘unconscious impressions in the ordinary occurrences of life’ (Wu vi, 27), it cannot be reduced to a rigid set of explicitly stated rules, and, in this respect (as Natarajan suggests), his analysis reveals the influence of certain Scottish Enlightenment philosophers. Thomas Reid, for instance, had written extensively about such topics in publications such as *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764), *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785), and *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (1788), and while Hazlitt’s views differed in several crucial respects from Reid’s, his advocacy of common sense was certainly part of a broader philosophical movement which influenced much contemporaneous writing and thinking about logic.⁴² For example, Whately had argued vehemently *against* a reliance on common sense:

But many who allow the use of systematic principles in other things are accustomed to cry up Common-Sense as the sufficient and only safe guide in Reasoning. Now by Common-Sense is meant, I apprehend ... an exercise of the judgement unaided by any Art or system of rules; such as we must necessarily employ in numberless cases of daily occurrence. ... He who is eminently skilful in doing this, is said to possess a superior degree of Common-Sense. But that Common-Sense is only our *second-best* guide – that the rules of Art, if judiciously framed are always desirable when they can be had, is an assertion, for the truth of which I may appeal to the testimony of Mankind in general. ... For the generality have a strong predilection in favour of Common-Sense, except in those points in which they, respectively, possess the knowledge of a system of rules; but in these points they deride any one who trusts to unaided Common-Sense.⁴³

There is much here that would have irked Hazlitt. Whately acknowledged that reasoning cannot always operate by means of a rule-based methodology, but he mistrusts such approaches and deems them to be a last resort. By contrast, Hazlitt considered common sense to be a desirable aspect of human understanding, primarily because it shows that the mind is not ‘the mere puppet of matter’ (Howe ii, 126). Inductive reasoning relies upon the creative establishing of analogical comparisons, and therefore, in Hazlitt’s theoretical framework, it depends primarily upon common sense. In this way, his criticisms of syllogistic deduction illuminate and substantiate other aspects of his general philosophy of mind, and his broader rejection of sterile, mechanical analyses of cognitive function is entirely in keeping

41 Uttara Natarajan, ‘Hazlitt’s Common Sense’, *Nineteenth-Century Prose* 36.1 (spring 2009): 13–26, 13.

42 For a comparison of Hazlitt’s and Reid’s ideas concerning common sense, see *ibid.*, 18–21.

43 Whately, *Elements of Logic*, xi–xii.

with his dogged attempt to reveal the inductive and commonsensical foundations of all seemingly deductive reasoning.

Conclusion

Hazlitt concludes his essay 'Logic' with the following remarks:

The mind ... has a natural bias to wrap up its conclusions (of whatever kind or degree) in regular forms of words, and to deposit them in an imposing framework of demonstration; it prefers the shadow of certainty to the substance of truth and candour; and will not, if it can help it, leave a single loop-hole for doubt to creep in at. Hence the tribe of logicians, dogmatists, and verbal pretenders of all sorts. (Howe xx, 230)

This is remarkable passage. The distinction between 'the shadow of certainty' and 'the substance of truth' conveys Hazlitt's frustration with philosophical methodologies that prioritize the artificial conventions of formal deductive argument construction over more natural presentations which provide accurate analyses with far less fuss and needless exhaustiveness. Indeed, the many references to logic in his essays all serve to elaborate this basic point. His distrust is often insinuated by metaphors of confinement, deception, and warfare, but it is stated explicitly in his 1829 *Atlas* essay. As the present article has shown, Hazlitt's complex response to logic was a bespoke stance of his own devising, but which drew upon a diverse philosophical tradition. His approach was syncretistic rather than dogmatic. Despite his many reservations about Locke's empiricism, he accepted his contention that logic cannot discover new truths. In a similar manner, he robustly advocated Campbell's claim that all syllogistic arguments are fallacious since they presuppose that which they seek to prove. Underlying these particular concerns, though, is Hazlitt's conviction that the mind is formative (rather than merely a passive receiver of sensory perceptions), and this guiding belief is clearly manifest in his assertion (*contra* Whately) that all deductive arguments are necessarily based upon inductive inferences. When viewed in this way, Hazlitt's various writings about logic cast new light on better known aspects of his general philosophy of mind, and reveal the extent to which his thinking about a wide range of topics was based upon the same foundation. His advocacy of common sense, for instance, was closely associated with his championing of induction, though these two subjects are not usually juxtaposed in the recent critical literature. Consequently, there is much that remains to be explored and assessed – and not only concerning the status of logic in Hazlitt's philosophical work. As this article has emphasized, the responses to logic that were prevalent during the epoch 1780–1830 were surprisingly heterogeneous, and the full impact of these contrasting perspectives upon the philosophical and literary works of the Romantic period still awaits adequate (re)assessment.

HAZLITT AND THE COMMON PURSUIT

Bálint Gárdos

That ‘common’ is a keyword in Hazlitt’s critical vocabulary is especially evident in instances where he uses it more than once in a single clause, as in ‘neither common sense nor common honesty’ (‘On Living to One’s Self,’ *Table-Talk*; viii, 98) or ‘common sense and common feeling [are needed] to furnish subjects for common conversation’ (‘On the Conversation of Authors,’ *Plain Speaker*; xii, 26).¹ The word occurs by itself or as part of compounds 28 times in *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805), 59 times in *Lectures on the English Poets* (1818), 58 times in *Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth* (1820), 100 times in *Table-Talk* (1821–2), and 44 times in *The Spirit of the Age* (1825) – to give just a few examples.² It is a value-laden adjective, and Hazlitt takes considerable pains to annul its pejorative connotations. ‘A thing is not vulgar merely because it is common,’ he insists in the *Table-Talk* essay ‘On Vulgarity and Affectation’ (viii, 161). In ‘On Familiar Style,’ he adds that ‘words are like money, not the worse for being common’ (*Table-Talk*; viii, 244). Indeed Jon Cook has persuasively argued that this last-named work ‘is an essay in pursuit of what is to count as common.’³

This article assesses the concept of ‘the common’ in Hazlitt’s writings. It examines the way in which ideals and questions related to ‘the common,’ both in the sense of ‘familiar’ or ‘everyday’ and as something shared by us all, appear persistently in Hazlitt’s oeuvre. The concept is central to his theories of reason and imagination, which in turn relate both to his political ideals and to his critical norms for art and literature. Although Hazlitt seems to have despaired of seeing his ideals of ‘the common’ prevail in politics, in his own writing, alternatively, he created a genre that fulfils these ideals.

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 I have run word counts on the texts available on Google Books. There may be differences between editions.

3 Jon Cook, ‘Hazlitt, Speech and Writing’ in *Journalism, Literature and Modernity: from Hazlitt to Modernism*, ed. K. Campbell (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000): 15–37, 24.

Reason and imagination

Already in his first book, *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, Hazlitt describes something that might be called the arena of the common.⁴ It is created by the imagination, it is positioned in the future, and it is the place of rational, morally and politically significant human action. Raymond Martin and John Barresi summarize Hazlitt's 'metaphysical discovery' in the following words:

Hazlitt thought that he realized three things: that we are *naturally* connected to ourselves in the past and present but only imaginatively connected to ourselves in the future, that with respect to the future we are naturally no more self-interested than other-interested, and that for each of us our future selves should have the same moral and prudential status as that of anyone else's future self.⁵

It should be clarified, perhaps, that the future hypothesized by Hazlitt is not some vague utopia: it is simply the imagined state that we want to reach through our actions:

all morality, all rational, and voluntary action, every thing undertaken with a distinct reference either to ourselves or others must relate to the future, that is, must have those things for it's object which can only act upon the mind by means of the imagination, and must naturally affect it in the same manner, whether they are thought of in connection to our own being, or that of others (i, 7).

