# 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.



We invite essays of 4,000 to 9,000 words in length on any aspect of William Hazlitt's work and life; articles relating Hazlitt to wider Romantic circles, topics, or discourses are also expressly welcome, as are reviews of books pertaining to such matters. Contributions should follow the MHRA style and should be sent by email to James Whitehead (j.r.whitehead@ljmu.ac.uk) or Philipp Hunnekuhl (philipphunnekuhl@gmail.com). Submissions will be considered year-round, but must be received by 1 April to be considered for publication in the same year's *Review.* We regret that we cannot publish material already published or submitted elsewhere. Contributors who require their articles to be open access (under the RCUK policy effective from the 1 April 2013) should indicate this, and they will be made freely available on the Hazlitt Society's website on publication.

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# THE HAZLITT REVIEW

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## Hazlitt and Mind

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

It is with great pleasure and a certain sense of disbelief that I point out to our readers that this year's issue of *The Hazlitt Review* is the tenth. The fact that the *Review* has continued to exist (in paper!) for a decade is a testament to the way in which our journal has, as we had hoped, both responded to and stimulated the growth of writing and research on Hazlitt in this time. In the last ten years, we have published essays, reviews, and even a poem on Hazlitt by writers from all over the world: not only the United Kingdom and the United States, but also, for instance, France, Germany, Hungary, Brazil and, in this issue, Turkey.

I am especially delighted to be able to publish in this issue the evocative account of the origins of the Hazlitt Society, by its first Chairman, Ian Mayes. I also want to take this opportunity to express the Society's deep appreciation for the unacknowledged services of John Hodgson, who for the last ten years, has designed and typeset the *Review* (and chosen its glorious colours) as pro bono support for the Society by HWA Text and Data Management.

That this tenth issue is devoted to the topic of 'Hazlitt and Mind' is fitting, given Hazlitt's own sense of himself as a 'metaphysician'. As has been the case in recent years, the focus here is especially on his philosophy and politics. First and foremost, however, as my own teacher, Roy Park – among the earliest and best of Hazlitt scholars – pointed out, 'Hazlitt's self-appointed task as a critic and essayist was to safeguard what has been called the inspired condition of man'. The loyalty and continued support of the members of the Hazlitt Society is proof of his success in that task.

Uttara Natarajan

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# HAZLITT AND RESISTANCE

## Hazlitt Society Annual Lecture, 2016

*Jon Cook*

The thought that Hazlitt is a resistant writer is a familiar one, at least to readers of recent criticism of his work, although its implications, as this essay argues, deserve further exploration. In *The Day-Star of Liberty* (1998), Tom Paulin, responding to Hazlitt's description of the two boxers in Hazlitt's essay 'The Fight', sees them 'as living symbols of vehement prose in action'.[1] To write with Hazlitt's distinctive energy is to act as if trading blows, to resist your opponent and to overcome his resistance. Kevin Gilmartin, in his recent book, *William Hazlitt: Political Essayist* (2015), detects a similar energy. 'Hazlitt's political criticism', he writes, 'often develops in resistance' and he goes on to link the 'fiercely mobile animosity' of Hazlitt's style to his antinomian tendency to overturn established categories of virtue, as in his famous essay, 'On the Pleasure of Hating'.[2] To understand Hazlitt's style is to understand what it is braced against. Gilmartin suggests that there is something like a formal principle at work here. The varying energies of resistance give shape to Hazlitt's political criticism. It suggests the genesis of a literary style in strongly held commitments rather than abstract speculations. In the process ideas are put to the test not just of their truth or falsity, but of their place in a political battle that will be decided by who wins and who loses in a struggle for power.

There is, however, an immediate risk in describing Hazlitt as a resistant writer. If it enables us to see how closely aligned politics and style can be in Hazlitt's work, it also carries the danger, perhaps immanent in any critical description, of creating a stable image of Hazlitt's authorship, one that responds to hopes that writing might be a form of heroic action. While such an image is not obviously misleading, it can lead to a reductive reading of what resistance amounts to in Hazlitt's work and the different directions it can take. This has as much to do with the way we think about resistance as the way we think about Hazlitt's work. In his book, *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance* (2013), Howard Caygill has given a finely discriminated account of some of this complexity. While resistance certainly has its place in any history of modern politics, as a third term and an

1 Tom Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998), 104.

2 Kevin Gilmartin, *William Hazlitt: Political Essayist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 16.

alternative to reform or revolution, the idea extends well beyond the domain of politics conventionally understood. It has scientific applications in the work of Newton on gravity or in Faraday's study of electromagnetic fields. It is used by Freud in his theory of psychoanalysis. Its political applications are closely linked to the development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of an idea of resistant subjectivity, exemplified in the work of writers like Genet or in Gandhi's conception of 'Satyagraha'.[3]

In Hazlitt's thought, similarly, the idea of resistance is both complex and elusive. As David Bromwich has suggested, the act of resistance is celebrated in Hazlitt's work both as a means of arriving at the truth and as a source of aesthetic power.[4] In his essay, 'On the Aristocracy of Letters', Hazlitt explores a contrast between opinions that are shaped by assumptions about superiority and those that are formed in a properly democratic debate:

> Pedants […] talk to the vulgar as pedagogues talk to school-boys, on an understood principle of condescension and superiority, and therefore make little progress in the knowledge of men and things. […] There can be no true superiority but what arises out of the presupposed ground of equality: there can be no improvement but from the free communication and comparing of ideas. Kings and nobles for this reason, receive little benefit from society – where all is submission on one side and condescension on the other. The mind strikes out truth by collision, as steel strikes fire from the flint! (viii, 208)[5]

The passage gives a vivid image of how truth is arrived at in the momentary illuminations sparked by resistant energies. But it shows too how illumination is inhibited by inherited privilege and hierarchy. Tyranny can work subtly as well as brutally to overcome resistance. It can involve acquiescence in what appears to be a right way of behaving.

Ways of speaking could according to Hazlitt have a similarly neutralizing effect on thought and feeling. In his *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy* (1826) he detects with predictable English prejudice an affectation in French speech:

> a vague, flaccid, enervated rhetoric being too often substituted for the pith and marrow of truth and nature. The greatest facility to feel or to comprehend will not produce the most intense passion, or the most electrical expression of it. There must be a resistance in the matter to do this – a collision, an obstacle to overcome. (x, 116)

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3 Howard Caygill, *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). For the discussion of resistant subjectivities, see 97–137.

4 For David Bromwich's discussion, see his *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 275–313.

5 All quotations from Hazlitt's work 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.

Here it is 'facility' rather than social hierarchies that put Hazlitt on his guard. Both compromise the energies that true resistance provokes. Both suggest that in Hazlitt's work resistance is as much a matter of sensibility as of political commitment.

## Resistance and the people

Where might we begin to follow the energies of resistance in Hazlitt's work? One starting point is his essay, first published in 1817, 'What is the People'. Hazlitt wrote it in the aftermath of Napoleon's defeat and the restoration of hereditary rule in Europe at a moment when, in his view, the cause of popular sovereignty had suffered a major defeat. The essay begins with the rhetorical equivalent of a surprise attack:

> What is the People?
>
> And who are you to ask that question? One of the people. And yet you would be something. Then you would not have the People nothing. For what is the People? Millions of men like you with hearts beating in their bosoms, with thoughts stirring in their minds, with the blood circulating in their veins, with wants and appetites, and passions and anxious cares, and busy purposes and affections for others and respect for themselves, and a desire for happiness, and a right to freedom and a will to be free. And yet you would tear out the mighty heart of a nation, and lay it bare and bleeding at the foot of despotism. (vii, 259)

The essay's title is unexpectedly assimilated to its main text. It forms part of a sequence of rapid questions and imagined responses whose cumulative effect is to sketch a drama of resistance and counter-resistance. To ask the question, 'What is the People?', is to be involved immediately in the political contentions that surround it, a condition that makes the motives of the questioner as important as the question itself. And the motives of the questioner, as they are framed by the opening of Hazlitt's essay, are suspect. There is a suspicion that the question is being posed cynically or dishonestly. Above all, perhaps, it is being asked in a spirit that implies that the questioner is not one of the people, but one of their oppressors.

The tone of these questions implies a voice that is seeking confrontation rather than dialogue. The abrasive and defiant response to them gives an initial indication of what it might mean to think of Hazlitt as a resistant writer. But they also frame Hazlitt's first attempt to answer the question posed by the essay's title. This begins with the sentence, 'Millions of men like you', the first of what will turn out to be a series of impassioned definitions, each one amplifying and complicating our understanding of what the people is, and what they might be. Hazlitt's prose moves into a different rhythm here, not the staccato exchange of question and response, but an extended eloquence which attempts to say what the people are at the same time as their existence is celebrated. The values implied by Burke's description of the people as a 'swinish multitude' are turned on their head. The people are a

multitude, certainly, but they are far from 'swinish'. Their physical appetites do not debase them, but are a part of their physical reality. What each experiences individually is also the ground for thinking of them as a collective. The features that Hazlitt distinguishes in his list of characteristics – physical being, and with that a capacity for pleasure and pain that is both physical and emotional – are almost exactly the same as the philosopher, Bernard Williams, writing some 200 years after Hazlitt, identifies as an important and often overlooked ground for affirming human equality: an idea of respect based upon the acknowledgement that everyone has what Williams calls 'their own views and purposes', and that these should be acknowledged independently of 'their technical success or social position'.[6]

'A right to freedom and a will to be free' emerge out of and on a par with these shared human characteristics. Freedom is not a belated invention of political theory and the writing of constitutions. It is, Hazlitt suggests, intrinsic to popular experience. But it is part of the political character of the essay that these claims, asserted as self-evident by Hazlitt, are exactly what is in dispute. What one side might take for granted, the other does not believe. Hence the distinctive nature of the essay's work. To give an answer to the question posed by the essay's title is not just intrinsically complicated. It arises in a context of political hostility that provokes not just one line of attack on the dignity of the people but many. The people are a mob, a menace, a threat. Their claim to recognition and rights upsets established hierarchies and the intellectual development that, it is claimed, depend upon these. The writer who defends them in resisting these denunciations has to work on a number of fronts. The form of 'What is the People' is shaped by Hazlitt's answers to these different modes of attack. It is, as we shall see, part of the essay's irony that this labour seems endless.

The essay's opening implies that politics begins as much in commitments and identifications as in doctrines and deductions from first principles. Stated abstractly, the political position it seeks to defend is close to Rousseau's: equality is based in rights and not according to intellect, strength or material possessions. A principle of mutuality is at work. Citizens have the same rights over others as others have over them. Amongst citizens enjoying an equality of rights there is a reciprocal attribution of freedoms.[7] Hazlitt nowhere states this doctrine explicitly in his essay, and nor does he mount a formal defence of its claims. Instead, as a number of critics have noted, he draws on a well-established analogy between the collective existence of the people and the image of a giant body. Unsurprisingly, one of the most influential of these images in English political thought, Hobbes's Leviathan, is not far away:

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6 Bernard Williams, 'The Idea of Equality' in *In the Beginning Was the Deed* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 103.

7 I have drawn on Martin Loughlin's summary of Rousseau's account of republican liberty. See 'Active, Passive, or Dead?: Sovereignty' in *The London Review of Books* 38.12 (16 June 2016), 43–4.

> If we could suppose society to be transformed into one great animal (like Hobbes's Leviathan), each member of which had an intimate connexion with the head or Government, so that every individual in it could be made known and have its due weight, the State would have the same consciousness of its own wants and feelings, and the same interest in providing for them, as an individual has for his own welfare. […] But such a Government would be the precise idea of a truly popular or representative Government. The opposite extreme is the purely hereditary and despotic form of Government, where the people are an inert, torpid mass without the power, scarcely with the will, to make its wants and wishes known. (vii, 268)

Hazlitt writes hypothetically here about a possible state of the people. What is given in vigorous outline is a political dream: that the political state might be experienced as a sympathetic interlocutor, not as an alien power set in opposition to individual interest and aspiration. Unlike Hobbes's Leviathan, Hazlitt's 'great animal' does not require any sacrifice of individual liberty for the sake of collective order. The mass of individuals are not turned towards the giant figure of the state in recognition of its authority as they are in the famous frontispiece to Hobbes's work. Instead the representative state is imagined as sympathetic body, one involved in a constant process of adjustment as individual wants and feelings vary. The hypothetical character of this body is underlined by the way it is shadowed by its opposite, 'where the people are an inert, torpid mass' or a body discomposed. It is characteristic of the essay's mood that the latter seems less of a hypothesis than the former.

## The voice of freedom

What might this contrast between two states of the popular body – one actively communicative, the other 'an inert torpid mass' – have to do with thinking about Hazlitt's essay as an act of resistance? One answer lies in the significance the essay attaches to a particular slogan, 'vox populi vox dei' and the way this is counterpointed by another word repeated in the essay, 'legitimacy'. The second of these indicates the urgent political context of the essay. Hazlitt is writing after the defeat of Napoleon and the restoration of 'legitimate' hereditary rulers in various states in early nineteenth-century Europe. It is this event, and its claim to re-establish legal government on the basis of a revamped statement of the divine right that sanctions hereditary rule, that Hazlitt sets out to resist. The first, 'vox populi vox dei', is a way of invoking what has been defeated, but the sounding of this phrase in the essay offers another perspective on imagining the body of the people: what will its voice be? How will that voice be expressed?

The slogan had been in circulation in England since at least the beginning of the eighteenth century. It had been the title of a radical tract published in 1709. Another and expanded version of the text was published a year later under the title of *The Judgement of Whole Kingdoms and Nations*. Its basic argument is one that Hazlitt's essay assumes: 'There being no natural or divine Law for any

form of government, or that one person or another should have the sovereign administration of affairs […] therefore Mankind is at Liberty to chuse what Form of Government they like best'.[8] If there is to be a law that is the equivalent of a divine authority it will be found in the voice of the people.

This slogan seems to resonate with some of Hazlitt's deepest concerns. These take us beyond the essay, 'What is the People', to the numerous occasions in his work when the experience of freedom is identified with the discovery of voice. Amongst them are the recollection of the young Coleridge's sermon in 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', 'as if the sounds had echoed from the bottom of the human heart […] And for myself I could not have been more delighted if I had heard the music of the spheres' (xvii, 108); the encounter at the inn in Newbury, described in 'The Fight', between the depressed author and 'a tall English yeoman' whose boisterous speech is remembered as the expression of a 'joyous mind, free-spoken, frank and convivial' (xvii, 78); or in his essay, 'On Going a Journey' when Hazlitt recalls his first visit to France in 1802 during the period of the Peace of Amiens:

> Calais was peopled with novelty and delight. The confused, busy murmur of the place was like oil and wine poured into my ears; nor did the mariner's hymn, which was sung from the top of an old, crazy vessel in the harbour, as the sun went down, send an alien sound into my soul. I breathed the air of general humanity. […] for the image of man was not cast down or chained to the foot of arbitrary thrones. (viii, 188–9)

What these examples suggest is that freedom is not just a political goal to be achieved but a potential in experience that has its momentary realizations. Each gives a slightly different form to the experience: the sound of Coleridge's voice is, for the young Hazlitt, the harbinger of a freedom of expression that will overcome his own sense of being 'at that time dumb, inarticulate, helpless, like a worm by the wayside' (xvii, 107). The yeoman's speech, recalled in 'The Fight', restates the connection between a free voice and defiance that is at work in 'What is the People', and reminds Hazlitt of the work of Cobbett. The recollection of Calais turns a traveller's impressions into a moment of political allegory. The 'confused busy murmur' and 'the mariner's hymn' are no longer the sounds of a foreign place. Instead they are part of the 'air of general humanity' that is realized under conditions of political liberty. What the sounds of Calais speak of is an historically unprecedented experience of freedom, and, with that, the common bond that arises between the English traveller and his fellow French citizens. The passage is a prose lyric that celebrates the effect of political freedom on common life.

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8 *The Judgement of Whole Kingdoms and Nations* (archive.org), 31. The authorship of this work is disputed. Robert Ferguson, Thomas Harrison, Daniel Defoe and John Somers have all been claimed as authors of the text.

These examples give a sense of 'vox populi, vox dei' in action. If the search for and the celebration of what Coleridge called 'the one life within us and abroad'[9] is a central theme of Romanticism, this is Hazlitt's version of it, a version that finds the signs of this fluid and evolving unity not in a solitary communion with nature, but in a collective experience of popular life. Yet all these signs are cast as moments of recollection. If they are Hazlitt's equivalent of Wordsworth's 'spots of time',[10] their significance is not defined in relation to the subject of the growth of the writer's mind, as they were for Wordsworth. Instead they raise a more politically charged and a less self-absorbed question. In a context of revolutionary defeat, a defeat sealed for Hazlitt by the final overthrow of Napoleon in 1815, the experience of liberty is suddenly shifted to become part of a past that has to be recalled. We may say that Hazlitt's recollection serves to protect that value in the hope of its future resurrection, but it poses a further question about why it had proved so precarious, especially when, for some at least, the direction of English culture and politics in the late eighteenth century seemed to be moving towards an affirmation of liberty rather than its denial.

## Resistance and reaction

There is a well-known and credible explanation for this. It has to do with the reaction in British society to the French Revolution. Marilyn Butler has summarized one version of this in her book *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (1981):

> the hitherto dominant *public* was transformed by political events in the 1790s into the prime object of fear, the *people*. The necessity to reconstitute the arts without the people became a driving force behind the creative endeavours in the post-revolutionary decade.'[11]

E.P. Thompson has charted in his classic essay, 'Disenchantment or Default? A Lay Sermon' (1969), how this process affected the lives and work of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Two processes were at work, the gathering pace of political reaction in England, with its spies, show trials and militias raised in national defence against the Napoleonic threat; and the increasing doubts in both poets about the course of the French Revolution itself. Thompson discerns two critical moments in the work of both poets: one, a creative moment of revolutionary disenchantment, when Wordsworth in particular sought to move away from 'a déraciné Godwinian intelligentsia […] toward the common people'. This is accompanied by 'a transposition of enthusiasm from overtly political to more lowly human locations'. The second moment, one in which Thompson finds nothing creative at all, is the

9 'The Eolian Harp', l 26. See *Coleridge: The Complete Poems* (Penguin Classics), ed. William Keach (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 85.

10 *The Prelude* (1805), Book 11, l 208. See *William Wordsworth: The Major Works* (Oxford World's Classics), ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 565.

11 Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) 37–8.

assumption of a dogmatic conservatism represented by Coleridge's *Lay Sermons* of 1817 or Wordsworth's support for 'the feudal power yet surviving in England' as 'counteracting the popular tendency to reform'.[12]

Thompson acknowledges Hazlitt's role in this story, both as a contemporary commentator on it, and as a figure who stood out against the great pulse of conservative reaction that flowed through English society in the opening decades of the nineteenth century. There is certainly something distinctive in Hazlitt's sense of generational attachment to the radical promise that he found in the young Coleridge and Wordsworth, an attachment that made him feel their turn to conservatism as a personal betrayal. This may have enhanced Hazlitt's tendency to dramatize his sense of beleaguered political isolation, even though he was writing after 1815 in the midst of what E.P. Thompson in another work, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), called 'the heroic age of popular radicalism'.[13] He felt himself branded by a sustained campaign of vilification by the conservative press and that no doubt contributed to the authorial identity that Marilyn Butler has described as that of 'an isolated no-sayer driven by unpropitious circumstances into himself, and into wholly notional opposition'.[14]

What this well-known description of Hazlitt's authorship is in danger of overlooking is the importance of resistance not only to the way he wrote but also to the way he imagined the circumstances of his own work. This has not simply to do with the way he thought of himself as resisting the tendency to reaction, a resistance that runs like a thread through the biographical portraits gathered in his 1825 collection, *The Spirit of the Age*. A sense of a cause and a hope betrayed informs his portraits of James Mackintosh, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. But there is something more than that, a strand of Hazlitt's thinking that connects the way he imagined one response to that lifting of a constraint on speech that formed for him a crucial part of the experience of freedom to his thoughts on the state of public opinion in the post-revolutionary period.

If speaking out is a mark of freedom in Hazlitt's work it is haunted by an anxiety about how expressive utterances might or might not be heard. 'What is the People' is, as we have seen, an essay that starts in antagonistic confrontation and plays itself out, almost to the point of exhaustion, in a series of counter-statements to objections to popular sovereignty. The effect is that of witnessing someone engaged in an argument that he feels he cannot win. The odds are simply too heavily stacked against him. The act of giving voice to the cause of the people provokes a resistance that refuses to hear what is being said. Speaking heightens isolation rather than creating those forms of convivial association that Hazlitt associated with 'conversational style'. Hazlitt returned to this desolate possibility on a number of occasions. It informs his understanding of the tragedy of Lear, where Lear's 'keen passions' meet with

12 E.P. Thompson, 'Disenchantment or Default? A Lay Sermon' in *Power and Consciousness,* ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien and William Dean Vanich (London: University of London, 1969), 150–1, 176.

13 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 196; rept Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 660.

14 Butler*, Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries,* 173.

the 'petrifying indifference' of Goneril and Regan and 'seem whetted on their stony hearts' (iv, 260). A variation on this motif occurs in the *Liber Amoris*, where the expressions of love by H produce the opposite of sympathy in their recipient, S. This is the irony in the book's subtitle, 'The New Pygmalion'. Instead of stone being turned to living flesh, as in the original myth, the opposite happens in the exchanges between the two lovers. One of them hardens emotionally in almost exact proportion as the other speaks. Yet the compulsion to speak continues even though H knows his words are likely only to make matters worse.

One task of the critic, in Hazlitt's understanding, is to resist this indifference or turning away from the expressions of others. These may provoke sympathy or antipathy, but whatever the direction of response, the fact of attention is what is paramount. It is an aspect of what Hazlitt meant by disinterestedness. In 'On Consistency of Opinion', an essay in which he measures his distance from the inconsistencies of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey, he gave one definition to this quality of attention: '[…] I think that it is my sympathising beforehand with the different views and feelings that may be entertained on a subject, that prevents my retracting my judgement, and flinging myself into the contrary extreme *afterwards*' (xvii, 23). Yet, as 'On Consistency of Opinion' makes clear, this capacity to be sympathetic before rather than after the fact of expression had dried up in the reactionary nationalism of English culture during and after the Napoleonic wars. This is the context for Hazlitt's reflection on the state of 'our modern polemics' in the same essay. A new kind of intellectual violence characterizes those who have renounced their earlier enthusiasm for liberty:

> They have been of all sides of the question, and yet they cannot conceive how an honest man can be of any but one – that which they hold at present. It seems that they are afraid to look their old opinions in the face, lest they should be fascinated by them once more. They banish all doubts of their own sincerity by inveighing against the motives of their antagonists. (xvii, 24)

This analysis of a cultural psychology informs a number of the essays in *The Spirit of the Age*: the philosopher and politician, Sir James Mackintosh, for example, who had welcomed the French Revolution in his *Vindiciae Gallicae*, published in 1791, only to change his mind in his *Lectures on the Laws of Nature and Nations* of 1799. It is not the fact of Mackintosh's change of mind that appals and fascinates Hazlitt so much as the violence of its display:

> He laid about him like one inspired; nothing could withstand his envenomed tooth. […] The havoc was amazing, the desolation was complete. As to our visionary sceptics and Utopian philosophers, they stood no chance with our lecturer – he did not 'carve them as a dish fit for the Gods, but hewed them as a carcase fit for hounds'. (xi, 98)

Hazlitt's irony here is urbane. He is engaged by the energy of Mackintosh's performance but intimates at the same time that it verges on the ludicrous. But

finding something comic in the 'sudden and violent change' (xi, 100) of Mackintosh's views does not defend Hazlitt against a sadness about what his *Lectures* exemplify, a refusal to mourn the passing of revolutionary hopes and progressive ideals:

> If all that body of opinions and principles of which the orator read his recantation was unfounded, and there was an end of all those views and hopes that pointed to future improvement, it was not a matter of triumph or exultation to the lecturer or anybody else […]; on the contrary, it was a subject of regret, of slow, reluctant, painful admission. (xi, 99–100)

Hazlitt's portrait of Mackintosh depicts a person who has lost the capacity to listen to a former self and denies the fact by the stridency with which he asserts his current convictions. He also has a serious reservation about what is being displayed here. Mackintosh, he notes, 'strikes after the iron is cold' (xi, 103). His eloquence does not produce illumination. But, as Hazlitt makes clear, far from being eccentric, Mackintosh is a symptom of a culture in which the capacity for disinterestedness has been seriously eroded.