According to John Whale, 'Throughout his career Hazlitt is concerned with the capacity of sympathy to enable individuals to rise above mere selfishness and to enter a community of feeling.'⁶ The argument of the *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* is that with respect to the future we are capable of arriving at such a community. What makes matters puzzling, though, is that Hazlitt's reference to 'morality' as well as 'rational, and voluntary action' suggests a community not merely of feeling, but of intellect too. More than one critic has observed that Hazlitt here almost equates imagination with reason. Uttara Natarajan, who was the first to argue consistently for the 'mind's independence of the senses' in Hazlitt's metaphysics,⁷ sees this equation as a sign of the same tendency: 'both "reason"

4 The substantial recent growth of critical literature on the *Essay* makes it unnecessary to rehearse in detail the arguments of that youthful work. I refer primarily to the papers collected in *Metaphysical Hazlitt: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. U. Natarajan, T. Paulin, and D. Wu (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

5 Raymond Martin and John Barresi, 'Hazlitt on the Future of the Self', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56.3 (July 1995): 463–81, 464.

6 John Whale, *Imagination under Pressure, 1789–1832. Aesthetics, Politics and Utility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 110.

7 Uttara Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense: Criticism, Morals and the Metaphysics of Power* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 2.

and “imagination” belong to the same intellectual principle; it is “sensation” and not “reason” from which imagination must be distinguished.⁸ Tim Milnes claims, however, that this reveals a central weakness in Hazlitt’s epistemology: ‘By placing imagination at such an extreme remove from sensation, and so close to reason, he makes the question of the mind’s receptivity problematic.’⁹ Whether or not Hazlitt’s arguments are cogent, his aim is clear: if, as Deborah Elise White explains, ‘[p]ast and present are incommunicable’, and ‘are never the objects of rational pursuit’, then both imagination and reason have to be directed at the future, which, since the ‘selfishness’ of our past memories and present sensations does not apply to it, is also the temporality of the common.¹⁰ ‘The imagination by means of which alone I can anticipate future objects, or be interested in them, must carry me out of myself into the feelings of others’ (i,1). If Hazlitt does not succeed in providing an epistemology which is altogether convincing, this may indicate that he is not, in fact, primarily interested in epistemology. His efforts are focused, rather, on proving that in our future-directed thoughts and imaginings there is the potential for real communication concerning our common affairs.

The cooperation that Hazlitt posits between imagination and reason is all the more surprising in light of the sharp contrast he later draws between imagination and understanding, most famously in the chapter on *Coriolanus* in *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays* (1817). However, it is not so much that Hazlitt abandons his early notion that both the imaginative and the rational parts of our nature can construct the common, as that his later work attends more to these faculties’ diverse ways of achieving this aim. Reason or understanding (in Hazlitt there is no clear terminological difference between the two) does it by fostering endless dialogue, a continuous clash of well-weighed arguments, without any attempt to annul the multiplicity of voices that partake in the conversation or to unify them into a monologic utterance of the truth. In the unity created by imagination, however, no room is left for individual judgment. Imagination operates faster, holds more powerful sway over our minds but its rule is tyrannical.

Public reason

Hazlitt distinguishes between private and public reason, and makes the second the foundation of civilized social life.

Private reason is that which raises the individual above his mere animal instincts, appetites, and passions: public reason in its gradual progress separates the savage from the civilized state. Without the one, men would resemble wild beasts in their dens; without the other, they would be speedily

8 Ibid, 43.

9 Tim Milnes, *Knowledge and Indifference in English Romantic Prose* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 121.

10 Deborah Elise White, *Romantic Returns: Superstition, Imagination, History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 68.

converted into hordes of barbarians or banditti. ... Reason is the meter and alnager in civil intercourse, by which each person's upstart and contradictory pretensions are weighed and approved or found wanting. ... It is the medium of knowledge, and the polisher of manners, by creating common interests and ideas.

(‘William Godwin, *The Spirit of the Age*’; xi, 22)

Thus ‘public reason’ creates ‘civil intercourse’, or the rational exchange of ideas that constitutes the ‘public sphere’ where communication about our ‘common interests and ideas’ becomes possible. In his ‘Illustrations of Vetus’ (1814), Hazlitt celebrates reason for just this capacity to create a ‘common system’: ‘Reason is the queen of the moral world, the soul of the universe, the lamp of human life, the pillar of society, the foundation of law, the beacon of nations, the golden chain, let down from heaven, which links all animated and all intelligent natures in one common system’ (vii, 66–7). In keeping with a significant strain of Enlightenment political and moral thought, Hazlitt seems to hold that society (at least one worth living in) emerges from an interchange between rational agents.

Tom Paulin rightly remarks that ‘[h]istory for Hazlitt begins with the big bang of the Reformation.’¹¹ It is with the Reformation, according to Hazlitt’s *Lectures on the Age of Elizabeth*, that the communication described above gradually becomes possible, due to the translation of the Bible and the broadening of the reading public brought about by the invention of printing:

the Reformation ... gave a mighty impulse and increased activity to thought and inquiry, and agitated the inert mass of accumulated prejudice throughout Europe. ... There was a mighty fermentation: the waters were out; public opinion was in a state of projection. Liberty was held out to all to think and speak the truth. ...

The translation of the Bible ... gave them [the people] a common interest in a common cause. Their hearts burnt within them as they read. It gave a *mind* to the people, by giving them common subjects of thought and feeling. It cemented their union of character and sentiment: it created endless diversity and collision of opinion.

(‘General View of the Subject’; vi, 181–2)

In a much-quoted passage from his *Life of Napoleon* (1828) Hazlitt presents exactly this productive ‘diversity and collision of opinion’ as the direct source of the French Revolution:

The French Revolution may be described as a remote but inevitable result of the invention of the art of printing. The gift of speech, or the communication of thought by words, is that which distinguishes man from other animals. But

11 Tom Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt’s Radical Style* (London: Faber, 1998), 17.

this faculty is limited and imperfect without the intervention of books, which render the knowledge possessed by every one in the community accessible to all. There is no doubt, then, that the press (as it has existed in modern times) is the great organ of intellectual improvement and civilisation (xiii, 38).

It is by no means an overstatement that according to Hazlitt, all positive changes through history happened as a result of a 'common interest in a common cause,' which transforms a society into a 'community,' implying a community of ideas as well. A necessary condition, then, of the rise of a society based, not on the commands of absolute leaders, but on the common discussion of those issues that bear on common life, is the spreading of information. 'Before the diffusion of knowledge and inquiry, governments were for the most part the growth of brute force or of barbarous superstition. ... Such must be the consequence, as long as there was no common standard or impartial judge to appeal to; and this could only be found in public opinion, the offspring of books' (xiii, 39–40).

As Mary Jacobus comments, 'Books [for Hazlitt] are the supreme example of a democratically constituted government, one that modern times alone have made possible; to them are ascribed the curbing of arbitrary power and the transmuting of might to right.'¹² 'Liberty,' writes Hazlitt in *The Spirit of the Age*, 'is but a modern invention (the growth of books and printing)' ('Mr Brougham–Sir F. Burdett'; xi, 141). This assertion is supported by what Roy Park calls Hazlitt's "'pluralist" viewpoint,' elaborated by Stanley Jones as a 'pluralistic conception of truth as emergent from the interplay of minds, from a dialogue between individuals.'¹³ This pluralism is encapsulated in Hazlitt's aphorism from *Characteristics* (1823): 'Truth is not one, but many; and an observation may be true in itself that contradicts another equally true, according to the point of view from which we contemplate the subject' (ix, 228). Hazlitt's idea of course is that none of these points of view has to prevail over the others; his 'truth,' in the words of David Bromwich, 'is not private but submits naturally to the medium of social exchange.'¹⁴ Not only does it submit to social exchange, it cannot subsist without such exchange. 'The growth of an opinion,' Hazlitt argues in the essay 'On the Causes of Popular Opinion' (1828), 'is like the growth of a limb: it receives its actual support and nourishment from the general body of the opinions, feelings, and practice of the world: without that it soon withers, festers, and becomes

12 Mary Jacobus, 'The Art of Managing Books: Romantic Prose and the Writing of the Past' in *Romanticism and Language*, ed. A. Reed (London: Methuen, 1984): 215–46, 240–1. Jon Cook was among the first to direct attention to this aspect of Hazlitt's work in his 'Hazlitt: Criticism and Ideology' in *Romanticism and Ideology. Studies in English Writing 1765–1830*, ed. D. Aers, J. Cook, and D. Punter (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 137–54.

13 Roy Park, *Hazlitt and the Spirit of the Age: Abstraction and Critical Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 59; Stanley Jones, *Hazlitt: A Life from Winterslow to Frith Street* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 63.

14 David Bromwich, *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic* (1983; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 22.

useless' (xvii, 311). This is why Hazlitt is happy to embrace disagreement in his late essay, 'The Spirit of Controversy' (1830):

We condemn controversy, because we would have matters all our own way, and think that ours is the only side that has a title to be heard. We imagine that there is but one view of a subject that is right; and that all the rest being plainly and wilfully wrong, it is a shocking waste of speech, and a dreadful proof of prejudice and party spirit, to have a word to say in their defence. But this is a want of liberality and comprehension of mind. For in general we dispute either about things respecting which we are a good deal in the dark, and where both parties are very possibly in the wrong, and may be left to find out their mutual error; or about those points, where there is an opposition of interests and passions, and where it would be by no means safe to cut short the debate by making one party judges for the other. They must, therefore, be left to fight it out as well as they can; and, between the extremes of folly and violence, to strike a balance of common sense and even-handed justice (xx, 310).

Hazlitt's belief, as stated in his article on 'Capital Punishments' (1821), is that 'the general discussion of all subjects of public interest leads ultimately to sound and salutary views of them' (xix, 216). Bromwich argues that unlike Coleridge, 'Hazlitt sees no reason why opposites should be reconciled,' and Jeffrey C. Robinson adds that Hazlitt 'believes that the world is basically a place of difference and variety: nothing needs reconciliation; everything needs acknowledgement.'¹⁵

Imaginative unity

In an article of 1996, Richard Cronin argued that between the years 1815 and 1819, a basic shift occurred in the political language of the period, due to radical writers and orators like William Cobbett and Henry Hunt: the 'Enlightenment tradition that construed political difference as an opposition of ideas ... became increasingly irrelevant.'¹⁶ Hazlitt's insistence that politics should consist in a rational, public debate concerning common problems, on the basis of commonly-shared ideas, seems to fall in with the Enlightenment paradigm that came under attack in the early nineteenth century. The clash between reason and imagination in Hazlitt's thinking is one between the traditions he inherited mostly from his father, who was educated at Glasgow, the powerhouse of the Scottish Enlightenment, and his own distinctly nineteenth-century experiences. In theory he fully supports reasonable debate, but he sees this debate as being of extremely limited avail in the world of practical politics. Hazlitt's investigation of the workings of the imagination, then, is largely an analysis of the irrational forces that motivate human action.

15 Bromwich, *Hazlitt*, 233; Jeffrey C. Robinson, 'Hazlitt's "My First Acquaintance with Poets": The Autobiography of a Cultural Critic', *Romanticism* 6.2 (2000): 178–94, 187.

16 Richard Cronin, 'Keats and the Politics of Cockney Style', *Studies in English Literature* 36.4 (Autumn 1996): 785–806, 792.

In reasonable conversation, as we have seen, Hazlitt is all for diversity. The contrary applies, however, to the products of imagination. ‘We hate disputes in poetry, still more than in religion,’ he states in his 1814 review of Lucien Bonaparte’s epic poem *Charlemagne: ou L’Église Délivrée*. ‘At least, whatever appeals to the imagination, ought to rest on one undivided sentiment, on one undisputed tradition, one catholic faith’ (xix, 29). In a footnote to one of his *Lectures on the English Poets* he similarly insists that ‘Nothing is a subject for poetry that admits of a dispute’ (‘On Poetry in General’; v, 15). Natarajan thus contends that Hazlitt, like Coleridge, applies a ‘criterion of unity’ when discussing ‘works of the imagination’ which are, for both, ‘produced from a single and indivisible first cause, however defined.’¹⁷ What motivates the negativity behind the following famous sentences from the essay on *Coriolanus* is the morally and politically unacceptable nature of the unity that imagination creates:

The imagination is an exaggerating and exclusive faculty: it takes from one thing to add to another: it accumulates circumstances together to give the greatest possible effect to a favourite object. The understanding is a dividing and measuring faculty: it judges of things, not according to their immediate impression on the mind, but according to their relations to one another. The one is a monopolising faculty, which seeks the greatest quantity of present excitement by inequality and disproportion; the other is a distributive faculty, which seeks the greatest quantity of ultimate good, by justice and proportion. The one is an aristocratical, the other a republican faculty (iv, 214).

In such statements, according to G. F. Parker, Hazlitt ‘is expressing his own painful suspicion that imaginative literature naturally and inevitably pulls against the egalitarian values represented by the ideals of the French Revolution.’¹⁸ It does so, because it does not allow for the multiplicity of views and opinions essential to those revolutionary ideals. Hazlitt’s account of the ‘accumulation’ achieved by the imagination is best seen in contrast with his ideal of the ‘aggregate’, which according to Natarajan ‘signifies a universal or general reality, each of whose components is individual and particular.’¹⁹ In other words, Hazlitt believes that the unity of the universal can be achieved without sacrificing the uniqueness of its constituting parts. This is clearly not just an epistemological question. According to Natarajan, for Hazlitt “the people” is an “aggregate” (vii, 268) which represents the ideal symbiosis of particular and general, at once embodying Hazlitt’s strong sense of collectivism and his extreme individualism.²⁰ But it is exactly the particular, more precisely, the many different particularities, which are annihilated by the

17 Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense*, 45.

18 G.F. Parker, “A Kind of Sympathy with Power”: Grandeur and the Literary Imagination circa 1797, *The Cambridge Quarterly* 16.3 (1987): 225–43, 225.

19 Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense*, 133.

20 *Ibid.*, 176. Cf. James Mulvihill, ‘Character and Culture in Hazlitt’s *Spirit of the Age*’, *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 45.3 (December 1990), 281–99. Mulvihill defines Hazlitt’s understanding of the ‘public mind’ as ‘an aggregate of aggregates’ – *ibid.*, 288.

power of the imagination. To Hazlitt, as Natarajan remarks elsewhere, imagination ‘conquers difference.’²¹ ‘It puts the individual for the species, the one above the infinite many’ (‘Coriolanus’; iv, 214–5). One voice engulfs all the rest: that of the powerful poet or the despotic politician as is the case in *Coriolanus*.