Another version of this concern emerges in the ambivalence Hazlitt feels about the state of public opinion in 'What is the People'. As with so much in this essay, there are two moods, one informed by a sense of possibility, the other by a sense of things as they are. In one case, public opinion has its genesis in 'the impartial reason and enlightened intellect of the community' (vii, 267). It is an expression of a 'collective sense' and constitutes a tradition that draws on 'all ages and nations' and 'all those minds that have devoted themselves to the love of truth and the good of mankind' (vii, 269). The polemical target of these remarks is clear. Burke claimed that learning was sustained by 'the nobility and the clergy'; 'manners' and 'civilization' depended on the 'spirit of the gentleman and the spirit of religion'.[15] By contrast Hazlitt found the basis of learning and civilization in the lives of the many, not the few.

In the England of 1817, however, Hazlitt was not at all confident that public opinion was either impartial or rational. The voice of the people can be dissembled and corrupted by a government intent on denying the claims of popular sovereignty. A collective made up of the 'most inveterate, powerful and active enemies of the freedom of the press' produces a class of what Hazlitt calls 'government-writers', 'factious, designing demagogues, who delude the people to make tools of them' (vii, 270–1.) A similar scepticism was forcefully expressed in 'On Consistency of Opinion' where Hazlitt proposes a different genesis for public opinion and a different consequence. It has 'its source in power, in popular prejudice, and is not always in accord with right reason', he argues. Its effects on the body politic are like an infection that 'taints the blood' and 'is taken into the smallest pores' (xvii, 27). The disease is virulent, and, by implication, hard to resist.

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15 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in *Revolutionary Writings*, ed. Iain Hampsher-Monk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 81.

The basic thought is familiar enough and anticipates a number of later writers: Marx's terse definition of ideology, 'the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas'; Orwell on the role of euphemism in political language and its role in 'the defence of the indefensible'; or Hans Magnus Enzensberger's account of the industrialization of the mind which can turn 'any idea into a slogan and any work of the imagination into a hit'.[16] Whatever their differences, all share the thought that we live in a world where language and belief are in the grip of a power that may have an uncanny capacity to conceal its operations. In this context the exercise of critical reason itself becomes a form of resistance and irony one of its main rhetorical weapons.

How Hazlitt's ambivalence about the state of public opinion plays itself out in his essay, 'What is the People', is not easy to decide. The persistence of its arguments, its attempt to refute now one objection to popular sovereignty, now another, may be the result of a confidence about the state of public opinion. It can be won over, even against the deceptions practised by the 'government-writers'. Yet the opposite might also be true. It may be in the nature of the power that Hazlitt addresses that it refuses to listen. It may be a condition of its power that it does so. That is one implication of Hazlitt's understanding of Shakespeare's play, *Coriolanus*, which he thought embodied a knowledge of politics that made reading either 'Burke's Reflections or Paine's Rights of Man' superfluous (iv, 214). Hazlitt's essay on the play is usually mentioned because it asserts that the imagination is an 'aristocratical' faculty, devoted to the promotion of whatever object attracts it, at the expense of the 'republican' faculty of the understanding which 'seeks the greatest quantity of ultimate good, by justice and proportion' (iv, 214). Coriolanus commands our imagination. The Roman populace he holds in contempt does not. But what Hazlitt also shows in the essay is that Coriolanus cannot bear to listen, even when he appears to be doing so. His overbearing will cannot even bear being praised by others. To do so would mark a dependency that his assertion of power cannot tolerate. 'He cannot contradict the praises that are bestowed upon him; therefore he is impatient at hearing them' (iv, 217). This, Hazlitt suggests, is not an oddity in his character, but an aspect of the play's political realism, its portrayal of the will to power at work.

This understanding of power's indifference to the voice of others gives a different insight into the persistence of Hazlitt's arguments in 'What is the People'. The essay's purpose is not the overcoming of an opponent in a context of rational debate. Instead it seeks to maintain the capacity to resist in what Hazlitt took to be a politically dark time. It does not so much advance arguments as rehearse them, and rehearse them in a way that will remind Hazlitt's readers of what they might, given his sense of the corruption of public opinion, be in danger of forgetting. The

16 Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* in *Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, trans. T. B. Bottomore (London: McGraw Hill, 1964), 78; George Orwell, 'Politics and the English Language' in *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. Peter Davison, 21 vols (London: Secker and Warburg, 1998), XVII, 428–9; Hans Mangnus Enzensberger, 'The Industrialization of Mind' in *Critical Essays*, ed. Reinhold Grimm and Bruce Armstrong (New York: Continuum, 1982), 5.

essay works like an antidote to a poison, but the source of the infection cannot itself be eradicated.

## Liberty and power

These questions about Hazlitt's purpose in writing 'What is the People' point to a deeper ambivalence in the essay. If we think of the essay as a rhetorical performance, then the implied role of its author seems clear. He is acting as a popular tribune, giving voice to the people at a maximum of rhetorical intensity and argumentative range. The essay is itself an instance of the activity of reasoning in action and one that is opposed to the dogmatism and mystification that Hazlitt identifies with the restoration of hereditary power in Europe. The use of the term 'legitimacy' to both describe and justify this restoration is itself a provocation that Hazlitt responds to with invective and sarcasm. He demonstrates its function as a political slogan: claiming to restore the law it in fact acts as an alibi for tyranny. But the essay speaks out in the hope that argument might lead to another kind of restoration, a justice based on respect for the dignity and rights of the people. Power, in this view, can be regulated by law. The activity of the resistant writer is to at least hold out the possibility that this might be the case.

But there is another conception of power at work in the essay. It first emerges in Hazlitt's analysis of the purposes of government:

> That Government is instituted for the benefit of the governed, there can be little doubt; but the interests of the Government (when once it becomes absolute and independent of the people) must be directly at variance with those of the governed. The interests of the one are common and equal rights: of the other, exclusive and invidious privileges. (vii, 262)

The statement of what must be the case – an irreducible conflict of interests between government and the governed – is given a parenthetical qualification, as though Hazlitt is reminding himself and his reader that the conflict might not be as implacable as his initial formulation asserts. But the sentences that follow suggest that the qualification has little force and that is because the conflict Hazlitt describes is not just over rights and privileges, but over the control of resources:

> If the Government takes a fourth of the produce of the poor man's labour, they will be rich, and he will be in want. If they can contrive to take one half of it by legal means, or by a stretch of arbitrary power, they will be just twice as rich, twice as insolent and tyrannical, and he will be twice as poor, twice as miserable and oppressed, in a mathematical ratio to the end of the chapter, that is, till the one can extort and the other endure no more. It is the same with respect to power. (vii, 264)

If Hazlitt can invoke the rhetorical energy of a conservative like Burke and counter it with his own, here the tone of the passage is conditioned by a different

kind of opponent. Hazlitt begins to echo the rhythms and vocabulary of Malthus and his *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798). Malthus thought in ratios, say, between the 'quantity of food in any country' and the 'value of each man's patent or the sum of money which he can afford'.[17] The implacability of his 'demonstrations' – a favourite Malthusian word – are meant to raise his arguments above political contention. Hazlitt reverses both this lofty assumption and the premises of Malthus's argument. The 'Government' has by this stage in the essay been so defined that it refers not just to a set of constitutional arrangements, but something much closer to Marx's idea of a 'ruling class', and it is the rapacity of this group that threatens the availability of resource, not, as it was for Malthus, a multiplication in the numbers of the poor.

But if Hazlitt differs from Malthus in his identification of the threat to available resources, he uses the form of the ratio to describe, as Malthus does, a process that has its own implacable logic and one that can take the form of a zero-sum game in which the winner takes all. As the final sentence of the quotation underlines, what is true of economic life is true for politics. The powerful will always take advantage of the less powerful until they have 'succeeded in destroying the very name of liberty, or making it into a byword, and in rooting out the germs of every popular right and liberal principle from a soil once sacred to liberty' (vii, 264).

There is a stringent pessimism about this conception of power that Hazlitt clearly finds compelling. The mitigating or civilizing effects of 'public opinion' have vanished, at least for this section of the essay, from Hazlitt's account of the struggle between rulers and ruled. With that, something else has gone as well: a confidence that links the dissemination of knowledge with the establishment of justice. Hazlitt certainly wrote in terms of this confidence, as in his remarks, in his *Life of Napoleon*, on the French Revolution being the 'remote but inevitable result of the invention of the art of printing' (xiii, 38). What the Revolution affirmed was that tyranny could not withstand the spread of knowledge, and that this, in turn, depended upon the printing press, the 'great organ of intellectual improvement and civilization' (xiii, 38). But this view was shadowed by its opposite. Just as he was ambivalent about public opinion as a civilizing or corrupting force, so he was ambivalent about power as a force that could be regulated by law or reasoned argument. In his account of the struggle over resources, Hazlitt sees that 'Government' will act legally, when it suits them to do so, or 'by the stretch of arbitrary power', when necessary. As importantly, he sees this struggle as a form of warfare in which one side will seek to overcome the resistance of the other by destroying their capacity to resist. The tactics that inform this strategy include the debauching of language – liberty will be made into a 'byword' – and the 'rooting out of the germs of every popular right and liberal principle', or exactly those kinds

17 Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, selected and edited by Donald Winch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 91.

of experience that Hazlitt heard in the 'mariner's hymn' in Calais, or the forthright speech of the 'English yeoman' in the inn at Newbury.[18]

In 'What is the People', Hazlitt summarizes this tendency of power in the form of an allegory: 'Liberty is short and fleeting, a transient grace that lights upon the earth by stealth and at long intervals […] But power is eternal; it is "enthroned in the hearts of Kings"'(vii, 264–5). Like other allegories, it tends to turn historical time into something static or repetitive. Power and liberty are antithetical. Power persists, liberty is 'fleeting' and fugitive. There is no dialectical relation between them, no moment in the future when they will be reconciled in a configuration that makes power a medium that serves liberty. The motif stands in stark contrast to another, more optimistic, understanding of historical process. In this other perspective, the people are themselves envisaged as a persistent if unstable force. It is their intellectual achievements which over time bring about the 'triumphs of human genius over the rudest barbarism, the darkest ignorance […] the most unmitigated and remorseless tyranny' (vii, 269). It is part of Hazlitt's argument with himself that he judged both his own times and the historical past according to these contrasting perspectives. It accounts for the distinctive irony of 'What is the People', one that varies according to whichever of these perspectives is being held in reserve. The energy of the essay's style is created in this contest between disenchantment and hope, between a cynical reason that understands the lengths that power will go to secure its dominance and a continuing determination to write as if a better world was possible. Within this irony different possibilities for the resistant writer are in play: in the one case resistance encounters an enemy that it knows will never be overcome; in the other, resistance is a necessary moment in a struggle to restore or achieve justice.

Hazlitt invokes this irreducible conflict on other occasions in his work. It recurs in 'What is the People', not in allegorical form, but as an observation on political psychology. Thinking about the capacity of the 'people and their representatives' to resist the tyrannical impulses of 'Kings and their Ministers' (vii, 275), Hazlitt reflects on a bias that can weaken popular resolve. The will to freedom finds a counter in what Hazlitt states as a political fact: 'But the love of liberty is less strong than the love of power; and is guided by a less sure instinct in attaining its object' (vii, 275). This bias towards the 'love of power' has different inflections in Hazlitt's work. Its positive energy informs great works of art. It is manifest when the 'mind strikes out truth by collision'. But, in the political instance that concerns me here, it is connected to another theme, one that makes its presence felt in 'What is the People'. It connects the love of power to the condition of enslavement and takes us into the nightmarish territory of what might happen when the capacity to resist has been annihilated.

In a series of four articles on *The Times* newspaper, published in the *Examiner* at the end of 1816, the theme emerges in its most misanthropic expression:

18 Hazlitt anticipates a later twentieth-century preoccupation with how power is analyzed. See the commentary on Michel Foucault's distinction between strategic and judicial conceptions of power in Caygill, *On Resistance*, 8–9.

> Man is a toad-eating animal. The admiration of power in others is as common in man as the love of it in himself: the one makes him a tyrant, the other a slave. It is not he alone, who wears the golden crown, that is proud of it; the wretch who pines in a dungeon, and in chains, is dazzled with it […].
>
> There is something in the human mind, which requires an object for it to repose on; and, driven from all other sources of pride and pleasure, it falls in love with misery, and grows enamoured of oppression. […] Just in proportion to the systematic tyranny exercised over a nation, to its loss of a sense of freedom and the spirit of resistance, will be its loyalty. (vii, 148–9)

This is not Hazlitt's last word on the subject. His thought is too mobile to make him a writer of that kind of conclusiveness, but the tendency he finds in human beings to fall in love with their own enslavement is not a thought he can lightly dismiss. In it is recognizably a part of a sequence in his work connected by a concern about what happens in the weakening or absence of 'the spirit of resistance'. What begins with 'submission on the one side and condescension on the other' can end in an enslaved imagination whose only work is the creation of idols. In 'What is the People', as elsewhere in his work, Hazlitt can identify this same tendency as an instance of what came to be described in twentieth-century political analysis as 'false consciousness'. The opinions of the people are not 'their own, when they have been bribed or bullied into them by a mob of Lords and Gentlemen'. But he still feels obliged to contemplate the worst case, and, by doing so, garner the capacity to resist it. If, Hazlitt implies, we are to be drawn towards a love of liberty, we need to be revolted not just by its absence, but by what can take its place.

## Napoleon, power, and liberty

Napoleon, whose defeat is one of the occasions for 'What is the People', was also, for Hazlitt, the most compelling contemporary embodiment of the tension between power and liberty. It forms a central theme of the biography of Napoleon that Hazlitt wrote during the final years of his life. Napoleon enacts the tension in a heightened form, because, in Hazlitt's understanding of him, he is a figure who could not have emerged in the absence of liberty, yet, in becoming liberty's defender, Napoleon is drawn, perhaps fatally and inevitably, to a preference for power. That this happens in the way it does has to do with the extreme character of the violence that Napoleon provoked. In his account of the Russian campaign, Hazlitt comments on this extremity in his analysis of the affront that Napoleon's claim to power represented to the hereditary rulers who were his antagonists. They cannot bring themselves to regard him as a legitimate ruler. They do not feel bound by any treaties they enter into with him for this reason. Had it been otherwise, according to Hazlitt, the outcome of the Russian campaign would have been different:

> Had he [Napoleon] entered into the lists as a legitimate sovereign, […] he might have gone forth and had a tilting-bout with Alexander, either in

> the Neimen or the Don, in summer or winter […] with so much influence or territory added or taken off; but, in his case he never fought but for his existence. […] He did not like to contemplate the lodged hatred and rankling hostility of which he was and must necessarily be the mark. (xv, 17)

The encounter between Napoleon and Tsar Alexander is an encounter between two different kinds of law, one based on hereditary right, the other on the Republican trinity of liberty, equality, and fraternity. This makes an older form of warfare, 'a tilting-bout' with its compromises over 'influence and territory', impossible. Instead, Napoleon is engaged in a struggle for recognition that he can never win and one whose significance he cannot comprehend. Representing a new law, he wants to be treated in the terms of the old.

The working out of this dilemma between a new law and an old is the context for Hazlitt's return to the tension between liberty and power. But it is given a new inflection. Napoleon is presented as a figure who might have chosen liberty, but instead chose power, and the distinctive pathos of that choice arises in the context of his invasion of Russia. After the Battle of Valoutina in August 1812, Hazlitt describes a visit that Napoleon makes to his troops:

> He was surrounded by every regiment in turn as by a family of his own. These cordial manners, which had the effect of making the privates the companions in arms of the master of Europe – forms which brought back the long-regretted usages of the republic – delighted and transported them. He was a monarch, but he was the monarch of the Revolution; and they were devotedly attached to a sovereign who had elevated himself by his own merits and who elevated others in proportion to theirs. (xv, 44–5)

The mood here is imbued with the values of the French republic. There is a fraternal bond between Napoleon and his troops. Although he is their leader, his soldiers recognize him as an equal, and this equality, in turn, depends upon an idea of liberty often associated with Napoleon, that of the career open to talent. But, in Hazlitt's presentation, these elements become the occasion for a chivalric republicanism rather than revolutionary zeal. There is already an elegiac quality to the 'long-regretted usages of the republic'. New values entwine with older feudal codes in a way that verges on paradox: Napoleon is a monarch, 'but he was the monarch of the Revolution'.

Hazlitt imagines the scene in the manner of an historical painting or a novel by Scott. As his subsequent commentary makes clear, it comes to stand for liberty's fleeting moment. Away from the battlefield, out of touch with his troops, Napoleon loses touch with republican values and the possibility of founding a new law. Instead he is possessed by the horrors of war and by the intransigent character of the Russian resistance to him. He is confronted by a new extremity of violence: the willingness of the Russians to destroy their own cities and then blame this destruction on the French. What might have been a struggle for liberty, with Napoleon offering freedom to the Russian serfs, instead becomes a confrontation

between two nations in arms. Caught up in the logic of this confrontation, Napoleon's 'weak side' is revealed: 'he was fonder of power than of liberty!' (xv, 45–6). Hazlitt presents Napoleon as a figure who moves between two worlds of liberty and power, but is unable to reconcile them. He is the extreme modern instance of the absence of a dialectical relation between them: extreme because of the level of violence that is unleashed as a result; modern because the French Revolution carried the promise of their reconciliation, a promise that Napoleon, 'fonder of power than liberty', was incapable of realizing.

What might Hazlitt's account of Napoleon tell us about the work of resistance in his writing? It draws attention to another connection between resistance and Hazlitt's critical ethic of 'disinterestedness'. If the capacity to 'sympathize beforehand' resists a tendency to the dismissal of antipathetic opinion, so, in this instance, the capacity of the critic to resist the impulse of his own sympathies constitutes another dimension of disinterested appraisal. Hazlitt's own passionate attachment to the figure of Napoleon was well known. When the news of the Battle of Waterloo reached London, the painter, Benjamin Robert Haydon, described Hazlitt's reaction: '[…] he seemed prostrated in mind and body: he walked about, unwashed, unshaved, hardly sober by day, and always intoxicated by night, literally, without exaggeration, for weeks'. P.G. Patmore, another close observer of Hazlitt and a loyal friend, reported that Napoleon's defeat marked the 'utter extinction' for him 'of human liberty from the earth.'[19]

This image of Hazlitt in the immediate aftermath of the Battle of Waterloo informed and distorted later critical assessments of his relation to Napoleon. According to E.P. Thompson, Hazlitt's refusal of the conservative turn taken by Wordsworth and Coleridge came at too high a price. He 'could maintain his affirmatives only by latching on to the hero figure of Napoleon, and by sustaining his aspiration of a kind of whimsy fortified by rancor'.[20] This ignores the way that Hazlitt's assessment of Napoleon's significance changed in the period after Waterloo. The idea that Napoleon's defeat marked the extinction of liberty was replaced by another: that liberty was transient and fleeting. But this, in turn, was clearly connected in its formulation with its antithesis, the persistence of power. It was by this means that Hazlitt put in question his own tendency to make an idol out of Napoleon.

Another way of putting this is to say that what Thompson fails to see in Hazlitt's work is the importance of resistance as an alternative to either the unsustainable hope of revolution or the satisfactions of reaction. But to think of him in this way runs the danger of immobilizing him in a single defiant stance. The movement of resistant sensibility in Hazlitt's work is not just to do with the ways he rounds on his political enemies and fights back against them. It is connected to the nature of disinterestedness as it is to the bias he perceives in human nature towards power

19 Benjamin Robert Haydon, *The Autobiography and Journals of Benjamin Robert Haydon,* ed. Malcolm Elwin (London: MacDonald, 1950) 249–50; P.G. Patmore, *My Friends and Acquaintances,* 3 vols (London: Saunders and Otley, 1854), II, 323

20 E.P. Thompson, 'Disenchantment or Default?', 178.

and away from liberty. Resistance, in this more extended sense, informs the very process of criticism. It exposes the impulses of attraction and revulsion at work in judgements, and changes of judgement, and puts them in question. It also suggests a possibility for literature, and the art of the personal essay in particular. This seeks to resist the human bias towards a love of power and cultivate instead a love of liberty. Given the gravitational attraction of power, this attempt can never be certain of its outcome, and is carried through as much by tone and nuances of self-presentation as by explicit argument.

Beyond this, thinking about Hazlitt as a resistant writer can make us think again about the nature of his modernity. In his biography, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (2008), Duncan Wu sees this in terms of Hazlitt's place in the emergence of modern mass media.[21] He stands at the centre of new energies of communication and of political and cultural change, an inventor of new journalistic genres and a creator of the modern essay. This compelling interpretation gives us an expansive account of modernity. It draws upon the invention of new freedoms of expression for the individual. It affirms the value of equality and the importance of the idea that the human creature is a bearer of rights. The resistant writer is one who seeks both to defend and advance these forms of modern freedom.

The argument of this essay is that, while this account of Hazlitt's modernity captures an important truth about his work, it needs to be complemented by another. The direction of history in Hazlitt's work does not move simply towards a future of liberty. His response to the revolution's defeat drew him towards an understanding of power which operated in terms of relations of forces rather than the rule of law. Thought of as a relation of forces, one effect of the contest between liberty and power had been a modern escalation in violence. The reactionary turn in English culture had produced one version of this in the life of culture, typified for Hazlitt by the figure of James Mackintosh. Mackintosh's vehemence was itself the result of what in 'On Consistency of Opinion' Hazlitt called 'the whirling motion of the revolutionary wheel which has of late wrenched men's understandings almost asunder' (xvii, 26).

This violence of denunciation is matched by another, more obviously material, and unprecedented violence. Napoleon is its defining figure, the focus of two new intensities of violence: one in the level of hatred he provoked; the other in the scale of destruction unleashed by the post-revolutionary wars in Europe. If the French Revolution marked the affirmation of modern freedoms, it had as another of its consequences the inauguration of a modernity marked by a new form of war. Hazlitt was certainly not alone in this perception. As Howard Caygill has shown in his recent work on the philosophy of resistance, one of Hazlitt's contemporaries, the German philosopher and military theorist, Carl von Clausewitz, author of one of the most influential books of military strategy, *On War* (1832), was preoccupied with the figure of Napoleon. Like Hazlitt, von Clausewitz understood that the Napoleonic wars instigated a new level of violence, one characterized by both its

21 Duncan Wu, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xxii–xxiii.

speed and the scale of its devastation. Unlike Hazlitt, he was charged with the task of coming up with a way of countering the Napoleonic armies, after the defeat of Prussia at the battles of Austerlitz and Jena. His answer, drawn from the experience of the conflicts in Spain, was a theory of resistance, based on the guerilla, or little war, rather than on outright confrontation. And, given von Clausewitz's acute understanding of the parallels between war and politics, resistance was always more than a military strategy. It gave birth to another idea of modernity, one that was characterized by 'the insecurity provoked by the power of chance and the effects of enmity'.[22] The future was not to be the steady unfolding of the realm of freedom, secured by law and the mutual recognition of rights. Instead, modernity was characterized by a new and heightened volatility, shaped by unpredictable movements of resistance and counter-resistance. If a modernity imagined as the unfolding of freedom is immanent in Hazlitt's work, so is this other more sombre account. It is part of Hazlitt's intellectual courage that he was able to inhabit both these worlds and maintain a poise between them.[23]

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22 Caygill, *On Resistance*, 18.

23 An earlier version of this essay was given as the Hazlitt Society Annual Lecture in 2016. Thanks to Uttara Natarajan and Richard Holmes for their editorial comments.

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# 'ORGAN OF VANITY'

## Hazlitt's Phrenological Caricature of Southey

*David Woodhouse*

The year 2017 marks the bicentenary of 'a celebrated episode in Romantic cultural politics'.[1] It is hard to think of an unauthorized publication more exquisitely timed than *Wat Tyler*, a callow blank-verse drama celebrating civil insurrection in the aftermath of a war with France, which was exhumed immediately after the appearance of a cantankerous article in the *Quarterly Review* calling for the transportation of any writer inciting civil insurrection in the aftermath of a war with France. The common authorship of these two diametrically opposed pieces generated ironies serial and spectacular: the youth who had declaimed against 'the blood-purpled robes of royalty' turned out to be Robert Southey, now Poet Laureate proudly descanting upon 'the opulence / Of Britain's Court';[2] Wat Tyler had been one of the historical personages specifically invoked by the leaders of the disturbance in Spa Fields two months earlier, an 'attempt at insurrection' which prompted Robert Southey, anonymous Quarterly Reviewer, to call for extraordinary measures to be taken against journalists sowing the 'seeds of rebellion';[3] a book considered so subversive in 1795 that it was withheld by a publisher already in jail for sedition under Pitt's gagging acts saw the light of day at the height of a political crisis in 1817 where that repressive legislation was being reactivated; Southey's injunction against the piracy of his long-forgotten play failed on the legal nicety that he could not automatically claim property rights over a seditious work; this in turn meant that he could not suppress it nor earn a penny from what turned out to be easily the best-selling opus of any Lake

1 Kevin Gilmartin, *William Hazlitt: Political Essayist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 55. To the studies of the Controversy listed in Gilmartin's bibliographical footnote (82–3) may be added: Stuart Andrews, *Robert Southey: History, Politics, Religion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 71–8; Kim Wheatley, *Romantic Feuds: Transcending the 'Age of Personality'* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 21–56; Duncan Wu, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 204–7; the editorial introduction in *Robert Southey: Later Poetical Works, 1811–1838*, ed. Tim Fulford, Lynda Pratt, *et al.*, 4 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), III, 441–60.

2 *Wat Tyler* II, 106; *The Lay of the Laureate*, 'The Dream', 94–5 (Southey, *Later Poetical Works,* III, 485, 406).

3 *Quarterly Review* 16 (October 1816 [published February 1817]), 248, 275.

poet;[4] when Coleridge entered what had become the Wat Tyler Controversy with a series of articles in *The Courier* seeking to staunch the 'conducting-pipes of slander pumped up from the cellars and poison-vaults of roguery', his interventions were considered unhelpfully erratic by his friends and irresistibly empurpled by his enemies.[5] As Hazlitt put it, in one of his contributions to the same debate: 'Instead of applying for an injunction against *Wat Tyler*, Mr. Southey would do well to apply for an injunction against Mr. Coleridge'.[6]

A writer who considered it 'liberal thinking' to have 'Paine's Rights of Man and Burke's Reflections on the French Revolution bound up in one volume' (xvii, 65) might in less distressed or repressive atmospheres have examined the political rhetoric of 'both sides of the question' (ix, 36) with more detachment. But, during Hazlitt's 'pretty strong turn' (viii, 62) to political writing in 1816/17, it was the 'want of keeping' (vii, 177) at the heart of Southey's conduct which was mercilessly dissected. It may indeed have been Hazlitt's selection for *The Examiner* of delicious *morceaux* (vii, 168–76) from *Wat Tyler* and the *Quarterly Review* which inspired the Unitarian MP William Smith to draw the two volumes from his pocket for contrasting quotation during a debate on the Seditious Meetings Bill. Smith's widely reported speech sealed the Laureate's place in radical demonology as the paradigmatic 'renegado' and set in train another round of disputation.[7]

This article will focus on the last and longest of Hazlitt's direct contributions to the Controversy (first published as 'Literary Notices: No. 27' in *The Examiner* over three weekends in May 1817 and later collected in the 1819 *Political Essays*). It will zoom in further on a piece of caricature which is, even by Hazlitt's standards, remarkably intense and intertextual. It will argue that the full effect of the caricature rests on a phrenological interpretation. But its main purpose is to celebrate the ways in which the virtuosity of the attempt to 'neutralize' (vii, 189) Southey preserves him as a 'painful hieroglyphic of humanity' (vii, 208) two hundred years later.

4 William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 316–18.

5 *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Essays on His Times in* The Morning Post *and* The Courier, ed. D.V. Erdman, 3 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), II, 454.

6 *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe, 21 vols (London: J.M. Dent, 1930–4), vii, 176 (all subsequent references to the *Complete Works* will be parenthetical within the text).

7 Even Cobbett, whose coverage rarely extended to matters literary, eventually reported that the Laureate had been 'well compared to the Renegadoes in the Barbary States, who always treat Christian Captives with more severity than that with which they are treated by the native Turks' (*Political Register* 32 [15 November 1817], col 996).

## Hazlitt's review of Southey's *Letter to William Smith, Esq. M.P.*

The pamphlet response to Smith which Southey hurried out in April 1817 was by turns uncharacteristically self-deprecating and characteristically self-righteous. The vindication of his political conduct rested on an eminently reasonable defence: it was only when the facts changed – when the French Republic became a 'Military Tyranny' under Napoleon – that he changed his mind.[8] But several misjudgements of tone leave Southey vulnerable to ridicule as 'a prude and a scold' (vii, 169). First, he insists he 'escaped the atheism and the leprous immorality' which tended to accompany republican principles in the 1790s and which he now sniffs out everywhere in 'modern liberality'.[9] Second, he responds to what he saw as an abuse of parliamentary privilege with a denunciation more apocalyptic than juridical:

> Mr. William Smith is said to have insulted me with the appellation of Renegade; and if it be indeed true that the foul aspersion past his lips, I brand him for it on the forehead with the name of SLANDERER. Salve the mark as you will, Sir, it is ineffaceable! You must bear it with you to your Grave, and the remembrance will outlast your Epitaph.[10]

Finally, Southey goes on to write his own epitaph, where he imagines that his already 'conspicuous' name 'will certainly not perish' and portrays himself as a model of 'devotion' to family and vocation in an auto-obituary which seems to have foreknowledge of Coleridge's upcoming tribute to his 'perfect consistency' and 'absolute *reliability*' in private life.[11]

Hazlitt's review of the *Letter to William Smith, Esq. M.P.*, is a deliberately forensic, and at times pedantic, examination of Southey's deposition. The essay is therefore conscious of its own repetitiveness – 'We have said it all before' (vii, 188) – unevenness – 'We must get on a little faster' (vii, 196) – and shrillness – 'we cannot help it' (vii, 208). Yet it remains one of the most brilliant pieces in Hazlitt's long campaign against the Laker triumvirate, begun immediately after two of them accepted government posts in 1813 and continued up to the last essays of 1830.[12]

8 Robert Southey, *A Letter to William Smith, Esq. M.P.* (London: John Murray, 1817), 27–8.

9 Ibid, 19, 22.

10 Ibid, 28.

11 Ibid, 44; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Adam Roberts (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 50. Coleridge's paean also made smug assumptions about the conclusions of 'future' biographers and provoked Hazlitt into a tour de force of propulsive apposition (xvi, 120–1).

12 Hazlitt was not the only anti-ministerial writer for whom Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge became virtually inseparable as a symbolic 'trinity' (vii, 183n.) of lost leaders, with the latter's inability to produce anything meaningful becoming one of the many absurdities: 'the one with a receipt-stamp in his hand, the other with a laurel on his

The immediate influence of 'Literary Notices: No. 27' is difficult to recover but easy to underestimate. One of its distinctive features, perhaps inspired by the parallel Southey drew between the sudden probe into his political record and the government's 'Delicate Investigation' into the conduct of the Regent's wife Caroline,[13] is a cosmopolitan mockery of provincial uptightness more adroitly controlled, with one page-long exception, than in some of Hazlitt's spicier provocations.[14] He ascribes the splenetic Laureate's lack of good humour and fellow feeling to 'the prudery of his moral habits' and prescribes him the drinking song of *Don Giovanni* on the grounds that 'a little more indulgence of his appetites might make him a little less tenacious of his opinions' (vii, 202). This teasing antidote to the outpourings of a 'malignant Renegade' (vii, 196) may conceivably have provided Byron with the prompt for *Don Juan*, a poem (dedicated to the same 'Epic Renegade' a year later) in which indulgence of appetite almost always overcomes tenacity of opinion.[15]

At the same time, a sense of high stakes and a tone of desperate sincerity permeate the writing. Hazlitt works through his practised repertoire of attacks on Southey's apostasy and venality with such gusto that it is sometimes hard for him to maintain the attitudes of liberality and equability designed to contrast with his enemy's alleged intolerance and intemperance. Not for the only time, the power of Hazlitt's prose caused Keats to reflect upon his own poetic vocation; he was particularly responsive to the 'Thunderclap' at the end of the first part of the piece, where the absence of periods bespeaks the presence of passion: 'Why should not one make a sentence of a page long, out of the feelings of one's whole life?' (vii, 194). We will now concentrate on a passage which Keats admired less – 'O that he had left out the grey hairs!' – but which is perhaps even more representative of the energy Hazlitt invested in the Wat Tyler Controversy.[16]

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head, and the third with a symbol which we could make nothing of, for it was neither literal nor allegorical' (vii, 152). In 'The Letter-Bell', Hazlitt is still expending precious energy on variations of these tropes before allowing himself to be more explicit than usual about the contrast he expects his readers to draw: 'There is at least a thorough *keeping* in what I write' (xvii, 377–8).

13 Southey, *Letter*, 12.

14 Given Southey's particular reputation as a 'hireling slave', Hazlitt's various caricatures of the 'literary prostitute' are the most obvious hits (vii, 169, 178–9; compare vii, 137, 147), although the Laureate is also depicted as general pimp and 'pander' to the court (vii, 179; compare vii, 132, 149, 253) and as a client or paramour of the old 'bawd' Legitimacy (vii, 153–4), a figure which is given an energetic run-out in 'Literary Notices: No. 27' (vii, 193). Yet Southey has also been made 'effeminate' by his official position to the point of impotence (vii, 143, 169; compare vii, 25), even if he remains capable of 'hypostatical union' with his former self (vii, 169).

15 *Don Juan*, Dedication, 1: 5 (*Lord Byron: Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome McGann and Barry Weller, 7 vols [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980–93]), V, 3. See David Woodhouse, 'Shades of Pope: Byron's Development as a Satirist' (University of Cambridge: unpublished Ph.D., 1995), 167–87; Paul Magnuson, *Reading Public Romanticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 143–52.

16 *The Letters of John Keats 1814–1821*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), I, 137–8.

## A poet's head caricatured in prose

The grey hairs appeared on the first page of the review as originally printed, in an extended opening paragraph where Hazlitt seeks to establish his central case that Southey's reply to Smith 'is a concentrated essence of a want of self-knowledge' (vii, 187):

> It is the picture of the author's mind in little. In this respect, it is 'a psychological curiosity'; a study of human infirmity. As some persons bequeath their bodies to the surgeons to be dissected after their death, Mr. Southey publicly exposes his mind to be anatomized while he is living. He lays open his character to the scalping-knife, guides the philosophic hand in its painful researches, and on the bald crown of our *petit tondu*, in vain concealed under withered bay-leaves and a few contemptible grey hairs, you see the organ of vanity triumphant – sleek, smooth, round, perfect, polished, horned, and shining, as it were in a transparency. This is the handle of his intellect, the index of his mind; 'the guide, the anchor of his purest thoughts, and soul of all his moral being'. (vii, 187)

In his close analysis of the ways in which Hazlitt becomes 'the prose equivalent of a political cartoonist', Tom Paulin has cited part of this passage to illustrate how the 'aural texture' of the writing 'establishes a strong visual presence – the glow of a transparency as well as a musical key or motif'.[17] Paulin also seems to imply, when he concludes that the accumulated adjectives insinuate Southey is 'both a prig and a prick', that Hazlitt may have been asking his readers to have present in their minds another anatomical image.[18] The potential significations of the word 'organ' could indeed be suggestive of the Laureate's discordant output and tumescent egotism. If there is a musical motif, Southey – famously parodied patronizing a knife-grinder in his youth – may now himself have become an organ-grinder. Most *Examiner* subscribers would have recognized the *Quarterly Review*, shortly to be described in Hazlitt's article as the 'avowed organ of the government-party', to be the main instrument in his paid repertoire (vii, 189).[19] Such is the rich allusive texture of the caricature that this is merely one of the many suggestions it offers. As in the best Cruikshank prints, what is at first glance a graphic distortion is on closer inspection an image layered with references both topical and canonical.

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17 Tom Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998), 178, 179.

18 Ibid, 181.

19 'The Friend of Humanity and the Knife-Grinder' in *Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin* (London: J. Wright, 1799), 10–11. Hazlitt notes Southey's continuing sensitivity to 'Mr. Canning's parodies' (vii, 195) and alludes to this one specifically towards the end of the essay when he repeatedly addresses the Laureate as 'Man of Humanity' (vii, 206). Compare also vii, 182 with *Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin*, 235.

Although other literary precedents for the bald pate and grey hairs have been proposed, the immediate stimulus for the image was probably a desire to find an allegorical riposte to the *Letter*'s figuration of Smith's branded forehead.[20] But the main provocation underpinning the tableau was Southey's own habitual depiction of his decorated Laureate brow. His very first lines in the office envisioned his taking up the mantle of Dryden and Spenser – 'In happy hour doth he receive / The Laurel, meed of famous Bards of yore' – and reclaiming it as the birthright of poets whose works would survive the test of time.[21] This may itself have been a response to articles in the reformist press at the moment of his appointment, which questioned the legitimacy and relevance of the post both by mocking the literary qualifications of recent incumbents and also by asserting that there was no better symbol of the perversion of the imaginative spirit than the poet 'who condescends to twine the laurel wreath around his brows'.[22] By 1816, Southey was even more deliberately 'putting on the laurel in defiance' in an attempt to drown out the cynicism of certain readers with a 'strain of proud egotism' than when he began.[23] Both of the book-length poems he published that year interweave the 'olive garland' of British victory and 'the laureate garland' that 'crowns' the bard's 'living head'.[24] In this schema, national security and personal propriety are mutually reinforcing guarantees of 'Truth and Freedom':

> For therefore have my days been days of joy,
> And all my paths are paths of pleasantness:
> And still my heart, as when I was a boy,
> Doth never know an ebb of chearfulness;
> Time, which matures the intellectual part,
> Hath tinged my hairs with grey, but left untouched my heart.[25]

For Hazlitt, who had already accused Southey of plucking out 'the heart of Liberty within him' (vii, 185), his barefaced apostasy makes him a study in moral

20 Paul Magnuson offers a source text for the baldness in Milton (*Reading Public Romanticism*, 151); David Bromwich, a source text for the greyness in Junius (*Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1983], 178, 427n.). The bulbous cork head of the 'shuttle-cock' – which Southey used as a metaphor for the way his name had been patted back and forth in the London newspapers (*Letter*, 12) – may also have been suggestive.

21 Southey, *Later Poetical Works*, III, 15.

22 *New Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), I, 73.

23 Letter 2394 in *Collected Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. Tim Fulford, Ian Packer, and Lynda Pratt (www.rc.umd.edu/editions/southey_letters [accessed 4 May 2017]). Francis Jeffrey was a partial witness but claimed thousands of readers could not 'help tittering at the absurd figure' cut by Southey as Laureate (*Edinburgh Review*, 28 [March 1817 (published May 1817)], 160).

24 Southey, *Later Poetical Works*, III, 394, 393.

25 *The Lay of the Laureate* (1816), Proem, 21, 37–42 (Southey, *Later Poetical Works*, III, 392); compare *The Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo* (1816), Proem, 139–40 (III, 248).

decay rather than the kind of organic development portrayed in *The Lay of the Laureate*.[26] Like all Tory lackeys in dalliance with power, he has trod not the paths of pleasantness but 'the primrose path of preferment' (vii, 18, 252).[27] In a literally withering alternative presentation, the crowned head becomes a 'bald crown' and the salt and pepper of the contented family man is reduced to a 'few contemptible grey hairs'. The 'organ of vanity' is a symbolic paradox, at once (to borrow two adjectives repeatedly coupled in the essay) 'pert' and 'vapid' (vii, 190, 199). On the one hand, it represents the monstrously swollen self-importance exhibited in the *Letter to William Smith*, a work which Hazlitt later compared to 'a huge hydrocephalus' (viii, 67). On the other, it appears to have been emptied of all spirit and substance: the Jacobin 'glow on his cheek' long dimmed (vii, 133), the trappings of the court have prematurely fixed 'the volatility of genius in a *caput mortuum* of prejudice and servility' (vii, 238). Hazlitt is pronouncing Southey big-headed and brain-dead.

## Layers of allusion

It is typical of Hazlitt that the set-piece caricature of the Laureate, the easiest target, is bookended by quotations from Coleridge and Wordsworth. As a keen student of anti-Jacobin character assassination, he had seen the technique of *ex hoc disce omnes* applied to the Lakers in their radical youth (xvi, 234) and, under the pressure of current distress, is prepared to employ the same method. Although Coleridge and Wordsworth were presented with less dramatic challenges to their 'personal continuity' (vii, 168) than *Wat Tyler*, the publication of the 'psychological curiosity' 'Kubla Khan' in the *Christabel* volume of 1816 was just one manifestation of their post-war attempts to set their work in a revised perspective.[28] After a long period of relative silence, Wordsworth published five books (of material new, old, collected, and projected) between August 1814 and May 1816; in the years 1816 and 1817 Coleridge published seven. During

26 As an aside, Hazlitt seems to have had preternatural insight into Southey's 'psychological' state during the Controversy. A letter to Bedford of 19 February 1817 (Southey, *Collected Letters*, 2923) quotes from the *Lay* to reveal a vexation about *Wat Tyler* not yet carapaced by the *Letter*: 'In grief & in uneasiness I have often caught myself examining my own sensations as if the intellectual part could separate itself from that in which the affections predominate, & stand aloof, & contemplate it as a surgeon does the sufferings of a patient during an operation'.

27 Editors have noted the allusion to *Hamlet* (I.iii.50) but it combines with a relished echo (even if the phrase is used in the *Political Essays* in relation to Tories and clerics in general) of 'To My Own Miniature Picture[…]', first published in 1797, where Southey recalls he ignored advice to 'tread PREFERMENT's pleasant path' in favour of 'POESY' (*Robert Southey: Poetical Works 1793–1810*, ed. Lynda Pratt, 5 vols [London: Pickering and Chatto, 2004], V, 57). Such boasts of independence came back to haunt the Laureate: an excerpt from this poem was used as one of the epigraphs to the first pirated edition of *Wat Tyler* (Southey, *Later Poetical Works* III, 461).

28 The phrase 'psychological curiosity' appears in the Preface to 'Kubla Khan' itself (*Christabel &c.* [London: John Murray, 1816], 51).

this period Hazlitt sometimes acts almost as a variorum editor, footnoting any suppressions or contradictions of the authorized versions he had by heart (v, 233n.). Earlier in the Controversy, he had applied another phrase from the *Christabel* apparatus to the Lakers before denying the merit of anything they had produced since love of humanity had given way to love of self: 'All the authority that they have as poets and men of genius must be thrown into the scale of Revolution and Reform' (vii, 181).[29] In the caricature, the rehashing of the lines from *Tintern Abbey* to describe not the impulses of the sense sublime but the baser dictates of 'vanity and interest' (vii, 198) registers Hazlitt's determination at this time of political crisis to concentrate exclusively on the process of self-degradation.

Southey's 'human infirmity' implicates the other Lakers in the caricature because, as the echo of *Lycidas* intimates, his vanity extends to a thirst for fame.[30] It was helpful to Hazlitt's case that *The Lay of the Laureate*'s account of the One Life was so jejune and that its repeated appeals to the example of Spenser were so self-serving. But Wordsworth had made Spenser's 'laurel' one of the touchstones of his *Essay, Supplementary*, designed as a vindication of canonical 'select Spirits' but read by his critics as the most transparent example of his own sublime egotism.[31] In the *Courier*, Coleridge argued that those who accused Southey of inconsistency betrayed their 'compleat ignorance of the whole form, growth and character of a Poet's mind',[32] a line of defence alluding to a great autobiographical poem not yet published or fully titled. When Hazlitt, an early auditor of parts of *The Prelude*, taunts the Laureate about 'the retrograde progress of his own mind' (vii, 197), it is almost as if the head of Wordsworth (actually rather balder) has been superimposed on the head of Southey. The grimly reductive point is that the 'moral being' of all three Lakers has been snuffed out by their apostasy to 'moral atheism' (vii, 10); the defiant inference is that literary authority has been

29 On page v of the general Preface to the *Christabel* volume, Coleridge admits that since the turn of the century his poetic powers have been 'in a state of suspended animation', a phrase which Hazlitt decides is 'comparatively or wholly' applicable to Southey and Wordsworth also (vii, 182).

30 'Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise / (That last infirmity of noble mind)' (*Lycidas*, II 70–1) – see *John Milton: Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. Stella P. Revard (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 76. *Lycidas* was an elegy appropriate to the 'heavy change' (l 37) of Southey's political opinions which Hazlitt duly quoted back to him as soon as he took the post (xix, 116) and, perhaps to remind Southey of its 'Laureat Hearse' (l 151), more often than not Hazlitt spells the word Laureat without the 'e' (see vii, 86–7).

31 *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W.J.B. Owen and J.W. Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), III, 67. The argument that Spenser's bays are denied only by Francophile philistines had been anticipated in *The Excursion*, where the 'laurel' planted on the 'hoary hairs' of Voltaire (on his last visit to Paris in 1778) is presented as a symbolic grotesquerie of a 'most frivolous people' (*The Excursion by William Wordsworth*, ed. Sally Bushell, James A. Butler and Michael C. Jaye [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007], IV, 992–1006: 157–8).