For Hazlitt the question is not solved by saying that the rules in politics and aesthetics are simply different and what would be catastrophic in the one (putting ‘the one above the infinite many’) is perfectly acceptable in the other. Hazlitt does not perceive such a clear demarcation between political engagement and aesthetic pleasure. In ‘Coriolanus’, he freely discusses the ideology of the play, and even Shakespeare’s most probable political stance. Moreover, in his brilliant essay, ‘On the Spirit of Monarchy’, published in *The Liberal* in 1823, he analyses oppression as an issue largely of the aesthetics of power. He begins the essay by claiming that ‘The Spirit of Monarchy, then, is nothing but the craving in the human mind after the Sensible and the One’ (xix, 255). The definition recalls the analysis of imagination summarized above: while reason can accommodate the many, imagination craves the one. It is the latter part of our psyches that is enthralled by the glittering show of political representation.

Let us take the Spirit of Monarchy in its highest state of exaltation, the moment of its proudest triumph – a Coronation-day ... the golden censers are set in order, the tables groan with splendour and with luxury – within the inner space the rows of peeresses are set, and revealed to the eye decked out in ostrich feathers and pearls, like beds of lilies sparking with a thousand dew-drops – the marshals and the heralds are in motion – the full organ, majestic, peals forth the Coronation Anthem – everything is ready – and all at once the Majesty of kingdoms bursts upon the astonished sight – his person is swelled out with all the gorgeousness of dress, and swathed in bales of silk and golden tissues – the bow with which he greets the assembled multitude, and the representatives of foreign kings, is the climax of conscious dignity, bending gracefully on its own bosom, and instantly thrown back into the sightless air, as if asking no recognition in return – the oath of mutual fealty between him and his people is taken – the fairest flowers of female beauty precede the Sovereign, scattering roses; the sons of princes page his heels, holding up the robes of crimson and ermine – he staggers and reels under the weight of royal pomp, and of a nation’s eyes and thus the pageant is launched into the open day, dazzling the sun, whose beams seem beaten back by the sun of royalty... all eyes drink up the sight, all tongues reverberate the sound –

‘A present deity they shout around,
A present deity the vaulted roofs rebound!’

What does it all amount to? A shew – a theatrical spectacle! (xix, 263–4).

21 Uttara Natarajan, ‘Circle of Sympathy: Shelley’s Hazlitt’ in *Metaphysical Hazlitt*: 112–22, 116.

– a ‘theatrical spectacle,’ that is, which has a powerful influence on people’s behaviour. There is no need for royal power to apply directly oppressive measures; the imagination is carried away by the strong aesthetic effect. Hazlitt’s brilliant satire is an indication that political and aesthetic matters are forever entangled in his thinking.

‘On the Spirit of Monarchy’ shows that for Hazlitt, imagination, like reason, creates a commonality, but the way in which it does this is completely different. The politics built on reasonable debate takes for granted that there is a pool of necessarily divergent ideas available to a community that can be brought into play in order to find acceptable solutions to the dilemmas of that community. The politics of imagination, on the contrary, unites a community by the fascination it exercises over their minds through the ‘show,’ or aesthetics, of power. For Hazlitt, imagination is not politically retrograde because it is cut off from the common, but because the community it creates is one of helpless, inactive, unreasoning admirers. They are united through their subjection to monarchic power, which, paradoxically, their own imaginations create and uphold. Imagination cannot be a ‘republican faculty’ because it wipes out the community of individuals making the rational judgments on which a republic might be founded.

Bases of the common

The pessimism that emerges from Hazlitt’s sense of a disjunction between reason and imagination is closely connected to his changing opinions regarding the bases of commonality. His vision of a society based on commonly shared ideas and experiences begs the question of who exactly these ideas and experiences are common to. He has recourse to two foundational concepts, both probably inherited from the Enlightenment, to underpin his notion that it is not only the enlightened few for whom such a society is a viable form of coexistence. The first is the universality of nature as a source of human experiences. The second is common sense as a form of minimal rationality that enables everyone to understand and contribute to political debate. With respect to both these concepts, Hazlitt’s hopes shatter with the passing of time. This defeat of his ideals pushes him towards seeing the (sometimes dark) powers of the imagination as unconquerable by reason.

‘A kind of universal home’

For Hazlitt, art and literature can be connected to the world of the common, because they refer to nature, which is universal. In the *Lectures on the English Poets* he describes nature as ‘a kind of universal home’ (‘On Thomson and Cowper’; v, 103), while poetry ‘is the universal language which the heart holds with itself and nature’ (‘On Poetry in General’; v, 1). It is its connectedness to nature that gives poetry its general appeal.

The poet of nature is one who, from the elements of beauty, of power, and of passion in his own breast, sympathises with whatever is beautiful, and

grand, and impassioned in nature, in its simple majesty, in its immediate appeal to the senses, to the thoughts and hearts of all men; so that the poet of nature, by the truth, and depth, and harmony of his mind, may be said to hold communion with the very soul of nature; to be identified with and to foreknow and to record the feelings of all men at all times and places, as they are liable to the same impressions; and to exert the same power over the minds of his readers, that nature does. ... The power of the imagination in them, is the representative power of all nature. It has its centre in the human soul, and makes the circuit of the universe.

(‘On Dryden and Pope’; v, 69–70)

Hazlitt’s admiration of poetry is at least partly rooted in his belief that in it, imagination can foster a community of feeling and experience by its appeal to universal nature, since ‘the interest we feel in external nature is common’ (‘On Thomson and Cowper’; v, 100) and ‘[n]atural objects are common and obvious, and are imbued with an habitual and universal interest’ (‘Pope, Lord Byron, and Mr. Bowles’; xix, 78). So when he writes in his 1828 essay, ‘On Personal Identity’, of the shattering of his belief in nature as a common denominator, the shock he evinces sounds genuine and painful.

To those who are deprived of every other advantage, even nature is a *book sealed*. I have made this capital mistake all my life, in imagining that those objects which lay open to all, and excited an interest merely from the *idea* of them, spoke a common language to all; and that nature was a kind of universal home, where all ages, sexes, classes meet. Not so. The vital air, the sky, the woods, the streams – all these go for nothing, except with a favoured few (xvii, 272).

The recognition that there are no natural foundations which connect us prior to the social-cultural differences between ‘ages, sexes, classes’, and that, on the contrary, it is exactly such distinctions that form our susceptibility (or lack of it) to nature must have been one of the bleakest moments of Hazlitt’s career as a thinker. According to John Kinnaird, Hazlitt thought that ‘the modern function of the arts’ was to save ‘modern society from its diversities of will through a new and enlarged communion of imaginative experience.’²² This does not mean that Hazlitt entrusted art with a direct social mission; rather, he was seeking for a ground of commonality between our divergent opinions, feelings and experiences. It is his belief that nature is such a ground that collapses by his final years.

That he had had his doubts is evident from many of the examples quoted above, as well as from his thoroughgoing interest in book-learning as opposed to the knowledge gained by direct experience of nature. In one aphorism from *Characteristics* (1823), he emphasizes what connects those with the privilege

22 John Kinnaird, *William Hazlitt: Critic of Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 127.

of education to those without it: 'a wise or learned man knows many things, of which the vulgar are ignorant; but there is a still greater number of things, the knowledge of which they share in common with him' (ix, 201). In the essay 'On the Conduct of Life' (1822), however, he describes the difference in knowledge as a potential 'bar of separation' (xvii, 91). By 1828, he seems finally to lose hope of a common ground: 'I maintain that there is no common language or medium of understanding between people with education and without it' ('On Personal Identity,' xvii, 271).

The concept of a widespread, inclusive discussion of important issues, so important to Hazlitt's politics, is also threatened, since this too is backed up by the hypothesis of a common nature. 'The public opinion,' as he writes in 'What is the People?' (1818),

expresses not only the collective sense of the whole people, but of all ages and nations, of all those minds that have devoted themselves to the love of truth and the good of the mankind, – who have bequeathed their instructions, their hopes, and their example to posterity, – who have thought, spoke, written, acted, and suffered in the name and on the behalf of our common nature (vii, 269).