32 Coleridge, *Essays on his Times*, II, 469.

transferred from the philosophic mind synthesizing the power of nature to the 'philosophic hand' anatomizing the nature of power.

So the precedent suggested in the alternative tableau is not 'dear, divinest Spenser'[33] but the King of the Dunces. In his political writing, against the grain of his own literary taste, Hazlitt was increasingly drawn to the example of Pope, partly because the late epistles and satires provided him with a model for the lone voice speaking out against institutional corruption (vii, 22) and partly because targets like Castlereagh and the Lake poets were vulnerable to Scriblerian lampoon. The appearance of 'polished' in the list of adjectives describing the Laureate's forehead and the immediate proximity of a quotation from the *Moral Essays* to clinch the argument that vanity is Southey's ruling passion combine to prompt a recollection of the four-book *Dunciad*:

> What then remains? Ourself. Still, still remain
> Cibberian forehead, and Cibberian brain.
> This brazen Brightness, to the 'Squire so dear;
> This polished Hardness, that reflects the Peer.[34]

Pope's turn on 'reflects' deflates Cibber's sense of catering to sophisticated taste with the image of an obsequious courtier bowing so low that his aristocratic patron can use his gleaming pate as a mirror. The Cibberian brain is the palimpsest of the organ of vanity: Southey's senses have been so 'dazzled' by 'the finery of birth-day suits' (vii, 185) that he has naturally fallen in with power and into 'the very vortex of court-sycophancy' (vii, 199).

Cibber provided a particularly appropriate parallel given that he was, for Hazlitt's polemical purposes, not only a time-serving Poet Laureate (vii, 89, 234),[35] but also a shrill prose apologist. That the caricature has in view Southey's semi-official journalism, as well as his official verse, is registered by the moniker '*petit tondu*'. This may, in passing, help set up the essay's mordant take on the monkish 'absolute retirement' celebrated in Southey's *Letter*: [36] 'He unites somewhat of the fanaticism and bigotry of the cloister with its penances and privations' (vii, 202). But *petit tondu*, in the slang of Grande Armée marching songs, means Napoleon. Paul Magnuson, the first critic to spot this allusion, suggests rightly that Hazlitt's main thrust is to puncture any aspirations Southey might have to be the 'Napoleon of literature'.[37] There is also a sense of Southey being hoist by his own petard, given that he specialized both in calls for Bonaparte's public execution and in gloating spoofs of the pained radical responses to Bonaparte's downfall. The *Quarterly* article which set off the Controversy mocked the honorifics used by 'eminent patriots' for 'this their *beau idéal* of a philosophical sovereign, – this

33 Southey, *Later Poetical Works*, III, 393.

34 Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad in Four Books*, ed. Valerie Rumbold (London: Longman, 1999), 127 (Book I, ll 218–21).

35 See also Wu, *New Writings*, I, 65.

36 Southey, *Letter*, 44.

37 Magnuson, *Reading Public Romanticism*, 151.

Perfect Emperor of the British *Liberales*'.[38] Hazlitt, one of the liberal journalists explicitly under attack in the *Quarterly* piece, answers the passage directly when he claims that Southey makes the defects of others 'so many perfections in himself; and by this mode of proceeding, abstracts himself into a *beau ideal* of moral and political egotism' (vii, 201–2). In the caricature, when Southey's head appears 'as it were in a transparency', he is therefore 'triumphant', not like the Allied generals so often celebrated in window transparencies after Waterloo, but as a hero 'perfect' only unto himself.[39] Meanwhile, the appearance of the scalping knife suggests the writer who believed a post-war settlement depended on the removal of 'one execrable head'[40] is having his own *petit tondu* measured up. The essay's intended readership would have recognized immediately that many of the 'persons' who 'bequeath' their bodies to medical science did so involuntarily after being cut down from the gallows.[41]

## Phrenological context

The figure of dissection opens up another vein of topical reference to a different Controversy – by no means as dramatic as the Wat Tyler in London – which was being played out in Edinburgh. Johann Spurzheim had lingered in the city during his promotional lecture tour for a new edition of his manual on phrenology, partly because Edinburgh was a centre of anatomy and he wished to demonstrate his 'new and superior mode of dissecting the human brain' and partly because thence had emanated some of the most hostile criticism of his book and his system.[42] The basic premise of Spurzheim and his erstwhile mentor Gall was that the brain could be divided into many 'faculties' or 'organs', that the size of these organs determined the strength of particular character traits, and that trained practitioners could fairly precisely measure these propensities by means of an

38 *Quarterly Review* 16 (October 1816 [published February 1817]), 240. In his reply to Smith, Southey observed that the column inches devoted to *Wat Tyler* 'would otherwise have been employed in bewailing the forlorn condition of the Emperor' (*Letter*, 12); one of Jeffrey's nice little jokes when he reviewed the pamphlet was that Southey abused Napoleon 'with as much rancour as if he had once been his Laureate' (*Edinburgh Review* 28 [March 1817 (published May 1817)], 168).

39 The irony is also set up by an earlier allusion to Matthew 5: 48 (followed by John 14: 6): '"there is but one perfect, even himself." He is the central point of all moral and intellectual excellence; the way, the truth, and the life' (vii, 187–8).

40 Southey, *Later Poetical Works*, III, 44.

41 The judicial mistreatment of the corpses of impoverished criminals under the Murder Act of 1752 was a staple of radical rhetoric, although it should be noted that the body of the current cause célèbre was not given up to be anatomized because his capital crime was riot not murder. The remains of John Cashman, the only Spa-Fields agitator to be 'suspended' (xix, 186) – and the last Briton ever to be executed at the crime-scene – were eventually recovered by a nephew (*Political Register* 32 [15 March 1817], col 346).

42 'The Craniological Controversy', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 1 (April 1817), 35. For a modern academic commentary, see G.N. Cantor, 'The Edinburgh Phrenology Debate 1803–1828', *Annals of Science* 32 (1975), 195–256.

examination of the skull's contours. As Hazlitt's most recent editor notes, his use of the term 'organ of vanity' is therefore a 'satirical reference' to these theories, which he was to critique more thoroughly in three later essays.[43]

The idea of making Southey a phrenological exhibit in 'Literary Notices: No. 27' may have been suggested by two recent satirical works, one co-authored by Hazlitt's new patron, Francis Jeffrey, and one written by his new acquaintance, Thomas Love Peacock. *The Craniad* (published anonymously in February 1817 and usually attributed to Jeffrey and John Gordon) is a mildly reformist sub-Popean exercise which trots through a familiar catalogue of political and literary targets, including corpulent judges and Laureate poets: 'Let some who scrawl from vanity alone / […] Fill poet's corners'.[44] The hyperbole of conservative Bonaparte-baiting and the patness of phrenological determinism are simultaneously mocked when we are reminded that Gall detected in the 'marks' on the head of the '*huge villain*' Napoleon 'too much' of the predominant organs of the tiger (combativeness) and the peacock (vanity or self-esteem).[45] The lecture of the enthusiastic Mr Cranium in Peacock's *Headlong Hall* (published on the cusp of 1816) draws similar conclusions from animal skulls, allowing the author a characteristic moment of self-deprecation: 'Here is the skull of a peacock. You observe the organ of vanity'.[46] A more political agenda then emerges as a celebrated 'conqueror' and a celebrated highwayman are seen to exhibit exactly the same faculties, except that the former had still 'greater enlargement' of the organ of vanity and murdered 'millions' more victims.[47] The lecture's last comparison involves the sort of character who might have turned an ode or even an epic in the conqueror's memory:

> Here is the skull of a turnspit, which, after a wretched life of *dirty work*, was turned out of doors to die on a dunghill. I have been induced to preserve it, in consequence of its remarkable similarity to this, which belonged to a courtly poet, who, having grown grey in flattering the great, was cast off in the same manner to perish by the same catastrophe.[48]

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43 *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu, 9 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), IV, 402n. The three essays are 'On Dr. Spurzheim's Theory' (xii, 137–56); 'Burke and the Edinburgh Phrenologists' (xx, 200–4); 'Phrenological Fallacies' (xx, 248–55). See Stanley Jones, 'Hazlitt and the *Edinburgh Literary Journal*', *Review of English Studies* 30 (1979), 187–93.

44 [J. Gordon and F. Jeffrey], *The Craniad: Or, Spurzheim Illustrated, A Poem, in Two Parts* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1817), 70. Compare: 'many a genius lives by grinding knives / And many a dunce without a genius thrives' (ibid, 43).

45 Ibid, 53 and 127n.

46 Thomas Love Peacock, *Headlong Hall and Gryll Grange*, ed. Michael Baron and Michael Slater (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 64.

47 Ibid, 64–5. Peacock's satire serves to explicate the same line in Bishop Porteus's 1759 prize-poem on Death remembered in Hazlitt's *Letter to William Gifford*: 'Is it a paradox of my making, that "one murder makes a villain, millions a hero!"' (ix, 37).

48 Peacock, *Headlong Hall,* 65.

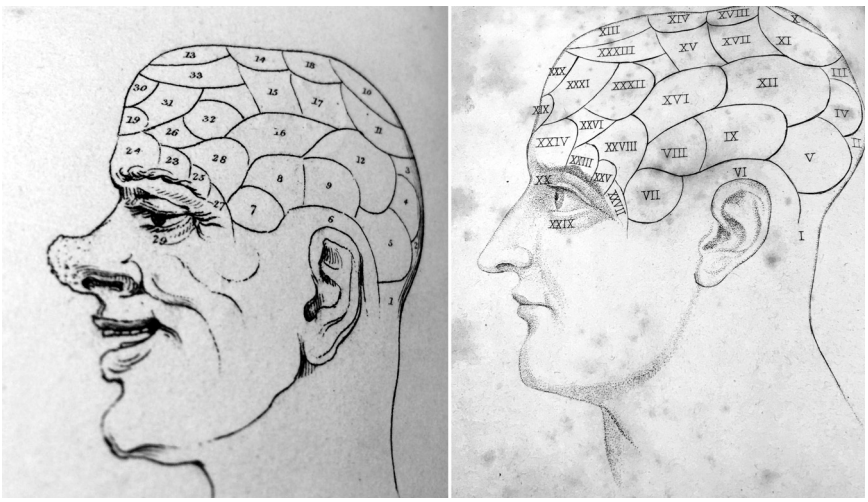

*Figure 1* *The Craniad*'s imbecilic spoof of the skull map in Spurzheim's *Physiognomical System* at least preserves the same phrenological numbering: the organ of vanity or self-esteem (10) is located in the tonsure position some distance from the organ of ideality (16)

Unusually for Peacock, whose travesties of the Laureate in *Sir Proteus* (1814) and *Melincourt* (1817) maintain an element of playfulness, his apparent contempt for the 'courtly poet' is here so great that delight in mock-phrenological exegesis gives way to thinly veiled insult: the hoary sycophant is compared to the dogs who ran round in wheels before the invention of hydraulic spits and is then imagined expiring on a heap of filth, possibly of his own creation.

Although Hazlitt also clearly considered phrenology to be an 'occult science' (xii, 138), the technical precision with which he locates Southey's organ of vanity in the tonsure position (Figure 1) suggests he is well informed enough to capitalize more subtly on its tendency towards the studies of pathology and creativity. The most polemical point is the one taken to absurdity in *The Craniad* and *Headlong Hall*: a dominant organ of vanity marks Southey out as a potential criminal. The accompanying ironies are that his 'friend' Coleridge's mode of defence assigned Southey the role of 'a pickpocket or highwayman turned thief-taker or king's evidence' (vii, 178) and that some of the case studies from Spurzheim's fieldwork in prisons and asylums could have walked straight out of the 'mixed rabble' (v, 162) of the *Botany Bay Eclogues* and *Lyrical Ballads*.[49] But the fact that the organ of vanity is 'triumphant' in the sense that it is preponderant over other faculties may pass comment on Southey's literary pretentions as well as his moral deficiencies.

49 Hazlitt may have had inside knowledge, perhaps through Lamb, that Coleridge was dabbling in phrenology. An August 1817 Notebook entry describes Spurzheim as 'beyond all comparison the greatest Physiognomist that has ever appeared', a verdict which seems to owe as much to the *Edinburgh Review*'s antipathy as to Coleridge's own conviction (*Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn, 5 vols [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958–2002], III, 4355).

The old charge that Southey had ceased to be a poet when he became Poet Laureate, reactivated by the appearance of *Wat Tyler*, provides a ground bass to the rhetoric of Hazlitt's contributions to the Controversy.[50] In resistance to Coleridge's *Courier* articles, his formulation is highly politicized: 'Poet-laureates are courtiers by profession; but we say that poets are naturally Jacobins' (vii, 182). In exasperation with a reference in Southey's *Letter* to a young heart 'full of poetry and romance',[51] the allegation becomes highly stylized: 'poetry and romance were banished from the human heart when he took a place and pension' (vii, 198). The caricature had already banished poetry from a particular human head because, according to Spurzheim, men of genius were supposed to exhibit outsized organs of ideality: 'It is a proverb that a poet must be born; and it is also certain that the heads of great poets, though not necessarily of versificators, are enlarged above the temples in an arched direction'.[52]

For some idea of what this enlargement may have been supposed to look like in 1817, there is a portrait of Wordsworth in a thoughtful and possibly phrenological pose (Figure 2), his hand resting on one of his organs of ideality and a gleam coming off the other.[53] This painting shows how baldness can heighten the effect: Haydon tells a wonderful, if perhaps suspect, anecdote of meeting Spurzheim in 1825, many years after the phrenologist had taken his life-mask and admired the requisite artistic faculties: 'Vy, your organs are more parfaite den eäver. How luckee you lose your hair'.[54] Any disciple of Spurzheim able to have direct access to the skull contours of an established poet, only to discover unremarkable organs of ideality, would have concluded that his sitter had either failed to exercise the faculty properly or had been subject to the atrophy of disease. Hazlitt's exclusive focus on Southey's tonsure rather than his temples may therefore be a phrenological conceit, the crowning insult in his campaign to deny a 'non-entity' (vii, 186) all rights to the title of poet.

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50 In his first reaction to *Wat Tyler*, William Hone described Southey as 'a gentleman of credit and renown, and, until he became Poet Laureate, a Poet' (*Reformists' Register* 1 [22 February 1817], col 157). Compare Leigh Hunt's mock-obituary: 'ROBERT SOUTHEY, Esquire, formerly "Man of Humanity" and Independent Poet, latterly Poet Laureat' (*Examiner* 10 [13 April 1817], 236). Byron later left Southey's title dangling on a line-end, leaving the feminine rhymes to suggest whether it is acting as a superlative or a disqualifier: 'BOB SOUTHEY! You're a poet – poet Laureate' (*Complete Poetical Works*, V, 3).

51 Southey, *Letter*, 14.

52 J.G. Spurzheim, *The Physiognomical System of Drs. Gall and Spurzheim* (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1815), 345. The passage was quoted verbatim in Note 7 to Part II of *The Craniad* (133).

53 For the original suggestion, see Frances Blanchard, *Portraits of Wordsworth* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1959), 35–6 and Plate 5, although it must be admitted the evidence marshalled seems to post-date the Carruthers picture.

54 *Benjamin Robert Haydon: Correspondence and Table Talk*, 2 vols (London: Chatto & Windus, 1876), II, 93. Compare Hazlitt, xii, 138; xx, 250.

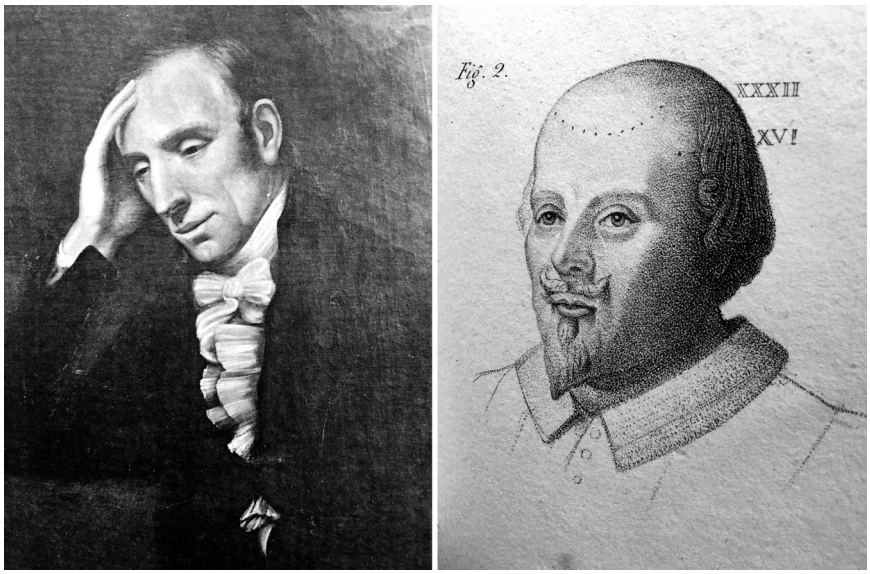


*Figure 2* Wordsworth's attitude in the 1817 portrait by Richard Carruthers may be designed to highlight the organs of ideality supposedly preponderant in poets (the area marked XVI in the relevant plate from Spurzheim's *Physiognomical System* is replicated on the other side of the head where Wordsworth's hand rests). (Courtesy of The Wordsworth Trust, Grasmere.)

## Towards reacquaintance

Hazlitt's review ends with a postscript from real life as he describes bumping into Southey in the seedy parish of St Giles.[55] There is still an element of mischief – 'it was odd we should meet *him* there' (vii, 208) – as if the possibility is entertained that he has caught the self-appointed crusader against 'physical and moral evil'[56] on an errand to a gin-shop rather than a bookshop. But the other register is one of 'sentimentality', as Hazlitt watches 'an old friend' walk into the distance, looking after him 'for some time, as to a tale of other times' (vii, 208). The antepenultimate sentence of the review, 'We saw in him a painful hieroglyphic of humanity; a sad memento of departed independence; a striking instance of the rise and fall of patriot bards!' (vii, 208), is placed in quotation marks for any readers inattentive to the reworking of a recent *Round Table* essay commemorating the final curtain call of John Philip Kemble: 'we see in him a

55 The Laureate, en route to a continental tour, had made a rare visit to London, where he attended a Royal Academy dinner in order to meet William Smith 'face to face & examine his *forehead*' (*Collected Letters*, 2987). The purpose of this examination was presumably to content himself that the mark of the slanderer was ineffaceable, although Southey did happen to sit for a phrenological analysis by Spurzheim on the eve of his departure for Europe (ibid, 2992).

56 Southey, *Letter*, 41.

stately hieroglyphic of humanity; a living monument of departed greatness, a sombre comment on the rise and fall of kings' (iv, 155).

The changes in wording are subtle but telling, including the denial of Southey's 'greatness', while the analogy of Kemble still carries a strong political charge for those familiar with Hazlitt's writings on Coriolanus.[57] But the poignancy of the encounter, nearly fourteen years after the two writers last met, calls to mind other characters in Kemble's repertoire. Having imagined conducting 'painful researches' upon Southey's skull, Hazlitt is now actually looking at it, as upon a sad memento: '*Alas poor Southey!*' (vii, 208) – the tone has shifted from 'Poor Bob Southey! how they laugh at him!' (vii, 179). Malvolio, to whom the Laureate had compared himself simply to suggest controversy had been thrust upon him (*Letter*, 13), was a character in keeping with Hazlitt's sense of a pert balding prig and political timepleaser. A particularly extreme moment in 'Literary Notices: No. 27', which essentially challenged Southey to a struggle to the death, had been leavened by a reference to *Twelfth Night*: '"Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale," says *Sir Toby* to the fantastical steward *Malvolio*. Does Mr. Southey think, because he is a pensioner, that he is to make us willing slaves?' (vii, 189).

Yet it is possible to 'feel a regard for Malvolio' (iv, 315) and, in the St Giles coda, irritation with Southey's puritanical 'asperities' seems to give way to a degree of contrition for the bullying he was receiving at the hands of *The Examiner* – at least until Hazlitt reads the *Letter* 'which appeared on the same day as himself'.[58] Kim Wheatley finds enough 'sympathy, regret and nostalgia' in the episode to suggest it 'anticipates Hazlitt's later ambivalent celebration of the Lake School' in 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', that tale of other times he had already begun drafting in 1817.[59]

Southey, of course, barely appears in the finished essay, the main reason being that Hazlitt first met him 'not till some time after' 1798 (xvii, 122). The secondary and yet important reason was that the Laureate remained *persona non grata* for the writers contributing to *The Liberal* in 1823. Southey's three fleeting cameos in 'My First Acquaintance with Poets' still cast him in the part of Malvolio: he

57 *Characters of Shakespear's Plays* was published two months after 'Literary Notices: No. 27'. For Hazlitt's compact of 'Kemble–Coriolanus–Burke', see Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730–1830*, 137–40. For the 'spatial proximity' of Coriolanus to Laker apostasy on the printed page of *The Examiner*, see Ian Haywood, 'Hazlitt and the Monarchy: Legitimacy, Radical Print Culture, and Caricature', *The Hazlitt Review* 9 (2016), 14–15.

58 Leigh Hunt, whose allegorical skits on Southey's imagined funeral ran contrapuntally to Hazlitt's essays, took delight in the way one of his columnist's earlier attacks on Southey had 'laid open his head' (*Examiner* 10 [13 April 1817], 236–7) and the pair seem to have indulged a Cobbettian aspiration to 'knock out' the Laureate's 'brains' (vii, 183n.).

59 Wheatley, *Romantic Feuds*, 48. Compare Robert Lapp's discussion of the primary urtext of 'My First Acquaintance with Poets' published in 1817 (*Contest for Cultural Authority: Hazlitt, Coleridge, and the Distresses of the Regency* [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999], 11–22).

is a collaborator with power, as the author of *A Vision of Judgment* (xvii, 115), a killjoy who is not partaking in the 'good things' of marriage (xvii, 118), and a bore 'with a common-place book under his arm' (xvii, 122). There is no role for him, except as a memento of departed independence, in this prelapsarian world of bountiful cakes and ale.[60] The essay's detailed descriptions of other men answering to the 'inspired name' of poet (xvii, 114) are more generally physiognomic than specifically phrenological and contain some striking reminders of the fall of patriot bards.[61] But the authors of the *Lyrical Ballads* have 'the sound part of their heads and hearts' (vii, 182) provisionally restored. One of the many ways in which Coleridge exhibits his genius is his 'broad and high' forehead (xvii, 109); Wordsworth has an 'intense high narrow forehead' and 'a severe, worn pressure of thought about his temples' (xvii, 118).[62]

Southey has to wait until his treatment in *The Spirit of the Age* for his 'genius' to be recognized, even if it still pales in comparison with Coleridge and Wordsworth and the 'stain' upon it is more remarkable than its gleam (xi, 82). Many of the familiar figures are rehearsed again: the Laureate remains firmly wedded to Legitimacy – now a 'not very reputable lady' (xi, 79) rather than an 'old bawd' (vii, 193) – and 'self-opinion' remains his 'ruling principle' (xi, 79) just as in 1817 it was his 'ruling passion' (vii, 187). But the personal habits that once provided a fund of comic material are now taken as read and Sir Toby's unanswerable question is repeated with the implication that abuse of the 'motley gentleman' has 'perhaps' been disproportionate (xi, 82–3). The Laureate's head is now a less painful, if less deeply coded, hieroglyphic than the organ of vanity: the revolutionary spirit 'was seen reflected on his brow, like the light of setting suns on the peak of some high mountain' (xi, 79). Southey as 'whirligig Court poet' (vii, 242) acted as one of the opposites against which Hazlitt's romanticized

60 To borrow another Shakepearean allusion with which Hazlitt taunts Southey, food and drink is always described with 'relish' (vii, 202) in 'My First Acquaintance with Poets': one thinks of 'the leg of Welsh mutton and the turnips' so savoured in Wem (xvii, 111), the 'half of a Cheshire cheese' that Wordsworth devours in Alfoxden (xvii, 118), 'the excellent rashers of fried bacon' and the 'tea, toast, eggs, and honey' provided by the Linton guesthouse (xvii, 120), and the '*flip*' which Hazlitt quaffs with Coleridge on tipsy Stowey afternoons (xvii, 119).