Hazlitt's despair about ever seeing a unified society may have had something to do with the fact that, as Simon Bainbridge points out, in his last major work, the *Life of Napoleon*, he consciously 'fought to convert Napoleon into a suitable object for popular idolatry,'²³ no longer trusting to the reasonable faculties of the soul to harness those problematic tendencies he analysed in lectures and essays such as 'Coriolanus' or 'On the Spirit of Monarchy.'

Earlier, I referred to Cronin's argument that, in the second half of the 1810s, a basic Enlightenment political conviction was shattered. Here we see Hazlitt losing confidence in another Enlightenment tenet: the universality of nature. The fragmentation of the experience of nature, according to differences in culture, history or class, are for Hazlitt symptomatic of a historic situation in which absolutely no ideas, experiences or emotions can be taken for granted as being common to any number of people. If the Enlightenment politics of reasonable debate is based on the shared ideas available in a community as a result of the expanding print culture, then, without that shared frame of reference, the only means of attaining the common is through the dictatorial powers of the imagination.

Uncommon common sense

The decline of Hazlitt's optimism is also evident in the transformation of his understanding of 'common sense.' The role of common sense in Hazlitt's epistemology, as well as its differences from Thomas Reid's influential theory, has

²³ Simon Bainbridge, *Napoleon and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 201.

been analysed very thoroughly in recent years.²⁴ I would merely like to add here that Hazlitt's common sense has an important social function as well. His understanding of the concept leads back into the Enlightenment period, well before Reid. Lord Shaftesbury's *Sensus communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour* (1709) discusses *sensus communis* as an essential psychological prerequisite of the formation of a cohesive society. Shaftesbury defines *sensus communis* as a 'sense of public weal and of the common interest, love of the community or society, natural affection, humanity, obligingness, or that sort of civility which rises from a just sense of the common rights of mankind, and the natural equality there is among those of the same species.'²⁵ Common sense, then, is a 'republican faculty'; it enables the formation of a public sphere based on equality and a sense of community. According to Shaftesbury, 'where absolute power is, there is no public.'²⁶

In his *Table-Talk* essay 'On Genius and Common Sense', Hazlitt similarly enlists common sense against all oppressive powers. 'Common sense is neither priestcraft nor state-policy,' and the '*ultima ratio regum* proceeds upon a very different plea' (viii, 37). It should be distinguished from both prejudice and reason. On the one hand, common sense is very different from the 'vulgar opinions' that exercise a strong influence on most people's thinking, 'that is, opinions, not which they have ever thought, known, or felt one tittle about, but which they have taken up on trust from others' (viii, 37). On the other hand, common sense may not reach as far as abstract reasoning, but it is the 'judge of things that fall under common observation, or immediately come home to the business and bosoms of men' (viii, 37). Even reason cannot do without it: 'reason, not employed to interpret nature, and to improve and perfect common sense and experience, is, for the most part, a building without a foundation' (viii, 36). Thinkers are likely to be carried away by empty, weightless abstractions, if their reasoning is not anchored in common sense, and through it, in nature. In a way, Hazlitt's whole politics is built on common sense. He entrusts it with creating the possibility of a dialogue in which ideas, different but all relevant, because all rooted in common sense, clash in a productive way. Common sense's jurisdiction extends to the whole sphere of the common; it is perceived as the minimum of rationality that enables people to enter the public sphere.

But how common is common sense? On the basis of the universality of nature (including human nature), we might assert a truly democratic potential in common sense. Hazlitt finishes the essay 'On Genius and Common Sense' by declaring, 'Good nature and common sense are required from all people' (viii, 50). However, the first sentence of the 1829 *Atlas* essay, 'Common Sense', in which he returns to these questions, negates the belief that there is an epistemological

24 See Milnes, *Knowledge and Indifference*, 123–6, and Uttara Natarajan, 'Hazlitt's Common Sense', *Nineteenth-Century Prose* 36.1 (Spring 2009), 13–26.

25 Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 48. For the way in which the ideas of Hutcheson, Shaftesbury's follower, reached Hazlitt, see Duncan Wu, "'Polemical Divinity": William Hazlitt at the University of Glasgow', *Romanticism* 6.2 (2000), 163–77.

26 Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 50.

basis for reasonable debate about our common affairs: 'Common sense is a rare and enviable quality' (xx, 289). This short essay offers a series of vivid character sketches, of different people absorbed in convictions that they all probably regard as commonsensical, without any possibility, however, of mutual communication. Whether, like the 'country shoe-maker or plough-man,' they are lost in a narrow circle of activities, or, like the poets, in 'a world according to their fancy,' or, like 'the wisest men in theory' who are also the 'greatest fools in practice,' in abstractions (xx, 291–2), their ideas cannot meet in any fertile way, since they seem to have no shared roots in common sense.

The common as critical norm

The opposing drives of reason and imagination in politics are discernible also in another area in which both operate, namely, aesthetics, especially poetry. 'Impassioned poetry is an emanation of the moral and intellectual part of our nature, as well as of the sensitive – of the desire to know, the will to act, and the power to feel; and ought to appeal to these different parts of our constitution, in order to be perfect' ('On Poetry in General'; v, 6). It encompasses the rational and the imaginative parts of our nature, and thus our monologic and dialogic, our 'aristocratical' and 'republican' tendencies as well. Since both reason and imagination can, in their very different ways, create the common, Hazlitt uses this concept as a critical norm in his appraisals of literature and art.

That the common is a critical touchstone for Hazlitt is confirmed by a number of examples. In the arts, Hogarth is celebrated for being the 'absolute lord and master' of 'the gross, material, stirring, noisy world of common life' ('On the Works of Hogarth', *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*; vi, 146); equally, Raphael's portraits, in Hazlitt's 1817 contribution to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, have a 'common humanity about them' ('Fine Arts'; xviii, 120). In drama, Hazlitt objects to Steele's comedies for 'not meeting the question [of virtue and vice] fairly on the ground of common experience' ('The Comic Writers of the Last Century', *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*; vi, 157), and to the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher because the authors 'seem to regard the decomposition of the common affections, and the dissolution of the strict bonds of society, as an agreeable study and careless pastime' ('On Beaumont and Fletcher, etc.', *Lectures on the Age of Elizabeth*; vi, 250). The theatre in France he describes in 1826 as 'a common and amicable ground on which we [the French and the English] meet' (*Notes of a Journey through France and Italy*; x, 118).²⁷

A more complex use of the common as critical norm is in Hazlitt's response to Wordsworth's poetry. In the much-quoted 'portrait' in the *Spirit of the Age*, Wordsworth's poetry 'partakes of, and is carried along with, the revolutionary movement of our age' (xi, 87). Wordsworth's revolutionary spirit, his 'levelling' Muse, is manifested in his eradication of the established traditions of poetry:

27 Cf. Julie A. Carlson, 'Hazlitt and the Sociability of the Theatre' in *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain 1770–1840*, ed. G. Russell and C. Tuite (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 145–85.

His popular, inartificial style gets rid (at a blow) of all the trappings of verse, of all the high places of poetry: 'the cloud-capt towers, the solemn temples, the gorgeous palaces,' are swept to the ground. ... The purple pall, the nodding plume of tragedy are exploded as mere pantomime and trick, to return to the simplicity of truth and nature. Kings, queens, priests, nobles, the altar and the throne, the distinctions of rank, birth, wealth, power, 'the judge's robe, the marshal's truncheon, the ceremony that to great ones 'longs,' are not to be found here. The author tramples on the pride of art with greater pride. The Ode and Epode, the Strophe and the Antistrophe, he laughs to scorn. The harp of Homer, the trump of Pindar and of Alcæus are still. The decencies of costume, the decorations of vanity are stripped off without mercy as barbarous, idle, and Gothic. The jewels in the crisped hair, the diadem on the polished brow, are thought meretricious, theatrical, vulgar; and nothing contents his fastidious taste beyond a simple garland of flowers (xi, 87).

Poetical representation is here identified with representation in politics. As in the essay 'On the Spirit of Monarchy,' here too, Hazlitt sees no difference between the power that issues from aesthetic sources and that which derives from political sources. The artistry of the (self-)representation of those in power is closely proximate to the power that emanates from great art. It is exactly this type of power, according to Hazlitt, that Wordsworth renounces. In terms of the dichotomy set out in the essay on *Coriolanus*, the language of Wordsworth's poetry seems to 'fall in' not so much with power (created by imagination), but with the republican order created by the understanding.

Hazlitt, who met Wordsworth in 1798, and thus had more knowledge about the youthful poet's political ideals than most of his contemporaries, must have found a lot to celebrate in what he saw as the political implications of the innovative poetics.²⁸ But even without taking into account Wordsworth's later shift in political allegiances, Hazlitt already presents, in his 1814 review of *The Excursion*, this poetical experiment as fraught with tensions and contradictions. Wordsworth gets rid of the 'high places of poetry' in the same spirit in which the French Revolution tried to eradicate 'the distinctions of rank, birth, wealth, power'. But he can do so only by replacing the grand, aristocratic heroes of traditional poetry with his own subjectivity. 'An intense intellectual egotism swallows up everything' (xix, 11) in *The Excursion*, and Hazlitt believes this to be a general truth concerning Wordsworth's poetry. Wordsworth prefers humble topics, because he 'chooses...to owe nothing but to himself' ('Mr. Wordsworth,' *The Spirit of the Age*; xi, 88). The spectacular representation in traditional poetry may be politically suspect, but at least it creates those powerful images that unite an audience through the power of imagination, and uphold a common plane of understanding with the poet.

Hazlitt expresses this problem through the use of the word 'common'. Wordsworth 'shuns the common 'vantage grounds of popular story, of striking

28 This meeting is described in detail by Duncan Wu in 'The Road to Nether Stowey' in *Metaphysical Hazlitt*, 83–97.

incident, or fatal catastrophe' ('Character of Mr. Wordsworth's New Poem, the Excursion'; xix, 10), choosing, instead, 'common everyday events and objects of Nature' (xix, 19), and, though his style is simple, his sentiments are 'subtle and profound', indeed 'above the common standard or capacity' (xix, 19). In other words, Wordsworth's topics may be 'common' (in the sense of everyday), yet they are anything but common as subjects for poetry, and are only made poetical by his associations.

Hazlitt already understands what twentieth-century criticism would recognize as both a basic problem of Wordsworth's poetry, and at the same time, a major source of its power: 'his *deprivation* of mythology, his aloneness with the universe.'²⁹ Lacking the common frame of reference that any shared mythology or historical background would have provided, objects, events, even people are significant in Wordsworth only insofar as they are connected to his own psychological development. His 'poetry has no other source or character' but the 'power of *association*' ('Mr. Wordsworth'; xi, 89). Hazlitt commends Wordsworth's poetry for keeping, unlike Byron's, to the 'common ground of a disinterested humanity' (xi, 90), but this does not mean that the reader necessarily shares Wordsworth's associations. To put it bluntly, what if 'the meanest flower that blows' does *not* give the reader 'thoughts that often lie too deep for tears'? In Hazlitt's reading the 'new view or aspect of nature' (xi, 89) that opens up in Wordsworth's poetry threatens to be solipsistic.

For Hazlitt, poetry has to be rooted in common feelings to achieve its full emotional impact. 'A man can make any thing, but he cannot make a sentiment!' he exclaims in an article of 1821. 'It is a thing of inveterate prejudice, of old association, of common feelings, and so is poetry, as far as it is serious' ('Pope, Lord Byron, and Mr. Bowles'; xix, 75). These common feelings arise from the common world in which poetry, to Hazlitt's mind, is rooted, and to which it refers back. Yet most of his contemporaries fail to meet this expectation. Southey 'has too little sympathy with the common pursuits, the follies, the vices, and even the virtues of the rest of mankind' ('Coleridge's Literary Life'; xvi, 121). Shelley 'does not grapple with the world around him' ('On Paradox and Common Place', *Table-Talk*; viii, 148), and Byron 'does not commit himself in the common arena of man' ('Lord Byron's Tragedy of Marino Faliero'; xix, 44).

For Hazlitt, genius is 'exclusive and self-willed, quaint and peculiar. It does some one thing by virtue of doing nothing else' ('On Genius and Common Sense'; viii, 42.). At the same time, the products of genius should be connected to the common in order to influence its recipients. For Hazlitt, there is no real contradiction here: though the perspective is unique, the experiences and problems addressed in the works of the genius are common to us all. Thus in discussing the question of originality, he always insists that the unique vision of a genius should not separate a work of art from our common experiences; on the contrary, it should help us

29 Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth-Century Background: Studies in the Thought of the Age in Relation to Poetry and Religion* (1934; London and Henley: Ark Paperbacks, 1986), 268.

perceive these experiences in an unprecedented way. ‘This is the test and triumph of originality, not to shew us what has never been, and what we may therefore very easily never have dreamt of, but to point out to us what is before our eyes and under our feet, though we have had no suspicion of its existence, for want of sufficient strength of intuition, of determined grasp of mind to seize and retain it’ (‘On Genius and Common Sense’; *Table-Talk*, viii, 43). In 1829, Hazlitt went on to argue that strictly speaking the mind is not creative, at least not in the sense of *creatio ex nihilo*. ‘Even Shakespeare, who was so original and saw so deeply into the springs of nature, created nothing: he only brought forward what existed before. ... You may observe and combine, but you can add nothing’ (‘Conversations as Good as Real (3)’; xx, 295).³⁰ The mind, rather than being creative, ‘resembles a prism, which untwists the various rays of truth, and displays them by different modes and in different parcels’ (xx, 298). What is required from the artist, then, is not to go beyond nature, but to look at nature with a fresh eye, and to open us to perceiving it in ways in which we have never done before. ‘Genius or originality is, for the most part, *some strong quality in the mind, answering to and bringing out some new and striking quality in nature*’ (‘On Genius and Common Sense’; viii, 42).

This ideal merger between the common and the unique, however, is very infrequent. Hazlitt’s comments on his contemporaries, quoted above, amply demonstrate his feeling that by modern times, the individualities of poets do separate them from the community for which they are supposed to write. Already Dante, he argues, ‘the father of modern poetry’ is distanced from the common world, because his personality obscures the objects that he writes about. ‘The immediate objects he presents to the mind are not much in themselves, they want grandeur, beauty, and order; but they become every thing by the force of the character he impresses upon them’ (‘On Poetry in General,’ *Lectures on the English Poets*; v, 17). Perhaps Milton comes closest to the ideal balance between individual vision and shared experience:

Milton has borrowed more than any other writer, and exhausted every source of imitation, sacred or profane; yet he is perfectly distinct from every other writer. He is a writer of centos, and yet in originality scarcely inferior to Homer. The power of his mind is stamped on every line. The fervour of his imagination melts down and renders malleable, as in a furnace, the most contradictory materials. In reading his works, we feel ourselves under the influence of a mighty intellect, that the nearer it approaches to others, becomes more distinct from them. The quantity of art in him shews the strength of his genius: the weight of his intellectual obligations would have oppressed any other writer.