61 The notorious caricature of a 'feeble' nose which is the symbolic 'index' of Coleridge's will (xvii, 109) – in the same way that the bald pate in 'Literary Notices: No.27' was the 'index' of Southey's mind – owes more to Lavater than Spurzheim, and more still perhaps to *Tristram Shandy* ('Literary Notices: No. 11' [*Examiner* 9 (8 September 1816), 572]). Hazlitt is recovering a personal attack which was one of the few things he suppressed when he collected the *Political Essays* in 1819 (vii, 381n.).

62 Wordsworth, in a piece of marginalia dated about 1840, took exception to the adjective 'narrow' and replaced it with the word 'broad' (*Barron Field's Memoirs of Wordsworth*, ed. Geoffrey Little [Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1975], 27): he may simply have been making a point about the size of his brain but by that date he would have been well aware that he had become a prime phrenological exhibit: 'Wordsworth, with large Ideality […] presents the noblest manifestation of its excellence' (Sidney Smith, *Principles of Phrenology* [Edinburgh: William Tait, 1838], 168).

ideal of radical Dissent was defined;[63] here the elegy for the light which once 'beamed into his soul' (xi, 79) recalls the smile that 'beamed across' the face of Hazlitt's father in conversation with Coleridge on the fateful evening in the parlour in Wem (xvii, 111). The whimsical effect of the *Spirit of the Age* portrait may qualify the 'severity of recrimination' (xi, 83) in the *Political Essays* but it should not compromise the splendour of the achievement in 'Literary Notices: No. 27'. Coleridge will always decide to take the money in the morning, and Hazlitt will always have to 'come in contact' (vii, 208) with Southey's writings: 'the *Wat Tyler* and the *Vision of Judgment* are the Alpha and Omega of his disjointed career' (xi, 82).

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63 Gilmartin, *William Hazlitt*, 221–2.

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# HAZLITT, CRABB ROBINSON, AND KANT

## 1806 and beyond

*Philipp Hunnekuhl*

Hazlitt's philosophical concepts, Uttara Natarajan writes in her introduction to *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense* (1998), 'are startlingly close' to those of Immanuel Kant and his successors. Natarajan continues: 'But unlike the British philosophers with whom Hazlitt is closely and actively engaged, his reading of the Germans in translation is limited and even cursory. What we have here is analogy, never perfect, but close enough to confirm a strong intellectual affinity that has so far been largely ignored'.[1] Stephen Burley, in his recent monograph *Hazlitt the Dissenter* (2014), suggests that Hazlitt may have known Henry Crabb Robinson's work on Kant and German philosophy. Yet Burley, in the absence of 'direct evidence', agrees with Natarajan on the 'coincidence between their writings on Kant, rather than […] direct influence'.[2] Acknowledging the brilliance of both Natarajan's and Burley's discernment of similarities between Hazlitt and Kant and Hazlitt and Robinson, the present essay nonetheless argues, largely on the basis of Robinson's hitherto unpublished notebook for 1806, that Robinson did exert a direct influence on Hazlitt that may not have caused, but certainly consolidated, the 'strong intellectual affinity'. Coincidence is a plausible explanation for the similarity between Kant's moral philosophy and Hazlitt's elaboration of disinterestedness in his 1805 *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, but thereafter, through the influence of Robinson, this turned into a knowledge firm enough to support the originality of Hazlitt's thought in the long run. Only after 1806 do we find in Hazlitt's writings a quasi-Kantian philosophy of mind, encompassing Kant's critical distinction between noumena and phenomena (between things-in-themselves and their appearances) as well as a Kantian notion of the faculty of the understanding as playing an active role in assembling phenomena into intelligible concepts. Kant must have proved particularly intriguing to Hazlitt as his concept of the formative mind chimed with the metaphysical outlook of the *Essay* – which asserts a power of the mind strong enough to achieve, to quote Roy Park, 'self-transcendence' through the

1 Uttara Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense: Criticism, Morals, and the Metaphysics of Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5.

2 Stephen Burley, *Hazlitt the Dissenter: Religion, Philosophy, and Politics, 1766–1816* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 188, n.98.

'moral faculty' of the imagination[3] – but also because of Kant's liberalism and its polemical potential.

In order to substantiate these claims, I shall first read Hazlitt's explicit mentions of, as well as allusions to, Kant in his 'Preface to *An Abridgment of the Light of Nature Pursued*' (1807), his 'Prospectus of a History of English Philosophy' (1809), and his *Lectures on English Philosophy* (delivered in 1812 but not published until 1836) against the backdrop of Robinson's work on the German philosopher. The origins and accuracy of Robinson's Kantianism have been aptly pointed out by James Vigus, which is why I shall focus primarily on the congruence between Hazlitt and Robinson.[4] The two men had been friends since 1799, and, despite falling out and not speaking to each other between 1817 and 1821, Robinson remained an admirer of Hazlitt the author throughout his life.[5] The single most formative event in Robinson's life was his prolonged stay in Germany from April 1800 to September 1805, during which his in-depth study of Kant undid the Godwinian scepticism and necessitarianism with which he had left England, and resulted in his 'conversion' to Kantianism.[6] The immediate result of this conversion were three 'Letters on the Philosophy of Kant', published in the short-lived Eurocentric *Monthly Register and Encyclopaedian Magazine* between August 1802 and April 1803, two further expositions of Kant's thought which remained unpublished at the time, a series of private tutorials for Germaine de Staël in early 1804, and plenty of philosophical discussions in his letters. Reading Hazlitt against these materials will add a new layer to the 'strong intellectual affinity' between Hazlitt and Kant that Natarajan notes.

Thereafter, I shall examine Robinson's notebook for 1806, which covers the period immediately after his return from Germany, for references to Hazlitt and Kant.[7] One particularly striking circumstance will emerge from this examination: whereas this notebook attests to frequent discussions of Kant with a wide range of people, from fleeting acquaintances to close friends to established authors such as Thomas Holcroft and Anna Laetitia Barbauld, none of the equally frequent references to meetings with Hazlitt mention any discussion of Kant whatsoever. I will argue that this silence of the diarist, whether deliberate or accidental, does not reflect an overt, trivial truth, but obscures a much more intricate and significant one.

To be clear: both Hazlitt and Robinson were, in 1806, not only aspiring men of letters but also professed metaphysicians – a rare enough occurrence, not least

3 Roy Park, *Hazlitt and the Spirit of the Age: Abstraction and Critical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 47.

4 Henry Crabb Robinson (hereafter HCR), *Essays on Kant, Schelling, and German Aesthetics*, ed. James Vigus (London: MHRA, 2010).

5 For a survey of Robinson's critical appreciation of Hazlitt, see Philipp Hunnekuhl, 'Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson: The Common Pursuit', *The Hazlitt Review* 6 (2013), 13–34.

6 See HCR, *Essays*, 4–6.

7 I am currently editing this notebook for publication with OUP as part of the larger Henry Crabb Robinson Editorial Project (www.crabbrobinson.co.uk).

in the radical circles around London that both men were frequenting – and it is therefore altogether inconceivable that they did not discuss Kant, at length and in detail. Such discussion is all the more likely because Robinson not only shared Hazlitt's philosophical interests and inclinations, but also wished to support him intellectually. One of Robinson's last letters to his brother Thomas from Germany, dated 21 April 1805, suggests this with particular emphasis:

> Talking of Mysticks has put me in Mind of *William Hazlitt* if I ~~I~~ ^you^ should know any thing about him, tell me; Of all the young men of my acquaintance in England I consider him as incomparably the first in point of intellect – I am inclined to think that in the whole stock of my ffriends he is the only one who promises to be a distinguished & original Character Tho' on the other Side for various reasons I fear that he will never be able to shew himself but perhaps be another of the sad instances ~~in which~~ of Genius which sinks in its struggle with fortune & the World[8]

Robinson had recognized Hazlitt's extraordinary promise as a thinker prior to his departure for Germany. On his return, not having been in contact with Hazlitt for several years, Robinson not only found his first impression amply confirmed, but also found himself suddenly agreeing with the metaphysical outlook of Hazlitt the 'Mystick'. The striking parallels in their writings, Robinson's fear that Hazlitt's personality and habits might still get in the way of his exceptional talents, and the frequency of their meetings in 1806 suggest that Robinson may well have tutored Hazlitt in Kantian philosophy, probably in much the same manner that he had tutored de Staël some two years earlier.

## Hazlitt and Robinson on Kant

In his 1823 essay 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', Hazlitt recalls how, some twenty-five years before, he had told Coleridge of the first 'few remarks' on his 'discovery' of 'the *Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind*' that he had written down (xvii, 114).[9] The conversation that triggered Hazlitt's revelation centred on

8 HCR to Thomas Robinson, 21 April 1805, Bundle 3.A, Letter 43, Dr Williams's Library, London (hereafter DWL). I wish to thank the Director of the library, Dr David Wykes, for his kind permission on behalf of the Trustees to publish from HCR's manuscripts in their keeping. I would also like to thank Ms Jane Giscombe, the Conservator, for her long-standing support in making these documents available to me. The German Research Foundation provided the fellowship that enabled me to carry out the research on which this article is based. The above-cited letter is also quoted in Stanley Jones, *Hazlitt: A Life. From Winterslow to Frith Street* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 5, albeit from Edith Morley's incomplete transcription that omits Robinson's indication of not having been in touch with Hazlitt for some time. Jones overall treats Robinson with the favourable attitude that he merits, although Robinson's early influence on Hazlitt lies outside the scope of his work.

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

Coleridge criticizing Samuel Johnson's famous mockery of Berkelian idealism (the stone-kicking anecdote), and Joseph Butler's refutation of self-interest (xvii, 113). Coleridge was moving on from empiricism in general and Hartley's associationism in particular – and so was Hazlitt, who hence found Coleridge's ideas congenial and stimulating: 'Coleridge in truth met me half-way on the ground of philosophy, or I should not have been won over by his imaginative creed' (xvii, 115). Burley convincingly argues for Butler's prior influence on Hazlitt via Richard Price's *Review of the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals* during Hazlitt's time at New College Hackney, an influence that went against the doctrines of Hazlitt's teacher, Thomas Belsham, and gave him a philosophical outlook encompassing notions of disinterestedness and an active mind that would subsequently find its way into the *Essay*.[10] But Hazlitt failed to make himself understood to Coleridge on this occasion, and his subsequent attempt, 'for the twentieth time', to put his own theory into words ended in 'tears of helpless despondency on the blank unfinished paper' (xvii, 114). This is the 'great difficulty of expression' – both in speaking and writing – against which the young Hazlitt was struggling, as the old Robinson puts it in his Reminiscences.[11]

By 1805, that difficulty had been overcome, and Hazlitt's means of making himself understood had caught up with the pace of his mind: the *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, in which Hazlitt, in defence of natural disinterestedness, asserts a power of the mind that transcends identity and empiricism alike, was finally completed and published by the dissenting bookseller Joseph Johnson. The philosophy espoused in the *Essay*, however, shows that Hazlitt is not yet a Kantian at this point. Hazlitt, in the *Essay*, severs future from present and past by asserting that a future object alone can be an object of volition, but since such an object 'is wholly imaginary, it cannot be directly or immediately apprehended by the senses'.[12] Hazlitt thus drives a wedge between the will and experience: we can want only what lies in the future, but since future objects are necessarily imaginary, motives must be generated within the mind and therefore do not depend on sense experience. Hence, such imaginary objects of volition are not restricted to one's confined identity but encompass an infinity of other people's interests, all equally imaginary. The imagination, for Hazlitt, is thus the faculty of disinterestedness.

Such a power of the mind and its implications for moral truth and a liberal politics may chime with Kant – *but it is not Kant*. Natarajan pinpoints the agreement in her section entitled 'Hazlitt and Kant' by saying that 'Kant refutes the empirical conditions for morality', adding that 'such refutation represents also Hazlitt's ethical and metaphysical objective'.[13] This is precisely the early coincidence that connects the writer of the *Essay* with Kant, and that would prove fruitful for Hazlitt's later,

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and page.

10 Burley, *Hazlitt the Dissenter*, 108–9; Richard Price, *A Review of the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals* (London: Millar, 1758).

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

12 Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense*, 28.

13 Ibid, 155.

more explicit endorsement of the philosopher: the sharp divide between morals on the one hand, and experience on the other. However similar the result, though, the *Essay*'s line of argument rests on an altogether different foundation. The fact that nowhere in it is Kant explicitly mentioned is neither here nor there, but what matters is that the independent power of the mind as proposed in the *Essay* takes for granted, still in the Anglo-French empiricist tradition, the agreement between object and concept, between experience and the idea thereof. Hazlitt may, by 1805, have come across that one key term in Kant – the noumenon, or thing-in-itself – as he claims that 'the thing itself is a non-entity' (i, 8). Here, however, Hazlitt refers to future objects as conceived by the imagination, not to Kant's distinction, on the synchronic level of experience, between the noumena outside the mind and their appearances, the phenomena perceived and processed by the mind. The *Essay* is not only, as Natarajan finds, written 'in the style of the eighteenth century',[14] in that it centres on terminology such as (self-)interest, disinterestedness, benevolence, necessity, habit, association, pleasure, and happiness, but its manner of making its case for idealism is also rooted in the corresponding empiricist tradition. This is hence an archetypical instance of Hazlitt 'colonizing' the tradition he aims to subvert,[15] albeit not along the lines of Kant. The *Essay*'s discussion of virtue instead echoes the English tradition from Shaftesbury via Price to Hartley and Godwin.

The critical distance between mind and matter that Hazlitt proposes in 1805 occurs diachronically and not synchronically, as is the case in Kant. Hazlitt claims an 'absolute separation', or 'insurmountable barrier', between the present and the future (i, 11), but nowhere in the *Essay* does he draw any such distinction between objects of experience and their appearances (although the section on individuals as 'aggregates' comes close [i, 34]). This distinction, however, is the key epistemological move of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and, thereafter, the cornerstone of his moral and aesthetic philosophy. Robinson succinctly explained this move to his tutee Germaine de Staël on or around 25 February 1804 thus: 'Our Knowledge is after all confined to that of Things as they appear to us; what Things are in themselves (Die Dinge an sich) is an enquiry beyond the bounds of human Knowledge'.[16] This limitation of knowledge allows Kant to make his case for the independence of the mind, as Robinson also explained to de Staël by asserting that '[k]nowledge as an active power lies essentially in the Mind itself'.[17] This power of the mind is synthetic, and it is the faculty of the understanding that combines appearances (taken in as disconnected entities through the senses) into intelligible concepts. Robinson explained this to de Staël by pointing out that:

14 Ibid, 1.

15 Ibid, 147.

16 HCR, 'Remarks on Kant's Critical Philosophy' in *Essays*, 123. Robinson's influence on de Staël has, through Vigus's work, gained considerable likelihood; see also James Vigus, 'Zwischen Kantianismus und Schellingianismus: Henry Crabb Robinsons Privatvorlesungen über Philosophie für Mme de Staël 1804 in Weimar' in *Germaine de Staël und ihr erstes deutsches Publikum: Literaturpolitik und Kulturtransfer um 1800*, ed. Gerhard R. Kaiser and Olaf Müller (Heidelberg: Winter, 2008), 355–92.

17 Ibid, 121.

> in respect to the powers of Knowledge [Kant] shows that Man has two faculties[:] (*Sinnlichkeit*) Sensibility, which gives us (*Anschauungen*) Intuitions – And (*Verstand*) Understanding which is the source of (*Begriffe*) Conceptions, which are the essential Ingredients of Knowledge.[18]

Hazlitt's early conceptual conformity with the Anglo-French philosophical tradition would not be so remarkable if it did not change quite so drastically sometime between 1805 and 1807, when his prevailing case for natural disinterestedness was expanded by the Kantian notion of the mind's unifying power. In one long paragraph of his 1807 'Preface to *An Abridgment of the Light of Nature Pursued*', 'Hazlitt calls attention to Tucker's theory of the unity of consciousness, and in so doing admits more fully than anywhere else his own sympathy with Kantian thought', Natarajan finds.[19] What exactly Hazlitt means by 'unity of consciousness', he interjects in the passage from the 'Preface' cited by Natarajan. Tucker, Hazlitt writes here, 'believed with professor Kant in the unity of consciousness, or "that the mind alone is formative", that fundamental article of the *transcendental* creed' (i, 130). Although Hazlitt does not make Kant's noumenon–phenomenon distinction explicit at this point – probably because he did not find it in Tucker, the self-confessed disciple of Locke – he does so in his *Lectures on English Philosophy*, in direct relation to the above passage. What to Hazlitt, in his lecture on Locke, constitutes an intellect, is the provision of 'actual, living impressions', the 'power of perceiving their relations to one another, of comparing and contrasting them, and of *regarding the different parts of any object as making one whole*' (ii, 151; my emphasis).[20] There exists a multitude of different impressions, 'received by different senses, which must be put together by the understanding before they can be referred to any particular thing, or *considered as one idea*' (ii, 152; my emphasis). This 'principle of cohesion', now, clearly relies on Kant's distinction between noumena and phenomena, as well as the related role of the understanding, and Hazlitt hints at his source, forging a bridge back to his 'Preface' to Tucker: '*The mind alone is formative*, to use the expression of a great German writer' (ii, 153), which he repeats, verbatim, in his discussion of Horne Tooke (ii, 280).

Thus 'explod[ing]' the 'mechanical ignorance' of the empiricists in order to explain 'what passes in the human mind' is 'worthy of a philosopher' (i, 129) – and in essence the foundation on which the entire system of Kant's philosophy rests, as Robinson explains above. The impact this had on Hazlitt's literary criticism can be traced, for instance, in the passage on Tom Moore, part of the lecture entitled 'On the Living Poets':

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18 Ibid, 122.

19 Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense*, 5.

20 Natarajan correctly notices that such claims of liveliness raise the question of constitutiveness in ideas (which Kant denied explicitly), and concludes that Hazlitt 'is generally much less concerned than Coleridge' with this problem (ibid, 68). On the topic of Coleridge, Robinson, and constitutive ideas, see Philipp Hunnekuhl, 'Constituting Knowledge: German Literature and Philosophy between Coleridge and Crabb Robinson', *European Romantic Review* 28.1 (2017), 51–63.

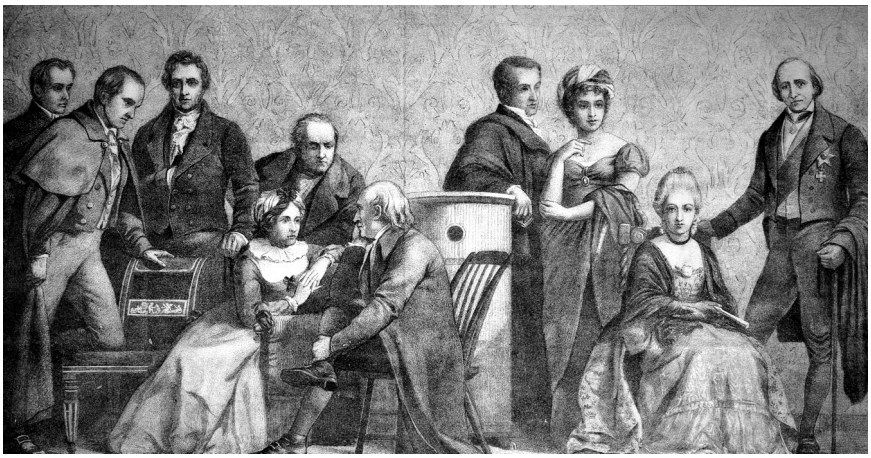

*Figure 1* The section from Edward Armitage's fresco 'The Vanguard of the Age' that represents the early years of Henry Crabb Robinson's life. The fresco was painted across all four walls of what is today the Lecture Hall of Dr Williams's Library, Gordon Square, London, and featured a portrait of Robinson at its centre, above the entrance. The characters, from left to right: William Hazlitt, William Godwin, Thomas Clarkson, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Walter Savage Landor, Gilbert Wakefield, August Wilhelm Schlegel, Germaine de Staël, Anna Amalia of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, Friedrich Carl von Savigny. The fresco was wallpapered over in 1958. (Reproduction by kind permission of the Trustees of Dr Williams's Trust.)

> The graceful ease with which he lends himself to every subject, the genial spirit with which he indulges in every sentiment, prevents him from giving their full force to the masses; from connecting them into a whole. [...] His mind [...] glances over the surfaces, the first impressions of things, instead of grappling with the deep-rooted prejudices of the mind, its inveterate habits, and that 'perilous stuff that weighs upon the heart'. (v, 151)

Hazlitt here combines Kant's pure and practical reason with the *Essay*'s explanation of habit as that which impedes natural disinterestedness. Instead of settling for metonymy – the disambiguation of a metaphor through the familiarity of meaning – true poetic imagination generates wider, all-encompassing metaphors that lift language beyond the level of familiar verbal reference. Such defamiliarization, to borrow Viktor Shklovsky's famous term, would then open up ways of entering deeper into the workings of the human mind and, ultimately, the moral questions that concern it.[21]

The elaboration of the understanding as related to the noumena–phenomena distinction is another striking similarity between Kant and Hazlitt that we do not

21 For the effects of Shklovsky's concept, see Douglas Robinson, *Estrangement and the Somatics of Literature: Tolstoy, Shklovsky, Brecht* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 174.

find as early as the *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*. In the 'Prospectus of a History of English Philosophy', Hazlitt describes this faculty as follows:

> By the understanding I mean that faculty which perceives the *relations* of things, which combines, compares, and distinguishes our different impressions, and by which we are enabled, besides being sensible to the successive impulses and fluxional parts of objects, to consider them in reference to one another, or understand their connections, forms, and masses. (ii, 116)

To Hazlitt, the faculty of the understanding is that which digests 'our different impressions' – phenomena perceived through the senses – and moulds them into concepts. This Kantian elaboration of objects entering the mind piecemeal, as disconnected appearances, before undergoing conceptualization through reassembling, we find in Robinson, too. In his third 'Letter on the Philosophy of Kant', published in the April 1803 issue of the *Monthly Register*, he writes that 'sensibility is the capacity of being affected by objects, and hence of receiving correspondent representations; that is, *intuitions*: […] intuitions are *thought* by the understanding which produces *conceptions*'.[22] The understanding in Kant, Robinson, and Hazlitt synthesizes the phenomena, 'impressions', or 'representations' into ideas.