(‘On Shakespeare and Milton,’ *Lectures on the English Poets*; v, 58)

In a sense, this amounts to a description of poetry as an aggregate, having an unmistakable identity, without destroying or rendering unrecognizable its

30 Tim Milnes discusses Hazlitt’s ‘fear of unfounded expression, of creation without foundations or “existing materials”’ (*Knowledge and Indifference*, 143).

constituent parts. Milton relies heavily on tradition, and thus manages to remain faithful to the common, without weakening his own particular vision.

We still tend to think of the romantic concept of poetry as rooted in the communication of something essentially private (memories, visions, emotions), and to contrast it with the sociability of neoclassical literature. Hazlitt may be the best example we have of a romantic critic for whom it was exactly the interconnectedness of the personal and the interpersonal that was a fundamental critical norm. A unique amalgamation of commonly available experiences or traditions – this might be the short formula for Hazlitt’s expectations as a critic of poetry and art.

The familiar essay and the common

This article has so far suggested that Hazlitt’s quest for the common was dogged by disillusionment and failure. In this concluding section, however, I want briefly to suggest that in his own essays, Hazlitt found a style and a genre that could embody his ideals of the common.

In the essay ‘On the Conduct of Life,’ Hazlitt advises his son, to whom the essay is addressed, that the reading of ‘our Novelists and periodical Essayists’ is the ‘best qualifier of ... theoretical *mania* and of the dreams of the poets and moralists’ (xvii, 94). He certainly took his own advice and, after trying his hands at a number of genres, produced his best work as an essayist, whose *Table-Talk* and *Plain Speaker*, according to Duncan Wu, justify ‘his claim to the title of the British Montaigne.’³¹

In his references to his chosen genre, Hazlitt always emphasizes its connection to the common. Marcus Tomalin has discussed Hazlitt’s defence of the common idiom of the English language, which is already present in his *New and Improved Grammar of the English Tongue* (1809), but which receives its best-known articulations in the *Table-Talk* essays, ‘On Vulgarity and Affectation’ and ‘On Familiar Style.’³² I quote the opening of the second essay at length because it shows how closely Hazlitt associates ‘the common’ with ‘the familiar.’

It is not easy to write a familiar style. ... It is not to take the first word that offers, but the best word in common use; it is not to throw words together in any combinations we please, but to follow and avail ourselves of the true idiom of the language. To write a genuine familiar or truly English style, is to write as any one would speak in common conversation, who had a thorough command and choice of words, or who could discourse with ease, force, and perspicuity, setting aside all pedantic and oratorical flourishes. Or to give another illustration, to write naturally is the same thing in regard to common conversation as to read naturally is in regard to common speech (viii, 242).

31 Duncan Wu, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 284.

32 Marcus Tomalin, “‘Vulgarisms and Broken English’: The Familiar Perspicuity of William Hazlitt,” *Romanticism* 13.1 (2007), 28–52.

The artistic use of common language enables the essayist to adapt conversation as a model. Hazlitt has rightly been celebrated for finding a form and a style that does not suppress the contending voices of a society in which there is room for the expression of public opinion. Jon Cook has argued that ‘Hazlitt’s use of conversation as the basis of an analogy between writing and talking carries strong social and ethical implications. The society implied by the conversational style is clearly one of arguers, each with a claim to be heard.’³³ Davide Panagia sees this as the defining characteristic of Hazlitt’s genre. ‘Attending to the genre of the essay as constructed by Montaigne, theorized by Adorno, and practiced by Hazlitt, is one way in which we may begin to better appreciate the affirmative value of contradiction to democratic life.’³⁴

The conversational quality of Hazlitt’s essays manifests itself in their rich texture of quotations as well. Although some readers find his innumerable quotations irrelevant,³⁵ we can see them as the essayist’s solution to the problem of the ‘exclusiveness’ of genius. As Paul Hamilton explains, for Hazlitt,

expressions of individual self-projection themselves borrow from the language of others. But they do so by sympathy with the potential for ‘gusto’ or the powerfully individual expression we share with other people rather than by isolating a bland common denominator. His essays integrate marvellously inventive and pointed patchworks of quotations; their synthetic method insists that we maintain the richness of the category of the common.³⁶

The unique language of the Hazlitt essay is an effect not so much of its difference from other texts, but of its readiness to embrace and creatively integrate other voices. We might say that the essay, in Hazlitt’s hands, is an imaginative form of writing that does not abandon the possibility of reasonable conversation.

In his 1819 lecture ‘On the Periodical Essayists,’ Hazlitt describes the subject matter of the essay in terms similar to his distinction between reason and common sense in ‘On Genius and Common Sense.’ According to the lecture, the essay does not trespass on the territory of science and philosophy, which is reason’s remit: ‘It does not treat of minerals or fossils, of the virtues of plants, or the influence of planets; it does not meddle with forms of belief, or systems of philosophy’ (*Lectures on the English Comic Writers*; vi, 91). What it does treat, however, is the common world, in which the practical wisdom of common sense operates:

it makes familiar with the world of men and women, records their actions, assigns their motives, exhibits their whims, characterises their pursuits

33 Jon Cook, ‘Hazlitt, Speech and Writing,’ 28–9.

34 Davide Panagia, ‘The Force of Political Argument,’ *Political Theory* 32.6 (December 2004): 825–48, 843.

35 See Thomas McFarland, *Romantic Cruxes: the English Essayists and the Spirit of the Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 66.

36 Paul Hamilton, ‘Hazlitt and the “Kings of Speech”’ in *Metaphysical Hazlitt*: 68–82, 69.

in all their singular and endless variety, ... takes minutes of our dress, air, looks, words, thoughts, and actions; shews us what we are, and what we are not; plays the whole game of human life over before us, and by making us enlightened spectators of its many-coloured scenes, enables us (if possible) to become tolerably reasonable agents in the one in which we have to perform a part (vi, 91).

For Hazlitt, the essay is the form that is most open to the 'endless variety' of our common world. He may have despaired of ever seeing a society based on conversation, but his poetics as an essay writer imply that we can still become at least 'tolerably reasonable agents'. Some of the greatest prose of the early nineteenth century resulted from this limited optimism.

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BOOK REVIEW

**Marcus Tomalin, *Romanticism and Linguistic Theory:*
*William Hazlitt, Language and Literature.***

pp. viii + 201. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Cloth, £45.

In the spirit of John Horne Tooke, that great linguistic debunker, perhaps the first thing to say about *Romanticism and Linguistic Theory* is that its title is a misnomer. Interesting as it will undoubtedly be to students of Romanticism and Romantic linguistics in general, this is essentially a book about Hazlitt, Horne Tooke and grammar.

Many of the leading Romantics dabbled in linguistics (Wordsworth, Coleridge and De Quincey spring to mind), but only Hazlitt wrote a grammar (his *New and Improved Grammar of the English Tongue* of 1809), and even in his later years philology remained a focus of interest. How unfortunate then (as Tomalin sees it) that until now there has been so little attention given to this particular aspect of his writing. Inevitably, given the novelty of the subject, there is a certain amount of scene-setting to be done in the first chapter, where Tomalin takes us on a brief tour of eighteenth-century grammarians, lexicographers, and philologists, name-checking figures such as Locke, Dr. Johnson, James Harris, Horne Tooke, Robert Lowth, George Campbell, and Hugh Blair. So too, there is a fair bit of candle-snuffing to be done at the end: the final chapter contains a short discussion of Hazlitt's place, such as it was, within nineteenth-century philology.

The main meat of the book is contained in its three central chapters, which are essentially concerned with two distinct but related issues. The first set of interests revolves around the linguistic theories of John Horne Tooke, the author of the *Diversions of Purley* (1786), and their influence upon Hazlitt. There is a polemical aspect to this. In the past, Tomalin argues, too much emphasis has been placed on Hazlitt's idealist rejection of Horne Tooke's empiricism, and too little on the former's selective endorsement of the latter's etymological method. As is well known, Horne Tooke was a thoroughgoing linguistic primitivist who wanted to reduce language to its bare bones, thereby revealing its true, underlying logic. Etymology was the key for him, for it helped him to supply origins for words and parts-of-speech that were otherwise notoriously difficult to explain or account for. To give an example: instead of being satisfied, as most eighteenth-century grammarians were, that the word *that* was sometimes a pronoun and sometimes a conjunction, Tooke set out to show that in fact it 'retains always one and the same signification' (i.e. that it is in effect the same word) in all contexts. Specifically, he

set out to show that in the following two sentences the word ‘that’ is in fact being used as a pronoun in both instances:

I wish you to believe THAT I would not wilfully hurt a fly.
I would not wilfully hurt a fly, I wish you would believe THAT. (p. 68)

By a similar process he also set out to show that *if*, *unless*, and *yet* are actually imperative verbs, and that *lest* and *since* are participle forms. What was impressive about this method was that it took words whose origin was otherwise quite mysterious – such as conjunctions and prepositions – and gave them a specific provenance and meaning. It also gave a sense of there being a deep underlying pattern to language, especially common language, a logic that went far beyond the elaborate formal principles of eighteenth-century grammar theory. With abstract nouns Horne Tooke was even more radical – and reductive – arguing that since abstract nouns such as ‘Truth’ were originally derived from verbs, the entities that they referred to could have no ontological validity. As Tomalin explains,

In the case of ‘Truth’ he sought to demonstrate that this abstract noun was derived from the past participle of the Old English word *treoþan*, and since this verb meant ‘to consider, To Think, To Believe firmly, To be thoroughly persuaded of, To Trow’, he came to the conclusion that: ‘There is no such thing as eternal, immutable, everlasting TRUTH; unless mankind, *such as they are at present*, be also immutable, and everlasting. Two persons may contradict each other, and yet both speak TRUTH: for the TRUTH of one person may be opposite to the TRUTH of another’ (p.69).

The radical political tendency of this theory is self-evident, and must have been attractive to Hazlitt, who noted, famously, in his *Characteristics* of 1823, that ‘truth is not one, but many’. But whatever political frisson Hazlitt might have felt on reading this passage, it did not change the fact that he was fundamentally a linguistic idealist at heart, and was therefore bound to reject its attack on abstract ideas. In place of Horne Tooke’s radically empiricist approach, therefore, he preferred an essentially ‘usage-based’ perspective, declaring that ‘the grammatical distinctions of words do not relate to the nature of the things or ideas spoken of, but to our manner of speaking of them, i.e. to the particular point of view in which we have occasion to consider them, or combine them with others of the same discourse’. Tomalin willingly acknowledges this point of distinction – but his contention is that previous discussions of Hazlitt’s relation to Horne Tooke (by Roy Park, David Bromwich and Uttara Natarajan most notably) have focused a little too exclusively upon it, and neglected the many things that the two writers actually have in common. For Hazlitt, he argues, was also a primitivist at heart, and looked forward to cutting through the red tape of eighteenth-century grammatical theory. He could also see the value of Horne Tooke’s reductive work on prepositions, conjunctions and other ‘indeclinable words’ (words which couldn’t otherwise be associated with either ‘things’ or ‘ideas’).

Tomalin's next two chapters are related not to knotty grammatical issues but to broader questions of grammar and style. He offers a reasonably broad, if still philologically inflected, discussion of Hazlitt's 'familiar style', looking at its roots not only in his political opinions but also in his work on grammar. Impatient with eighteenth-century notions of purity, propriety and precision, particularly as practised by orotund classicists such as Dr. Johnson, Hazlitt championed a style based on good, everyday, idiomatic speech. And when attacked by *Blackwood's Magazine* for exhibiting a vulgar, Cockney style in the late 1810s, he mounted a robust defence of his practice, justifying his sometimes rather informal use of prepositions and idioms on the grounds of general communicability and everyday usage. Of his critics he argued that they seemed not to be able to tell the difference between 'formal pedantry' and 'the most barbarous solecism' insisting that '[a]s an author I endeavour to employ plain words and popular modes of construction, as, were I a chapman and dealer, I should common weights and measures' (p.114).

Like Horne Tooke, Hazlitt viewed idioms as being, like prepositions or conjunctions, irreducible units of meaning, phrases which effectively function as single lexical items since they cannot be broken down into smaller syntactic units. There was thus a good primitivist logic behind them – they were there because they were the simplest, most effective means of saying certain things.

Idioms, then, for Hazlitt, were 'the most valuable parts' of any given language, having the status of a kind of 'abbreviated speech'. It was a testament to the power and force of Shakespeare's mixed metaphors, he thought, that so many of them had become idiomatic, even proverbial, 'giving no pain from long custom' and providing 'the building, and not the scaffolding to thought'. 'We take the meaning and effect of a well-known passage entire, and no more stop to scan or spell out the particular words and phrases, than the syllables of which they are composed' (p.145). Where Shakespeare was praised by Hazlitt in grammatical terms, Alexander Pope was frequently singled out for criticism. Pope had been consistently held up by eighteenth-century authorities as a model of good style, and so Hazlitt delighted in selecting examples from Pope's poetry to illustrate grammatical errors.

There is much that is of interest in this short, readable study. Its polemical claims are relatively modest, qualifying and enriching our sense of Hazlitt's attitude to language rather than transforming it. But the book does offer a masterly overview of what is a largely unregarded corner of Hazlitt's oeuvre, and becomes quite engrossing when it fixes upon specific issues of grammar and idiom.

Now and again the odd un-literary note is struck. Quoting a particularly fine piece of Tom Paulin on the 'unique sensuousness' of Hazlitt's style, Tomalin bangs his ruler on the table in the style of an old grammar teacher: 'While this kind of prettily descriptive analysis may help to characterise the impact of Hazlitt's writing on particular readers, there is considerable scope for more probing stylistic exploration than this, especially given his own interest in such matters' (p.121). Not only does 'prettily descriptive' seem the wrong term for Paulin's urgent, passionate, often revelatory manner, so too the promise of a 'more probing stylistic exploration' also represents something of a hostage to fortune. As it turns out,

Tomalin's discussion of the 'familiar style' is almost entirely theoretical, and takes it too much for granted that Hazlitt always practised what he preached. Tomalin also argues that whenever Hazlitt moved away from a good, conversational idiom in his writing, he generally did so for an ironic purpose, that is, in the spirit of 'imitative ridicule' (p.113). This seems reductive given the innumerable allusions, quotations and flights of fancy in his mature prose. I prefer Charles Lamb's sense of Hazlitt's prose style as a democratic but dynamic medium that specialized in bringing different voices and registers into dialogue with one another: 'If he enters upon some distinction too subtle and recondite to be immediately understood, he relieves it by some palpable and popular illustration. In fact, he all along acts as his own interpreter, and is continually translating his thoughts out of their original metaphysical obscurity into the language of the senses and of common observation.'¹

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1 Review of the Paris edition of *Table-Talk*: see Charles Lamb, *Lamb as Critic*, ed. R. Park (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 306-7.



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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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