Hazlitt extends and polemicizes his Kantian elaboration of the understanding in his discussion of Locke in the *Lectures on English Philosophy*:

> The great defect with which the 'Essay on the Human Understanding' is chargeable is, that there is not really a word about the nature of the understanding in it, nor any attempt to shew what it is or whether it is or is not any thing, distinct from the faculty of simple perception. (ii, 146)

Hazlitt accuses Locke of uncritically accepting the full agreement of experience and ideas, thus preparing the ground for his renewed assertion of the 'active powers and independent nature of the understanding' on the following page (ii, 147). These comments, too, have a striking parallel in Robinson's 1804 lecture for de Staël:

> Locke it is known proceeds from the Maxim 'Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius in sensu' A maxim which has been construed to teach that all our Knowledge is derived *from* Experience. But […] it seems to have been strangely forgotten that Experience or the facts or things conceived by the Mind, are in themselves dead till the Understanding has conceived them & by its own innate active power drawn its own conclusions. Knowledge as an active power lies essentially in the Mind itself.[23]

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22 HCR, 'On the Philosophy of Kant. By an Under-Graduate at the University of Jena. No. III' in *Essays*, 41. Vigus points out that Robinson summarizes section B33 in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*; ibid, 41, n.67.

23 HCR, 'Remarks on Kant's Critical Philosophy'; ibid, 121.

The allusion to Leibniz that this entails – 'There is nothing in the Intellect which was not before in the Sense, the Intellect itself being excepted'[24] – is made explicit in Robinson, but is present in Hazlitt's charge as well. The understanding lends the mind's 'innate active power' to ideas and thereby grants a liveliness that transcends what would otherwise be 'dead' representations of objects – mere disjointed phenomena of the world outside the mind. The liveliness that Robinson describes is perhaps best borne out in Hazlitt's explanation of the synthetic, or unifying, power of the mind described above.

Such a cutting-down-to-size of empiricism comes at the expense of surrendering the truthful correspondence of the mind's concepts with the objects of experience: the full truth about the outside world is forever out of reach, because ideas – the impressions of objects re-assembled by the active mind – will invariably fall short of encompassing the full complexity of experience. A related play with explicitly Kantian terminology as well as subject matter follows only a few lines down the paragraph from the 'Preface' to Tucker cited previously, where Hazlitt writes that 'all our professed *reasoners* […] are so thoroughly satisfied with the profession of the thing, so fortified and wrapped up in the mere name, that it is impossible to make any impression upon them with the thing itself' (i, 130). If 'the thing' is the faculty of reason, then this passage could be read as 'pure reason' and the inner workings of the mind eluding those who are too bogged down in the application of reason to observations of external causality. But in the light of the overt Kantianism preceding the passage, Hazlitt's use of such indeterminacy may well be a further, more subtle polemicization of his own argument: if 'the thing' is indeed the Kantian 'thing-in-itself', the unattainable noumenon, then Hazlitt mocks the empiricists for taking it at face value (unable to tell the name from the object, or the concept from the experience) and shutting their minds off from the thing's 'impression' on the senses, the phenomenon. In any case, these Kantian elocutions seamlessly sustain the claims of the *Essay*, as the active mind still counteracts the self-interest engendered by habit (i, 133).

In the 'Preface' to Tucker, Hazlitt expands his distinction between words and concepts as he makes the 'ideas' and their being 'interwoven into the finer texture of the mind' the subject of true philosophy (i, 133):

> I know but of two sorts of philosophy; that of those who believe what they feel, and endeavour to account for it, and that of those who only believe what they understand, and have already accounted for. The one is the philosophy of consciousness, the other that of experiment; the one may be called the intellectual, the other the material philosophy. The one rests chiefly on the general notions and conscious perceptions of mankind, and *endeavours to discover what the mind is, by looking into the mind itself*; the other denies the existence of every thing in the mind, of which it cannot find some rubbishly archetype, and visible image in its crucibles and furnaces, or in the distinct forms of verbal analysis. The first of these is the only philosophy that is fit for

24 Ibid, 121.

> men of sense, the other should be left to chymists and logicians. (i, 127; my emphasis)

Hazlitt, equating superficial 'verbal analysis' with empiricism, consigns Locke and Hobbes to that second-rate category of mechanical thinkers who do not acknowledge the difference between objects – what is 'already accounted for' through the senses – and their being processed in consciousness. Looking into the mind 'to discover what the mind is' has become Hazlitt's creed. Rudimentarily, this principle is already present in the *Essay* (i, 37–8), but it subsequently undergoes an expansion along the lines of Kant. To compare, here is what Robinson writes in his first 'Letter on the Philosophy of Kant', published in the *Monthly Register* in August 1802:

> Kant calls his the critical philosophy, because, instead of considering the human mind merely as the receptacle and instrument of truth, he makes objective truth to be subordinate to the mind. [...] Let all metaphysical enquiries, theological, cosmological, or moral, be preceded by a critical enquiry into the faculty itself. Thus the faculty though *subjective* in respect to knowledge, is *objective* in the critical philosophy[25]

In Robinson, too, the mind takes precedence over 'objective truth', experience. Just as in Hazlitt's 'Preface' to Tucker, the laws of the mind that collude in generating knowledge become the primary objects of philosophy proper. Hazlitt writes of the 'general notions and conscious perceptions of mankind' which ought to be scrutinized in a philosophy of mind, whereas Robinson claims the same for more high-flying philosophical abstractions and speculations. There is hence no complete equivalence here, but given the context and key philosophical parallels, this is a remarkable overlap. The mind, in both Hazlitt and Robinson, has an original power that creates knowledge individually – or subjectively – while its workings involved in the process become the object of true philosophical enquiry.

Hazlitt may scarcely mention Kant's name in his 1809 'Prospectus of a History of English Philosophy' and the subsequent *Lectures* on the topic, yet his Kantianism is here even more pervasive than it is in the 'Preface' to Tucker. And whereas the language in the 'Preface' to Tucker oscillates between the English tradition of the eighteenth century and Kant, the 'Prospectus', although surveying much of that tradition, has visibly moved on towards the latter. Kant's elaboration of the phenomenon now appears frequently and in full force and clarity:

> to say that physical experiment is either the test, or source, or guide, of that other part of philosophy which relates to our internal perceptions, that we are to look in external nature for the form, the substance, the colour, the very life and being of whatever exists in our own minds, or that we can only infer the

25 HCR, 'Letters on the Philosophy of Kant, from an Under-Graduate in the University of Jena. No. I. INTRODUCTORY' in *Essays*, 32.

> laws which regulate the phænomena of the mind from those which regulate the phænomena of matter, is to confound two things essentially distinct. *Our knowledge of mental phænomena from consciousness, reflection, or observation of their correspondent signs in others is the true basis of metaphysical inquiry*. (ii, 114; my emphasis)

The first part of this quote is Kant's Copernican Revolution: our minds are not subjected to the physical world, but the reverse: the physical world is subjected to our minds. The claim of the italicized section of my quotation, including 'metaphysical inquiry', is now almost an exact paraphrase of what Robinson says in the passage quoted previously, that 'all metaphysical enquiries, theological, cosmological, or moral', ought to be 'preceded by a critical enquiry into the faculty itself', and that '[t]hus the faculty though *subjective* in respect to knowledge, is *objective* in the critical philosophy'. All true philosophy, Hazlitt and Robinson here agree more fully, takes its subjectivity and objectifies it by picking apart its underlying laws, while Hazlitt maintains the altercentricity developed in his *Essay* by emphasizing the mental phenomena 'in others'. Hazlitt reiterates these claims only a couple of pages further into his 'Prospectus': 'That which we seek [...], namely the nature of the mind, and the laws by which we think, feel, and act, we must discover in the mind itself, or not at all. The mind has laws, powers, and principles of its own, and is not the mere puppet of matter' (ii, 116).

Thus the loose, accidental affinity between Hazlitt and Kant that is present in the *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* takes a leap forward after 1805, to arrive at overall conceptual congruence. The philosophical cornerstone of the *Essay* – the notion of the mind as powerful enough to transcend identity and dissolve one's self among a multitude of potential future selves – prevails, alongside its implications in favour of natural disinterestedness and, hence, political liberalism. From 1807 onwards, however, these uniquely Hazlittean tenets acquire a new tone and scaffolding – they become more explicitly Kantian in form and substance. Hazlitt's reasoning underwent a paradigm shift that closely resembles Robinson's. So what happened in 1806?

## Hazlitt and Kant in Robinson's 1806 notebook

The year 1806 tends to be treated rather fleetingly (if indeed at all) in Hazlitt scholarship and biographies. Duncan Wu's 2008 *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* is certainly an exception in this respect. Wu invokes Robinson's notebook for 1806 several times in relation to Hazlitt's early career as a writer, and can hence claim to be the first person to report the circumstances of Hazlitt receiving an £80 advance for his *Abridgment* of Tucker from Joseph Johnson.[26] Robinson's 1806

26 Duncan Wu, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 464, n.58. Robinson's manuscript 'Notebook for November 1805–December 1806' is kept as 'Bundle 6.VIII' at DWL. Robinson kept this diary exclusively in German, in order to practise the language after his return to England. The following translations from it are mine.

notebook also enables Wu to convincingly examine Hazlitt's close contact with Anthony Robinson, a dissenter and wealthy sugar merchant who was very well-connected in the publishing world, and who was also a close friend (though no relative) of Crabb Robinson's. Where Wu, however, claims that Crabb Robinson 'was no live wire', and that Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson merely 'renewed their friendship' after the latter's long stay in Germany,[27] I wish to suggest an alternative point of view. Both Hazlitt and Robinson were convinced metaphysicians, and Robinson a live wire of Kantian philosophy not only in his journal articles but also in personal encounters – a constellation out of which grew an informal collaboration that had a lasting impact on the development of Hazlitt's exceptional intellect.

Robinson's diary entry for Tuesday 10 June 1806, recounting his first personal encounter with the Lambs (with whom he was about to become very close friends), provides a first clue. The meeting was arranged by Catherine Clarkson (née Buck), Robinson's childhood friend who had married the abolitionist campaigner Thomas Clarkson in 1796:

> *Tuesday 10* London Institution – Lunched at Hazlitt's – Thelwall and wife Mr Londor [sic] – Harrison and wife – Rather good day – Thelwall the orator and W. Hazlitt the thinker well contrasted – Evening at Clarkson's Charles Lamb and sister He amused me Funny in conversation somewhat similar to W. Hazlitt – The sister seemed to be lovely[28]

Robinson's labelling Hazlitt as 'the thinker' in opposition to John Thelwall 'the orator' is telling. He had known both men for some time – in 1799, for instance, when Robinson met Hazlitt for the first time, he also spent several days with the Thelwalls in Brecon. But with Robinson's conversion to Kant also came a turn away from Thelwall's prevailing empiricism.[29] This is why, as late as 1849, while composing his Reminiscences, Robinson recalled how he used to be 'in the habit of saying I ~~read~~ ^buy^ all Hazlitts books but I shun him – I have a pleasure in seeing John Thelwall now & then but I read nothing that he writes'.[30] Crossing out 'read' and replacing it with 'buy' is by no means an admission of supplanting reading effort with material possessiveness. Robinson did indeed continue to read everything that Hazlitt wrote,[31] but on top of that also wanted to own his works for reference and renewed stimulation, as opposed to borrowing them. Such is the lifelong appeal that Hazlitt the writer had for Robinson. Most significant in 1806, however, is that,

27 Ibid, 76, 109.

28 HCR, Notebook, 10 June 1806. The second half of this entry is quoted in Wu, *Hazlitt*, 464, n.55, yet the comparison between Thelwall and Hazlitt is omitted.

29 See Yasmin Solomonescu, *John Thelwall and the Materialist Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) for how, in Thelwall, the mind remains very much subject to outer factors such as the physical vitality of the body. For Robinson's stay with the Thelwalls, see HCR, 'Reminiscences' I (1799), DWL, 26.

30 HCR, 'Reminiscences' I (1799), DWL, 28.

31 See Hunnekuhl, 'Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson', 32–3.

for Robinson, Hazlitt warrants the label 'thinker': both men had at this point found a thorough agreement in their metaphysical outlook, and Robinson was about to recognize more fully Hazlitt's potential to advance this outlook.

Hazlitt's conversation on that Tuesday in June must have triggered a greater curiosity in Robinson as to how the friend whom he had not seen for so many years had developed in the meantime – because, only three days later, we find Robinson 'read[ing] Hazlitt's book [the *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*] with delight'.[32] Up to this point in mid-June, the two men's encounters had been rather few, irregular, and haphazard. The first diary entry that mentions Hazlitt is that of Friday 27 December 1805, recounting in passing Robinson's brief stay at Hazlitt's after a visit to Sir Joseph Banks's library.[33] Shortly after that, Hazlitt disappeared to Wem in Shropshire, where he worked on his pamphlet *Free Thoughts on Public Affairs*. But not long after he had returned to London, on 3 April 1806, Robinson visited him again, after attending Thelwall's lecture with John Dyer Collier (Robinson's close friend and landlord, and formerly the editor of the *Monthly Register*, in which Robinson had published his essays on Kant).[34] One-and-a-half months after that, on 21 May, Robinson visited Hazlitt once more, who showed him the paintings that had been rejected at the Academy, which Robinson found 'truly beautiful'.[35] Their meetings start to become a little more frequent, but Robinson's entries reveal no further subject matter that was being discussed: exactly one week later, on 28 May, Hazlitt reciprocated the visit, and Robinson simply found his company 'as exquisite as ever'.[36] The evening of 5 June, Robinson spent once again at Hazlitt's.[37]

Then follow the meeting of 10 June, Robinson's labelling of Hazlitt as 'the thinker', and the perusal of the *Essay*. From here onwards at the very latest, Robinson and Hazlitt know that they are in the same boat – not just professionally, as they are both trying to establish themselves as men of letters, but also philosophically, as metaphysicians. The strengthening of the connection between Hazlitt and Robinson in their empiricist environment is immediately tangible: on the day after reading the *Essay*, they meet again, at Thelwall's, where Hazlitt, allegedly, was in a foul mood, insulting Collier but being kind to Robinson.[38]

The evening of 3 July, Crabb Robinson spent with Anthony Robinson, who 'was very friendly and took on my affairs as well as Hazlitt's – He approved of my literary plans and promised to enquire about Gall's book […] – He also wanted to speak for

32 HCR, Notebook, Friday [13] June 1806. Robinson's list of books read in 1806, drawn up on the inside of the notebook's cover, contains Hazlitt's name and the *Essay*'s title in the June column.

33 Ibid, 27 December 1805.

34 Ibid, 3 April 1806.

35 Ibid, 21 May 1806.

36 Ibid, 28 May 1806.

37 Ibid, 5 June 1806.

38 Ibid, 14 June 1806.

Hazlitt'.[39] 'Gall's book' is Robinson's translation of a German volume explaining the theories of the physiognomist Franz Joseph Gall. Thanks to Anthony Robinson's influence, Crabb Robinson's translation was published by Longman, still in 1806, under the title *Some Account of Dr Gall's New Theory of Physiognomy*, but drew neither critical attention nor profit. Nevertheless, Crabb Robinson's and Hazlitt's literary ventures were quickly becoming more closely intertwined. Hence, on the following morning, Robinson 'met W. Hazlitt with whom I took counsel about his affairs'.[40]

Crabb Robinson then spent the morning of Sunday 6 July poring over Locke, a circumstance that testifies to his wider philosophical engagements paralleling Hazlitt's, before having lunch at Collier's with Thomas Hardy. That evening, Crabb Robinson once again spent with Anthony Robinson, who told him 'that Hazlitt had received £80 for his extract from [Edward] Search from [Joseph] Johnson', for the *Abridgment* of Tucker – which 'delighted' Crabb Robinson.[41] From here onwards, notebook entries mentioning Hazlitt become briefer, but do not decrease in frequency. Two days after hearing of Hazlitt's improved prospects, Robinson, again, spent the day on Locke and the evening with Hazlitt.[42] On 21 July, Hazlitt and Collier joined Robinson in the London Institution, and as Robinson spent the next day with Hazlitt, too, he learned that Hazlitt had just secured Thomas Ostell as a buyer for the *Eloquence of the British Senate*.[43] On the coming Saturday morning, 26 July, they met again, and, according to Robinson, 'conversed well', although the conversation was 'egotistical on both parts' – each writer, for a change, being preoccupied with his own concerns. Still, Hazlitt allegedly told Crabb Robinson much of 'what one likes to hear, whether out of flattery or not'.[44] The evening of that day they spent together at Anthony Robinson's, Hazlitt being his usual outspoken self but at last happily reconciled with Anthony Robinson over their admiration of Wordsworth. In short, Hazlitt seems to be gaining confidence as a writer and thinker, and he is not afraid to spar with the man whose influence has secured him his recent book deals. At the same time, he reciprocates the support which Crabb Robinson must have given him up to this point.

Their close contact continued. Robinson visited Hazlitt on 10 August, and on the next day as well as 27 August, after reading at the British Museum, drank tea with him.[45] Nothing else is mentioned, though. Subsequently, from 20 to 22 September, Hazlitt and Robinson saw each other every day: first, on the Saturday night, Hazlitt, his brother John, and the Thelwalls visited Collier and Robinson for an evening of conviviality, and on the following two days, Robinson called

39 Ibid, 3 July 1806.
40 Ibid, 4 July 1806.
41 Ibid, 6 July 1806.
42 Ibid, 8 July 1806.
43 Ibid, 21 and 22 July 1806.
44 Ibid, 26 July 1806.
45 Ibid, 10–11 and 27 August 1806.

on Hazlitt.[46] But, again, Robinson does not provide any details of the subjects discussed. On 31 October, Robinson visited Thelwall to chat – regardless of their disagreement on the topic of mind and knowledge – a great deal about 'matters of poetic metre', before moving on to Hazlitt's once more, which resulted in a 'pleasant evening'.[47] After completing his translation of Gustav von Schlabrendorf's *Napoleon, and the French People under his Empire*, a treatise against Bonaparte, five days later, Robinson spent his first evening at the Lambs', along with Thomas Holcroft, Hazlitt, and others – but, with respect to Hazlitt, Robinson only tells us the amusing triviality that the party 'were pulling his leg'.[48] On 9 December, Hazlitt and Robinson had tea together once more.[49] These are all of Robinson's 1806 notebook entries relating to Hazlitt. Despite the interesting circumstances and the frequency of their meetings, as well as the mutual esteem between the two men that they reveal, they disclose hardly any details about the contents of their conversations. One thing we can ascertain, though, is that for none of the many meetings with Hazlitt, a conversation about Kant, or even philosophy more broadly, is recorded.

Robinson did, however, discuss Kant with a whole range of people, throughout the year 1806. A few selective examples should suffice to establish this, and to view Robinson's silence where Hazlitt is concerned more critically. As early as 20 November 1805, he discoursed with a distant friend referred to as 'Newton' about Kant, only to find that friend dismissive of, and dogmatic against, the philosopher.[50] A fortnight later, Robinson discussed Kant with his female friend Miss Iremonger.[51] Only a few days after that, on 7 December 1805, he 'quarrelled for a long time' with the Unitarian minister Thomas Belsham – Hazlitt's former teacher! – and a few others about Kant, and on the very next day discussed Kant again, now with Anthony Robinson, arriving at very different judgements as to the acumen with which these two men had argued against the German thinker and his English defender.[52] A week after this, Robinson met Anna Laetitia Barbauld for the first time, only to add, rather casually, that 'it goes without saying that Kant was much spoken about', with Robinson, once again, acting as Kant's advocate yet fearing that he may not have done a particularly persuasive job while faced with Mr and Mrs Barbauld's 'sensible' reasoning.[53]

On 5 March 1806, then, Robinson made the acquaintance of a certain Mr Brand, whom he praises as 'very intelligent', 'well informed', and, which 'meant even more' to Robinson, as a 'disciple of Kant'.[54] About a month before, on 2 February, Crabb

46 Ibid, 20–22 September 1806.
47 Ibid, 31 October 1806.
48 Ibid, 5 November 1806.
49 Ibid, 9 December 1806.
50 Ibid, 20 November 1805.
51 Ibid, 4 December 1805.
52 Ibid, 7 and 8 December 1805.
53 Ibid, 15 December 1805.
54 Ibid, 5 March 1806.

Robinson had written to Anthony Robinson, following his explicit encouragement, about Kant.[55] On 27 April, he recommenced these writings, and met Anthony Robinson in the evening, with whom he 'philosophized' on this occasion.[56] Some three weeks later, Crabb Robinson again visited Anthony Robinson, who finally conceded that 'Kant contained many significant things and much truth, and that he is convinced that there exists a different source of ideas than experience'.[57] Crabb Robinson had thus converted an important backer of Hazlitt's works to Kant, and in particular to that key notion of Kant's that Hazlitt would soon openly embrace in his work, namely that ideas are generated within the mind, not simply absorbed through the senses. On 25 May, however, the continuation of Robinson's Kantianist conversion practice ended in a quarrel with another of his long-standing literary heroes, Thomas Holcroft, at Amelia Opie's, and a mere four days after that, Robinson was back at Mrs Barbauld's, who read to him, and in return got to hear a talk about Kant and poetry.[58] When, on 17 August 1806, Robinson read Barbauld's 'Thoughts on the Devotional Taste, on Sects, and on Establishments' to a couple of his female friends, he resolved to pay the author a visit in person, who praised his talk about Kant but also advised him to speak more carefully in relation to the incompatibility of empiricism and faith.[59] Kant had affirmed Robinson's Unitarian faith, yet the manner in which he had done so – making room for faith by curtailing empirical knowledge – was too close to an accusation of atheism for those unwilling to abandon their philosophical tradition. For Hazlitt and his 'idealizing' but 'secular philosophy',[60] this was never a problem.

To sum up: Robinson, who had just returned from Germany, with a thorough understanding of Kant's philosophy as well as a series of remarkably erudite journal articles on that topic under his belt, roamed London in 1806, looking for literary work whilst discussing Kant with virtually anyone, from friends and acquaintances to literary intermediaries and sponsors to famous and established authors. Many of these people, as we have seen, were in Hazlitt's immediate circle of contacts, too. And then there is Hazlitt, friends with Robinson since 1799, whom Robinson meets on numerous occasions, who has just published the philosophical treatise on which he would found his pride in being a metaphysician straight away – he signed his proto-Kantian preface to the *Abridgment* of Tucker as 'the author of an *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*' – and who publicly proclaimed that pride until as late as his 1826 *The Plain Speaker* (xii, 98). And yet Robinson's 1806 notebook records no conversation about Kant between himself and Hazlitt.

One can only speculate as to the reasons for this silence. Perhaps Robinson, increasingly aware that his diaries might become of importance to posterity, is actively withholding information on his literary influence. It would not be the last

55 Ibid, 2 February 1806.

56 Ibid, 27 April 1806.

57 Ibid, 18 May 1806.

58 Ibid, 25 and 29 May 1806.

59 Ibid, 17 August 1806.

60 Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense*, 7.

time – we know that, in 1813, he obscured his influence (at least in print) on *A Biographical Dictionary of the Living Authors of Great Britain and Ireland*[61] – and his fears, quoted previously, that his friend and fellow metaphysician might not fulfil his extraordinary promise as a *thinker* would certainly have provided an additional motive. Or, perhaps, discussing philosophy, and hence Kant, went synonymously with meeting Hazlitt in Robinson's mind, so that he did not feel the need to add any kind of *aide-mémoire* to his diary entries. Be that as it may, the one thing we can conjecture with certainty is that Kant must have been debated regularly between Hazlitt and Robinson, and that he may well have dominated their discussions. Hazlitt hence, in 1806, probably received what Madame de Staël had some two years before: Robinson's private tutorials on Kant's philosophy. And just as much as it did with de Staël, these tutorials left a lasting imprint on Hazlitt, too.

## A shared outlook

What Hazlitt cherished about Kant's metaphysical approach to morality was, in Monika Class's words, that it took 'the defiance against Hobbesian calculation and self-interest to an extreme: it stipulated nothing but the conformity to the [moral] law irrespective of the consequences'.[62] To Hazlitt, Kant's philosophy represented a radical disinterestedness that was, like the morality developed in his *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, detached from empirical motives and utilitarian rationale. The polemical opportunities that this opened up can be gauged, for instance, in the *Anti-Jacobin*'s attacks on Kant.[63]

Eventually, of course, Hazlitt retracted much of his early Kantianism. Discussing his February 1814 letters in the *Morning Chronicle* on de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* alongside his 1817 review of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* in the *Edinburgh Review*, Natarajan observes:

> Hazlitt's objection to Kant's reasoning, that it does 'not appeal to known facts', echoes de Staël's complaint that 'what is known never serves as a step to what is unknown'. In spite of her otherwise largely unqualified admiration for Kant, de Staël also criticizes his language and phraseology in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.[64]

61 John Watkins, Frederic Shoberl, and William Upcot, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Living Authors of Great Britain and Ireland* (London: H. Colburn, 1816). Robinson insisted on his name as translator being removed from the volume; HCR, Diary 1813, 14 November, DWL.

62 Monika Class, *Coleridge and Kantian Ideas in England, 1796–1817: Coleridge's Responses to German Philosophy* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 73.

63 Ibid, 123–7.

64 Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense*, 164. Natarajan stresses that the extent of the review's negativity may have its roots in Jeffrey's editorship, who claimed it as his own (158).

Both Hazlitt's and de Staël's criticisms echo the final sentence of Robinson's first lecture for de Staël, where he writes that

> the general Character of [Kant's] Style is Coldness & Dryness in the Statem[en]t & perplexity in the Construction of the Period And tho' the general plan is admirable & the whole as a whole is clear, the detail is painfully obscure.[65]

This concession aside, Robinson's depiction of Kant is, like de Staël's, almost exclusively positive.[66] Most importantly, though, Robinson's charge of obscurity in detail, despite coherence as a whole, resembles Kant's very own theory of the aesthetic in the *Critique of Judgment*: works of art contain an inner purposiveness which does not exert an influence on the motives, purposes, and causalities of everyday life. As political events unfolded on the continent, especially from 1812/13 onwards, and as Hazlitt witnessed his fellow Kantians Robinson, Coleridge, and de Staël turn against Napoleon with increasing determination, the distance between Kant's allegedly abstract, self-contained system and the tangible workings of the mind must have become so great that it threatened to undermine the entire allegiance with Kant's thought. Or, in Natarajan's words relating to Hazlitt's later essay 'On Reason and Imagination', 'all abstraction or universals must be inducted from particulars, and systems which either claim or manifest independence from the particular, are mechanical or *mere* systems'.[67] Hence his attack on Kant in the review of Coleridge's *Biographia* along these lines: if a philosophical system does not cement or spread the only truth that emancipates humanity, namely that of the natural disinterestedness of the mind, but instead lends itself to misappropriation and the reinstatement of old evils – of hereditary monarchies, obscuring the loaded term 'divine right' under the euphemism 'legitimacy' – then perhaps the quest for a true philosophy needs to be continued elsewhere. In any case, Henry Crabb Robinson, in 1806, helped Hazlitt to acquire a more elaborate and wide-ranging philosophical foundation against which the key claims of the practical idealism that the *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* evinces were tested – and prevailed.

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65 HCR, *Essays*, 124.

66 Ibid, 18–20. Robinson met de Staël again in London in 1813, and assisted in the publication of *De l'Allemagne*, which had previously been confiscated by Napoleon.

67 Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense*, 163.

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# 'THIS HAPPY NONENTITY'

## Hazlitt, Hume, and the Essay

*Tim Milnes*

Recent studies of the philosophical character of the Romantic familiar essay have situated the genre within the conventions of Romantic aesthetic theory. Uttara Natarajan, for instance, depicts the development of the familiar essay as part of the Romantic project to unify poetry and philosophy, arguing that '[t]he romantic essay shares with romantic poetry, an aesthetic founded upon the attempt, or […] the failure, to represent the infinite through finite means'.[1] In a similar vein, David Duff has drawn attention to the way in which the digressive, paratactic, and impressionistic epistemology of the familiar essay models itself upon Romantic poetics. The essay's performance of its 'half-knowledge', its reflexive self-theorization through practice, he finds, 'only comes to full power, and full understanding of itself, through the stimulus of Romantic lyric'.[2] Viewed from perspectives such as these, the Romantic familiar essay appears as the product of a merging of British empiricism with a new, nascent idealism, what Natarajan calls a 'symbiosis of the experiential and the ideal', itself a 'hallmark of British as distinct from German idealism'.[3] Thus, the prosateur Romantic essayist, like his poetic counterpart, subordinates the senses to the mind as a means of exploring the 'experiential' through an aesthetics of sublimity.

Running parallel to these approaches is a tendency to represent the Romantic essay's unification of the poetic and the philosophical as the fulfilment of an eighteenth-century quest for a form of cultural communication that bridged the worlds of the quotidian and the intellectual. This aspiration is encapsulated by David Hume in his unpublished essay, 'Of Essay-Writing', in which the essayist assumes the role of a cultural diplomat between the worlds of learning and polite conversation:

> Learning has been as great a Loser by being shut up in Colleges and Cells, and secluded from the World and good Company. By that Means, every Thing of what we call *Belles Lettres* became totally barbarous, being cultivated by Men

1 Uttara Natarajan, 'The Veil of Familiarity: Romantic Philosophy and the Familiar Essay', *Studies in Romanticism* 42.1 (spring 2003), 27–44: 31.

2 David Duff, 'Charles Lamb's Art of Intimation', *Wordsworth Circle* 43.3 (summer 2012), 127–34:133.

3 Natarajan, 'The Veil of Familiarity', 31.

> without any Taste of Life or Manners, and without that Liberty and Facility of Thought and Expression, which can only be acquir'd by Conversation. Even Philosophy went to Wrack by this moaping recluse Method of Study, and became as chimerical in her Conclusions as she was unintelligible in her Stile and Manner of Delivery. And indeed, what cou'd be expected from Men who never consulted Experience in any of their Reasonings, or who never search'd for that Experience, where alone it is to be found, in common Life and Conversation?
>
> [...] In this View, I cannot but consider myself as a Kind of Resident or Ambassador from the Dominions of Learning to those of Conversation [...][4]

With its amenability to tentative, unmethodical improvisation and friendly conversation, the familiar essay seemed to fit an image of thought based on the same custom, habit, and sentiment embodied by Hume's picture of a decentred, trusting intersubjectivity. For Hume, essaying as an activity eschews the quest for certainty and instead fosters an idea of 'experience' as an experimental activity in which the mind comes to reshape itself through its engagement with human life in 'the common course of the world'. Here, Hume is treading on what would have been familiar ground for most of his readers. Since the days of *The Spectator* and *The Tatler*, the periodical essay had functioned as both medium and metaphor for the open, egalitarian, and polite discursiveness of the public sphere. Indeed, Addison and Steele actively exploited the essay's potential to move amphibiously across boundaries, between philosophical and literary modes of expression, as well as between academic and informal writing. Thus, in *The Spectator* no. 10, Addison declares his intention to emulate Socrates, who 'brought Philosophy down from Heaven, to inhabit among Men', by bringing 'Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-tables, and in Coffee-houses'.[5]

It is, then, tempting to see the Romantic aestheticization of the familiar essay as an extension of the practices of the periodical essayists of an earlier era. Thus, while Addison and Hume endeavoured to broaden intellectual culture by essayistically mediating between 'study' and 'conversation', the Romantic essay's attempt to synthesize poetry and philosophy promises to achieve on a formal level the performance of familiarity and communicability that its eighteenth-century precursors could only describe. Consequently (according to Natarajan), Hume's model of the essayist as ambassador between the realms of learning and conversation is fully realized only by Hazlitt's essayistic *practice*, by his Romantic incorporation of the conversability hypothesized in Hume's essays into the very voice of the essayist. Hazlitt certainly appears to have something like this in mind in his 1825 Advertisement to the Paris edition of *Table Talk*. Here, he claims that

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4 David Hume, 'Of Essay-Writing' in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary 1741–77*, ed. Eugene F. Miller, rev. ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), 534–5.

5 Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), I, 44.

one of the aims of the volume was to embody at a *stylistic* level the conversational ideals of the eighteenth-century essay:

> I had remarked that when I had written or thought upon a particular topic, and afterwards had occasion to speak of it with a friend, the conversation generally took a much wider range, and branched off into a number of indirect and collateral questions, which were not strictly connected with the original view of the subject, but which often threw a curious and striking light upon it, or upon human life in general. It therefore occurred to me as possible to combine the advantages of these two styles, the *literary* and *conversational*; or after stating and enforcing some leading idea, to follow it up by such observations and reflections as would probably suggest themselves in discussing the same questions in company with others. This seemed to me to promise a greater variety and richness, and perhaps a greater sincerity, than could be attained by a more precise and scholastic method. The same consideration had an influence on the familiarity and conversational idiom of the style which I have used.[6]

And yet, reading Hazlitt's essays in this way runs the risk of overlooking one important respect in which Hazlitt's essayistic theory and practice ran counter to that of Addison and Hume. Indeed, the intellectual bridge between Hume and Hazlitt is dwarfed by the gulf that separates them.

To appreciate this, we need to distinguish between two contemporary aesthetic models: the aesthetics of the *sublime* and the aesthetics of the *liminal*. Like its eighteenth-century predecessor, the Romantic essay is generically ambiguous, inhabiting a marginal cultural territory between the disciplinary categories of science and philosophy and the imaginative pleasures afforded by literary arts such as poetry and fiction. Unlike its Enlightenment precursor, however, the Romantic essay is presented with two different ways of exploiting this marginality. On one hand, in a Humean spirit of consensualism, it can attempt to negotiate cultural differences; on the other, by invoking a reinvigorated faculty of imagination, it can seek to transcend them. This dilemma manifests itself in the Romantic essay as a tension between quotidian liminality and sublime transcendence: between, on one hand, the engagement in the pragmatic diplomacy of communication, and, on the other, the exertion of power manifested as an incommensurable 'aesthetic' experience.

The distinction I allude to here is further illuminated by Ian Duncan's account of the two fundamental ways in which literary works of this period endeavour to negotiate the blurred boundary between fiction and reality. The first mode, which Duncan describes as Kantian-transcendental or lyrical, is familiar to students of Romanticism. On this model, aesthetic experience acquires a recuperative function, compensating for the loss of epistemic foundations and their replacement with

6 William Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. by P.P. Howe, 21 vols (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1930-34), VIII, 333.

merely transcendental conditions. Accordingly, representations of the fragmented self offer a fleeting and indirect glimpse of an impossible unity. In transcendental aesthetics, 'Literature' becomes (potentially, at least) sublime, which is another way of saying that literature assumes a unique, asymptotic relation to the Absolute. Thus, as Friedrich Schlegel writes of 'transcendental poetry' in Fragment 238 of the *Athenäum Fragments* (1798), Literature 'emerges as satire in the absolute difference of ideal and real, hovers in between as elegy, and ends as idyll with the absolute identity of the two'.[7] Transcendental lyricism remains serious (albeit nostalgically so) about truth – offering the prospect of an aesthetic resolution of human division in the dark foundations of Schelling's intellectual intuition, or in the form of an ineffable 'Literary Absolute'.[8]

Duncan, however, also identifies a second major aesthetic paradigm: a Humean-empirical or novelistic aesthetic, which remains poised between truth and fiction with no projected foundation beyond that of the goal of cultivating consensus though conversation.[9] On this model, the representational power of literature is deflated. Thus, for a rhetorically-minded ironist such as Hume, literature simply helps to promote and regulate communication in the public sphere by mediating between different forms of life (primarily, the reflective and the quotidian). Such diplomacy was exemplified by the essay, which, as cultural mediator *par excellence*, moved harmoniously between the worlds of earnest philosophizing and polite conversation. For Hume, the essayistic imagination involved a performative doubling of personae and perspectives, a form of open-ended mediating between the systematic understanding of the philosopher and the pragmatic diplomacy of the conversationalist in the lifeworld. The goal of this activity was the consolidation of social, and, ultimately, epistemological norms. My suggestion here, then, is that Duncan's distinction between transcendental and empirical aesthetics (what I refer to, respectively, as the sublime and the liminal) in the Romantic novel is also helpful for reflecting upon what is at stake, epistemologically and rhetorically, in the Romantic familiar essay.

The shift from a liminal aesthetics of mediation and consolidation to a sublime aesthetics of transcendence is, in part, a consequence of the decline of the public sphere upon which the former depended. The epistemology of the Romantic familiar essay, no less than other, more celebrated literary forms of the Romantic period, is moulded by circumstances associated with industrial and political

7 Friedrich Schlegel, 'From *Athenäum Fragments*' in *The Origins of Modern Critical Thought: German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism from Lessing to Hegel*, ed. David Simpson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 195.

8 See F.W.J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism,* trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978). Answering the question of how the subjective is to become objective, i.e. how intuition can intuit itself, Schelling claims that '[t]his universally acknowledged and altogether incontestable objectivity of intellectual intuition is art itself. For the aesthetic intuition simply is the intellectual intuition become objective' (228).

9 See Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 124.

revolution. Jon Klancher has demonstrated the ways in which the periodical played a vital role in cultivating the idea of a public sphere by organizing audiences and evoking 'a textual society unifying readers otherwise divided into hierarchic social ranks'.[10] As this 'textual society' segmented into political factions whose interests and world views appeared unbridgeable, however, the figure of the sympathetic, neutral spectator prized by Addison and Smith suffered a similar fate to that of the generalist man of letters. For instance, reviewing the reviews in 1824, James Mill identified the very communicability of the modern periodicals as the source of modern partisanship. For Mill, the responsiveness of the periodical press to public debate drove its craven adherence to political 'interests' at the cost of objectivity. 'Periodical literature depends upon *immediate* success', Mill complains: 'It must, therefore, patronise the opinions which are now in vogue, the opinions of those who are now in power'.[11] Similarly, for Hazlitt, the public sphere, which had already fragmented through the expansion of print media and a rapid increase in the dissemination of knowledge, could no longer function as a foundation for epistemic solidarity.

And yet, the ground Hazlitt shares with Mill – and with the Scottish Enlightenment more generally – ends here. Hazlitt rejects utilitarian rationalism, associating the latter with a Scottish philosophy of self-interest and with the commercialization of letters that he holds responsible for glutting the public appetite with cheap printed material. In 'The Main Chance', he depicts rational egoism as a form of mental commodification that fetishized a 'certain form or outside appearance of utility' in objects, while neglecting 'the natural, pulpy, wholesome, nutritious substance, the principle of vitality'. Utilitarianism – itself, for Hazlitt, the philosophy of an aggregative, purely mechanical intellect – produces a 'frigid habit of mind [in which] the real uses of things harden and crystallise; the pith and marrow are extracted out of them, leaving nothing but the husk or shell […]'. Moreover, since it promoted a view of well-being in which 'the idea of property is gradually abstracted from the advantage it may be of even to ourselves', it was ultimately self-defeating.[12] Against this perspective, Hazlitt pits his moral idealism, his belief that the mind forms experience, and hence its own moral objectives (self-interested and disinterested alike). This in turn is rooted in his conviction that the diversity and complexity of our experience always outstrips our conceptions, and that, as he declares in *Characteristics: In the Manner of Rochefoucault's Maxims* (1823), '[t]ruth is not one, but many'.[13] The error of 'people of sense', such as Bentham and Shelley, is that by mistaking the abstract, rational

10 Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790–1832* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 15.

11 [James Mill], 'Periodical Literature:*Edinburgh Review*', *Westminster Review*, 1.1 (January 1824), 206–49: 209.

12 Hazlitt, *Works*, XVII, 277. See also: 'On the Scotch Character' (*The Liberal*, January 1823): 'a Scotchman is a machine, and should be constructed on sound moral, and philosophical principles, or should be put a stop to altogether' (ibid, 106).

13 Hazlitt, *Works*, IX, 228.

forms that quantify experience for the 'pith and marrow' of the thing itself, they come to know only 'the form, not the power of truth'.[14]

This reaction against the Scottish Enlightenment ideal of a sociable 'progress of sentiments' stems, in large part, from Hazlitt's ambivalent relationship with the print culture upon which his journalistic career depended. The material conditions of the periodical and the cultural location of the essayist had shifted in fundamental ways since the age of Hume and Johnson. Crucial to these changes was a dramatic increase in readily available information through the explosion of print media in the early nineteenth century. This, together with increasing scientific, technical and professional specialization, led to the demise of the Enlightenment ideal of the 'Universal Intellect': the man of letters who was accomplished in all fields of learning. As Nathan Drake observed in 1814, knowledge had proliferated and diversified to such an extent that '[t]o comprehend the intricacies of *speculative* science, or to relish the *elaborate* productions of genius, requires not only the education of many years, but much subsequent leisure through life'.[15] Indeed, the demands of trade and business meant that even the leisured classes struggled to keep up:

> In a country just rising into consequence by commercial efforts, where, with the exception of a few individuals devoted to an academical or professional life, the higher and middle classes are but little acquainted with the pleasures and advantages of literature […]; it will be in vain that attention is called to philological enquiry or studied exhortation.[16]

Drake suggests that these cultural developments present an opportunity for the essayist. Amidst the bewildering complexities of speculative science and the productions of genius, the ideal role for the essay genre is that of a cultural aggregator. The essay, he notes, is the perfect medium for an age of commercial and communicative surplus, providing the 'higher and middle classes' with a digest of information in a world in which it is no longer possible to maintain a familiarity with every branch of knowledge.

In retrospect, Drake's vision underestimated the extent to which the rapidly changing economy of the early nineteenth century would fundamentally reshape the inner structure of the essay itself. Hazlitt, by contrast, was more alert to the need for a new paradigm for essaying. In his 1823 essay 'The Periodical Press', he argues that modernity's surplus of knowledge called for a reconsideration of the very function of the periodical writer:

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14 'On People of Sense', Hazlitt, *Works*, XII, 248.

15 Nathan Drake, *Essays, Biographical, Critical and Historical, Illustrative of the Tatler, Spectator and Guardian*, 2nd edn, 3 vols (London: Suttaby, Evance, and Fox, 1814), I, 15.

16 Drake, *Essays*, I, 16.

> To dig to the bottom of a subject through so many generations of authors, is now impossible: the concrete mass is too voluminous and vast to be contained in any single head; and therefore we must have essences and samples as substitutes for it. We have collected a superabundance of raw materials: the grand *desideratum* now is, to fashion and render them portable.[17]

The key word here is 'essences'. In an era that was witnessing a superabundance of information, the essay no longer contributed to the progress of knowledge. Instead of aggregating information, Hazlitt argues, the periodical essay achieves its distinctive form of cultural autonomy by distilling the spirit of the age.

This reconfiguration of the essayist was a characteristically Romantic response to the intellectual fragmentation of contemporary culture. As the figure of the man of letters diversified into the expert (the 'natural philosopher', for example, into the 'scientist' and the 'philosopher'), the essay as literary or scientific tool increasingly seemed fit for no purpose in particular, an amphibious genre whose ability to move between environments seemed maladapted to a milieu in which only the specialist thrived. Writing in 1923, George Marr traced the beginning of the periodical essay's demise at the end of the eighteenth century to a decline in the culture of consensus and to rapidly changing reading practices:

> It was not till the last decade or so of the eighteenth century, when new forces were being brought to bear on society and stirring it to its depths, that men were no longer satisfied with the little moral essay, the little didactic tale, the evergreen Eastern allegory, and the imaginary 'characters' drawn for their improvement, but called for a stronger and more varied literary diet. And then that particular form of the essay became extinct.[18]

Marr depicts the passing of the genre as a kind of cultural enclosure, with the essay's common ground being broken up and repurposed by more dedicated literary forms that borrowed elements and developed them in ways that the original format could not. The first and most obvious of these genres was the novel, which, by expanding the 'little didactic tale' and 'evergreen Eastern allegory' into richer, longer and more sophisticated narratives, 'sucked the essay dry'.[19] Second, the rise of criticism and heavyweight reviews such as the *Edinburgh*, the *Quarterly* and *Blackwood's* in the early nineteenth century dwarfed the relatively modest critical efforts of the eighteenth-century periodical essay. The third and most significant cause in the eclipse of the essay, however, was the rise of the magazine, which, with its greater size and wider range of interests, offered an 'infinitely varied dietary of story and article'.[20]

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17 Hazlitt, *Works*, XVI, 219-20.

18 George S. Marr, *The Periodical Essayists of the Eighteenth Century* (London: James Clark & Co., 1923), 11.

19 Marr, *Periodical Essayists*, 249.

20 Ibid, 253.

One significant consequence of the essay's perceived failure to be either sufficiently focused and serious (like the critical review) or satisfyingly varied and entertaining (like the magazine), was an increasing tendency for the genre to turn in on itself, evacuating 'content' in favour of self-conscious reflection. In this way, by restyling itself as a form of meta-media, the essay acquired surplus value as a cultural commodity. As pure commentary, it was free to cover any subject with no unity of method other than an ever-present awareness of its own status as cultural mediator: '"We are nothing, if not critical,"' Hazlitt writes in 'The Periodical Press': 'Be it so: but then let us be critical, or we shall be nothing'.[21] Consequently, as Leigh Hunt notes in the *Indicator*, the essayist becomes a doubled figure, a purveyor of everything and 'nothing'. The aim of the essay, he claims,

> is to be modest: it is to be expressive: it is to be new: it is to be striking: it is to have something in it equally intelligible to the man of plain understanding, and surprising for the man of imagination:—in a word, it is to be impossible.
>
> How far we have succeeded in the attainment of this happy nonentity, we leave others to judge.[22]

Both Hazlitt's depiction of periodical writing as 'nothing' but criticism and Hunt's image of a 'happy nonentity' invert Drake's idea of the essay as cultural digest in response to what they perceive to be its 'impossible' task: to be all things to all people and still be distinctive. They also reflect what Duncan has identified as the abstracted nothingness at the heart of the contemporary notion of 'common life', which in turn becomes 'a medium at once transparent and opaque', an abstraction, a '"nothing"'.[23] This conception of common life as a kind of nothingness ultimately stems from Hume's sceptical withdrawal of a reality principle from the quotidian. Hume's argument that everyday belief had no metaphysical foundation moved him to situate thought at the unstable boundary of fiction and belief, where, as Duncan puts it, '[o]ur sentimental investment in common life' and customs is 'framed by the fitful, uneven knowledge of their fictiveness'.[24] While Duncan focuses his attention upon the ways in which Romantic fiction comes to embody and represent this 'nothing' at the heart of empirical reality, Hunt's and Hazlitt's ruminations suggest that the essay in this period was no less involved in exploring the doublings of consciousness required to maintain the reflective and the quotidian in productive dialogue, in an epistemological form of suspended animation. For Hume, such doubling was largely a pragmatic matter, in that it made communication and getting on with everyday life possible. Hazlitt, however, saw in it a potential source of re-enchantment, a basis for transcending the conditions of a mechanized, alienated consciousness – in other words, as a source of possible sublimity.

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21 Hazlitt, *Works*, XVI, 213.

22 Leigh Hunt, *The Indicator and the Companion; A Miscellany for the Fields and the Fire-Side*, 2 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1834), I, 1–2.

23 Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, 117.

24 Ibid, 123.

At the heart of the idea of the essay as a 'happy nonentity', then, is a paradox. Struggling against the professionalization of the relationship between writer and reader and the commodification of the work of literature, Hazlitt nonetheless relied upon that economy for his literary livelihood. The product of this contradiction, as has been widely noted since Raymond Williams, is a 'super-reality' theory of art based upon imaginative truth and projected towards an 'Ideal Reader' who was capable of approaching literary works non-instrumentally.[25] By idealizing the sympathetic function of the work of art and the audience that engaged with it, the Romantic essayist engages in what Klancher describes as a kind of 'audience-making', itself a form of 'cultural capitalism', producing a value-added commodity in which aesthetic experience was configured not as an ideological position but 'a mode of reception and comprehension', a 'reading habit'.[26] As literary quantity is refined into quality, intersubjective consensus and epistemic solidarity is replaced by aesthetic activity as the ultimate foundation of cultural and epistemological norms.

In this respect, at least, Hazlitt's aesthetic model for the essay parallels that of publications such as *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and the *London Magazine*, both of which respond to anxieties surrounding literary commodification by producing surplus epistemic value in the form of self-conscious intellectualism.[27] As Klancher argues, by doing so these publications sought to redeem 'social and psychological fragmentation by recollectively bouncing back toward a fusion with the self's own ultimate ground' – a ground that was itself transcendental and putatively apolitical.[28] Similarly, by sophisticating the literary product with an ineffable aesthetics of 'power' and 'common sense', Hazlitt endeavours to transcend its material conditions. Like Hume and Johnson before him, he presents the essay and essaying as a prototype for human experience as a whole. While Hume and Johnson had attempted to consolidate the normative order that underpinned such experience, however, Hazlitt seeks to transcend that order through an aestheticized form of social empiricism. The aura of 'nothingness' that surrounded the essay was no longer the transparent medium of common life, but instead the privileged sphere of aesthetic contemplation that he outlines in 'On the Pleasure of Painting':

> I have more satisfaction in my own thoughts than in dictating them to others: words are necessary to explain the impression of certain things upon me to the reader, but they rather weaken and draw a veil over than strengthen it to myself. […] The ideas we cherish most exist best in a kind of shadowy abstraction,
>
> "Pure in the last recesses of the mind;"

25 Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780–1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), 35.

26 Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, 33.

27 Duncan notes that John Gibson Lockhart's interest in Friedrich Schlegel led him to the 'figure of a transcendental subject – a "national mind"', displacing political intent into purely aesthetic purposiveness' (Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, 56).

28 Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, 58.

> and derive neither force nor interest from being exposed to public view. They are old familiar acquaintance, and any change in them, arising from the adventitious ornaments of style or dress, is little to their advantage.[29]

Romanticizing the form and content of the familiar essay involved moving the social intuition theorized by the Scottish Enlightenment indoors, into the private domain of consciousness and individual imagination, of inexpressible impressions and shadowy abstractions. In Hazlitt's work the essayist mediates less between social formations and more between idealized phenomenological realms of 'inner' and 'outer' experience. Consequently, the ludic indeterminacy of Hazlitt's imagination is typically oriented by an aesthetic, not a social purposiveness: its playfulness signifies not the pragmatic presuppositions of communication (as it had in Hume), but the dark foundations of consciousness and identity. Thus, although Hazlitt's professed attempt to incorporate familiar conversation into the style of the essay superficially echoes the socializing objectives of Addison and Hume, his aesthetics takes the familiar essay in an entirely new direction. While the operations of the eighteenth-century essay sought to underpin sociability by buttressing the conventions of a polite and commercial society, in Hazlitt the gesture of the Romantic essayist postulates a higher, unattainable unity that transcends the social. By aestheticizing (or, borrowing Duncan's terminology, *lyricizing*) the liminal, diplomatic intellect of its eighteenth-century precursors, the sublime performance of the Romantic familiar essay acquires significance not as a pragmatic regulator of communication, but as the hypostasized other of a lost wholeness that surpasses public discourse. By transforming Hume's ideal of conversable intersubjectivity into an incommunicable depth of subjectivity, Hazlitt exchanges an essayism of liminality for an essayism of the sublime.

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29 Hazlitt, *Works*, VIII, 6–7.

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# BOOK REVIEWS

## **Helen Boyles, *Romanticism and Methodism: The Problem of Religious Enthusiasm***

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The issue of the relationship between English literary Romanticism and evangelical culture is highly contentious; some scholars deny that it is possible to find meaningful connections between these two movements, while others insist on direct and measurable cross-pollination. In her new study, *Romanticism and Methodism*, Helen Boyles has contributed to this debate by providing some enjoyable close readings of key Romantic works. Boyles explores the potentially 'enthusiastic' elements of these texts, while maintaining a firm faith in the unconscious sublimation of evangelical discourse in the expression of the passions and the language of the common people. Boyles presents her work as a development of Frederick Gill's *The Romantic Movement and Methodism* (1937), in which Gill posited a connection between the religion of the heart and the Romantic imagination, and Richard Brantley's study of *Wordsworth's Natural Methodism* (1975), which identified stylistic similarities between the poet's work and evangelical discourse.

Boyles is keen to explore Romantic literature through the prism of the history and semantics of the word 'enthusiasm' since the English Civil War; in her introduction she surveys the uses of the term, and in her first chapter she extends this discussion by examining the different uses which John Wesley made of the word. Here and elsewhere, Boyles is clearly most comfortable when she is discussing texts from the later eighteenth century and early nineteenth century: there are some errors in her historical comments on seventeenth-century Puritanism and early Methodism, and her reading of Wesley's sermon on 'The Nature of Enthusiasm' could go even further in clarifying contemporary hostility to the term – a hostility which Wesley shared, and which he spelt out in practical terms in his *Directions* for preachers. One also senses that Boyles's repeated discussion of the relationship between heart-work, enthusiasm, and feminine sensibility runs the risk of replaying rather than deconstructing the frequently malicious conflation of these notions by eighteenth-century writers.

It is an important part of Boyles's argument that many of the characteristics which could be negatively characterized as enthusiasm could be received positively in other contexts as legitimate outpourings of the spirit, or the passions of the psyche. In an engaging section on Methodist poetry, she mounts a spirited defence of Charles Wesley's hymns as embodiments of 'sincere enthusiasm'

(42) simultaneously intensified and rationalized through the process of poetic composition; in editing his brother's hymns, she argues, John Wesley culled their excesses of effeminate sentimentality and maudlin bodily metaphor. Nevertheless, while each of these claims may have some validity, Boyles tends to overemphasize their interconnectedness, and despite her advocacy the reader is sometimes left feeling that several of the hymns under discussion are not just 'direct' and 'forceful' (44), but actually rather bad when considered purely as verse, and that they have little connection to the Romantic poetry which she discusses later in the volume.

In order to consider possible lines of descent between early Methodism and Romantic thought, Boyles discusses as a test case Southey's *Life of Wesley* and the comments made on the work by Coleridge. Here we have concrete evidence of Romantic engagement with Methodism, although, as Boyles points out, these authors were very far from uncritical of the movement. Even though he was intrigued by the evangelical focus on heart-work, Southey clearly believed that its over-ardent expression had to be tempered, and he was both publicly and privately critical of the 'enthusiastic' tendencies of Methodist preachers. Coleridge was even more savage, diagnosing the most rapturous Methodist conversion narratives as a psychological 'disease' (63). Coleridge may have returned to Southey's *Life* at several points in his career, but one possible inference from this is that Wesley's huge cultural stature provided a focal point for Coleridge to dissent from and debate with Arminian Methodism's key principles and practices.

Another possible model of the relationship between Romantic ideas and evangelical beliefs is to see contiguity rather than direct lineage. In her final chapter, Boyles argues that Hazlitt's term 'gusto', a word which he sometimes imbued directly with religious meaning, represents (perhaps unconsciously) the positive potentialities of the concept of enthusiasm. Boyles acknowledges Hazlitt's inheritance of principles derived from the rational dissent of his father, although here again there is a tendency to elide concepts which really need to be distinguished very carefully (there is surely no such thing as 'the manly rationalism of Presbyterian Unitarianism' [160], for example). Unfortunately, this strategy renders her association of elements of dissenting 'heart-work' (159) with Methodist 'enthusiasm' tendentious, not in and of itself, but through lack of definitional clarity. She is on stronger ground when discussing Hazlitt's satirical essay 'On the Causes of Methodism', in which she correctly emphasizes Hazlitt's hostility to the movement, which extends backwards into his reading of biblical history. Despite despatching Methodism to a corner of the history of fanaticism, however, Hazlitt was not averse, as Boyles shows, to suggesting parallels between the history of poetic and religious enthusiasm. The difference for Hazlitt, one feels, is that religious enthusiasm leads to a distortion of the truth, whereas the epistemological objectives (and ontological condition) of poetry must be significantly different (again, by definition). Nevertheless, Boyles makes some insightful points about the perceived embarrassing effeminacy of Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris*, the reception history of which certainly does, as she suggests, point to

an equally embarrassing phallocentrism among many critics, past and present, who self-identify as 'radicals'.

The intellectual centre of Boyles's study lies in her readings of Wordsworth, which occupy four of the central chapters of the book. Boyles points to the presence of Methodist preachers in Wordsworth's home town of Cockermouth, and Wordsworth's ambivalent comments about open-air Methodist preaching, linking these remarks to Wordsworth's deeply original psychologism in the opening books of *The Prelude*. Boyles identifies terminological similarities between Wordsworth's 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* and Wesley's 'Preface' to the Methodist *Hymns*, and argues that these point to a deeper affinity of purpose, both in terms of the manifestation of 'truth' and the representation of 'simplicity' as the language of the 'common man' (91–8); true poetry, like the hymn, must therefore involve the cooperation of reason and intelligence for moral elevation. In one of the strongest sections of the book, Boyles discusses the contradictory resonances of the word 'common' in *Lyrical Ballads* and explores its rejection by the 'regulatory' (108) forces of contemporary periodicals, particularly *The Edinburgh Review* under Francis Jeffrey; here, Boyles is unashamedly polemical, and her analysis is clear, focused, and (despite the occasional historical blip) well-argued; underlying Jeffrey's vicious verbal assault on aspects of Wordsworth's style, she argues, was an attempt to distinguish three ways between an appropriate poetic diction, the true simplicity of 'common' men, and the heightened and therefore false simplicity of poems such as 'The Idiot Boy', 'The Thorn', and 'The Waggoner' (114–15).

Jeffrey's later criticism of parts of *The Excursion* as 'the mystical verbiage of the Methodist pulpit' (126–7) was a substantially different claim, which in Boyles's view attempted to highlight the poem's perceived combination of didacticism and obscurity, as well as a presumed enthusiastic excess of imagination on the part of the poet. In Boyles's analysis, these accusations are framed as a response to the poet's fascination with the potentially subversive itinerancy of the wandering pedlar-preacher. In some senses, Wordsworth's own anxieties regarding the themes and style of his poem 'Peter Bell' were justified by the critical hostility expressed towards several of his other works; his vacillations over the poem may be viewed as attempts to preserve its ruminations over the nature of imagination while adapting it to conform to the literary requirements of polite society. Nevertheless, if Wordsworth was aiming (as Boyles suggests) to reconcile the discourse of enthusiasm with the exigencies of public taste, he failed spectacularly in the eyes of Leigh Hunt, whose description of the poem as 'another didactic little horror' (143) arose in part from a culturally-endemic denunciation of inflated Methodist rhetoric.

Boyles's analysis of Wordsworth's poems are typical of the book's strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side, her close readings are engaging, exploratory, and personal accounts of the relation between the Romantic imagination and the rhetorical diversity of evangelical preaching. Boyles is too sensitive a reader to suggest that the two discourses are connected in either a genealogical or a material sense, and yet the book's tendency to elide rather than to distinguish

key terms ('Methodism', 'evangelicalism', and 'enthusiasm', for example) is not helped by her occasional misinterpretations of religious and social history. There may well be similarities at the level of discourse between Wesleyan Methodism and Romanticism, but the argument that visionary poetics could represent the acceptable face of enthusiastic evangelicalism remains unproven.

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**Ruth Livesey, *Writing the Stage Coach Nation: Locality on the Move in Nineteenth-Century British Literature***

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Ruth Livesey's *Writing the Stage Coach Nation* departs from a question: 'Why is it that so many of the most memorable, best-loved novels of the Victorian era take place not in the steam-powered railway present in which they were published, but in the recent past?' (1) The journey that follows considers the ways that nineteenth-century novels depict what Livesey calls the 'just' past, focusing on their 'tendency to draw on the stage and mail coach system as a means to evoke the nation' (1). This earlier system of communication and public transportation, 'in its halts, relays, stops at inns, and crossing points', organized space differently from the railway that ultimately supplanted it, 'offer[ing] an entirely different experience of mobility and being-in-place' (2). Livesey's intervention is to observe and analyse the mutual constitution of geographical place and historical time in nineteenth-century fiction, proposing a kind of space-time continuum characterized by the 'persistent spatialization of the past' (4). Observing that the term 'nostalgia' could also mean something akin to 'homesickness' in the nineteenth century, Livesey works to reframe what others might dismiss as the uncritical nostalgia of her central texts, suggesting instead that they evince a meaningful historicism in which time and space are theorized together (5–6).

In the Introduction, building upon the work of Ann Rigney, Livesey argues that the figure of the stage coach creates a 'paradox of portable hyperlocalism' in the novels she considers, one that theorizes 'the relation of local place to nation' (7, 10). Livesey distinguishes her novelists from contemporary historians and political philosophers, notably Thomas Babington Macaulay, for whom 'the speeding up of public national communication by road in the early nineteenth century provided the perfect analogy for progress and increasing homogeneity' (10). Through a reading of Thomas De Quincey's 'The English Mail-Coach' (1849), Livesey suggests that for many nineteenth-century novelists, instead, 'the work of the stage coach is to weave together a nation out of strongly rendered, disjointed localities, putting that sense of being-in-place into a shared circulation and inviting us all aboard' (11).

Chapter 1 identifies in the work of Walter Scott an influential paradigm for later representations of the stage coach in fictions of the 'just' past. Livesey argues that in Scott's works, a never-resolved '[c]onflict between the forces of modernity and the passionate survivals of the past occur at regular staging posts on the endless historical journey […] in which movement through time is mapped onto geographical space' (31). Livesey's reading of Jeanie Deans's journey to London in *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818) illustrates her central point about portable hyperlocalism, that 'the sort of rootedness, contiguity, and localized knowledge

represented by Jeanie Deans is a paradoxical source of power, free mobility, and speech in Scott's writing' (41). Her reading of *The Antiquary* (1816) emphasizes a 'pattern of the disruption of a grand unifying system by local interests', which she contextualizes within debates about the implications of road improvements for the place of Scotland within the Union (47). Contrasting Scott's depiction of local resistance with De Quincey's retrospective celebration of the stage coach as national unity, Livesey suggests that Scott 'writes through and of a system of British modernity that does not quite work – yet', reflecting his stadial, progressivist historiography (54).

Chapter 2 considers the figure of the mail coach in radical writings of the 1820s, contrasting the highly critical view taken by William Cobbett's *Rural Rides* with the hopeful and ultimately more influential stance of William Hazlitt's 'The Letter-Bell' (1831). Cobbett saw the mail coach system as a 'pernicious web of exploitation leaching wealth out of rural communities into London's financial centre' (56–7). By contrast, Hazlitt understood the mail coach as a 'symbol of the potential for perfect, concrete communication' (57). Through these writers, Livesey traces the politicization of the mail coach system in this period: in the years immediately after Waterloo, it could serve either as a symbol of loyalism or as the potential for problematic mass mobilization through mass communication, but it ultimately coalesced 'as a symbol of unity and progress at the end of the 1820s' (75). The chapter concludes with a fascinating analysis of the visual culture of 'the stage and mail coach genre of political satire', in which 'the mail coach emerge[s] as a symbol of national government and political destiny […] that anyone might see rolling past the end of their lane' (83, 88).

Livesey begins a two-chapter examination of Dickens with the observation that his writing career largely predated the Victorian age of rail travel, and that his works continued to represent the stage coach nation into the 1860s (89). Her analysis uncovers a 'residual ambivalence about railway modernity' that serves as a rejoinder to the view of Dickens as uncritically embracing modernity and forward progress (120). Chapter 3 argues that the figure of the stage coach in *The Pickwick Papers* (1836–7) 'speaks of an appetite for republican modernity' (91). Livesey reads the novel's fictional location of Dingley Dell as having a kind of portable sense of place, at once both highly localized and capable of 'moving and mutating out of Dickens's narrative and into all sorts of resignifying contexts' (113). Thus, 'to arrive in locality' in *The Pickwick Papers* 'is to find yourself in an interior state of feeling outside time, not a carefully evoked geographic locality' (114). Chapter 4 contrasts the 'almost utopian vision' of the stage coach in *The Pickwick Papers* with the much more ambivalent account found in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–4), focusing on the spatial and temporal disjunction between the novel's English and American portions. Livesey juxtaposes the way that the stage coach in the English section of the novel reflects a 'thick layering and seepage of past and present' with the dystopic representation of the American railroad (133). She argues that Dickens's fictionalization of Cairo, Illinois – a failed city intended to be a railway hub – as 'Eden' in the novel 'reveals the fault-line within Dickens's ambivalent response to steam-powered modernity: its potential to bring about a loss of

moorings of place altogether in a nation invested in rushing in a straight line to premature development' (152).

Livesey's reading of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) in Chapter 5 emphasizes the influence of Scott, and understands the novel as reflecting a 'resistant Tory mode of inscribing an alternative national modernity' (157). In looking back to the 'just' past of the 1820s from the perspective of the 1840s, Brontë 'preserves a landscape of locality on the verge of obliteration by speed' (159). Brontë reflects a 'Tory idea of communication', in which 'cheap and effective postage is needed not to diffuse useful knowledge or advance the free exchange of mercantile information, but to supplement the loss of proximity and local belonging in modernity' (164). In a reading of the flight from Thornfield, Livesey suggests that Jane's serendipitous discovery of her cousins at Whitcross reflects the way that the stage coach system links all people and places to each other, creating a national community (172).

Chapter 6 analyses the way that George Eliot reworks and transforms the ideas of Cobbett, establishing 'a conservative reading of radicalism as a means to inward revolution, local attachment, and individual memory' (179–80). Livesey reads *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866) as theorizing a 'new practice of national prosthetic memory', a project of 'writing portable roots', organized around 'the pairing of hope and memory' rather than 'externalized temporal categories such as "progress" and "history"' (180, 193, 181). Rejecting Cobbett's language of class consciousness, Eliot imagines an 'ideal of national regeneration through regrowth of a sense of local attachment' (194). Livesey ends the chapter by suggesting that the novel resists J.S. Mill's 'vision of a democratic nation [as] one of perfectly regular abstract space […] that obliterates the local' (204).

The Conclusion examines the figure of the empty road in Hardy's *The Woodlanders* (1887), by whose time the stage coach world had been definitively lost. In a reading of the Wessex map, Livesey suggest that despite the intensely local nature of Hardy's fiction, it also ironically 'shatters the idea that such being-in-place can underpin existence in a modern, mobile world' (208). In a brief final reading of Dickens's journalistic series on railway travel 'The Uncommercial Traveller', from the 1860s, Livesey traces how Dickens responds to the loss of the stage coach system from recent memory.

One of Livesey's significant contributions in *Writing the Stage Coach Nation* is to bring out connections, too often obscured by period boundaries, between novels from the Romantic and the Victorian eras, focusing in particular on the legacy of Scott. The book also makes frequent reference to relevant eighteenth-century contexts and influences. This wider historical lens offers a welcome perspective on the Victorian novel, and it reflects Livesey's impressive range as a scholar – her first book focused on the period between 1880 and 1914. Additionally, the monograph reflects not only a serious engagement with recent work on its major texts, but also an astute look back to mid-twentieth-century interlocutors, including Georg Lukács and Kathleen Tillotson, whose ideas have raised still-relevant questions about historicity in Victorian fiction. Livesey's central insight about the mutual constitution of space and time in nineteenth-century fiction allows the book to push past what is often a dead end for scholars – that these novels fail to embody

a robust historicism on the model theorized by Lukács. *Writing the Stage Coach Nation* is recommended reading for anyone interested in the way that the nineteenth-century novel theorizes time and space, imagines the region or nation, or responds to the new and old technologies of transportation that moved people, letters, and ideas from place to place.

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**Björn Bosserhoff, *Radical Contra-Diction: Coleridge, Revolution, Apostasy***

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Björn Bosserhoff's *Radical Contra-Diction: Coleridge, Revolution, Apostasy* is the first full-length study of the formation of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's political sensibilities during the *terreur* of the French Revolution in the early years of the 1790s and his subsequent modification of those sensibilities after the winter of 1796/97. The 'contra-diction' referred to in the book's title, and the orthographic eccentricity of its interceding hyphen, are of no small importance. Both point to Bosserhoff's main objective: to temper and complicate the highly polarized and polemical terms 'radical' and 'apostasy' when situating Coleridge's complex and idiosyncratic political thought. Bosserhoff does this is in a number of interrelated ways, all of which entail a type of *positioning against* ('contra') to then be *mediated* ('-') by a *philological reckoning* ('diction'), and which serve as the shaping force of his study.

'Contra-diction' is also a 'contra-dictioning', a verbal or discursive strategy of to and fro, of ceaseless modification, of middling. This, it would seem, is the most salient feature of Coleridge's political development from supporter of some of the French Revolution's more enlightened promises to conflicted critic of its darker energies. It is also inflected in Bosserhoff's 'Introduction', where he positions himself against some common but what he sees as all-too partisan assumptions on the part of the scholarship on the Romantics and their reactions to the French Revolution. He first does this by very briefly setting into counterpoint the spirit of the French Revolution, its descent into terror, and the betrayal of its own values with the initial euphoria of the Revolution's British supporters (reformists or 'radicals'), the counterrevolutionary stance of British loyalists, the success of the Pitt ministry in containing pro-Revolutionary sentiments via its anti-sedition laws of the 1790s, and the disappointment in and disaffiliation from the Revolution on the part of former supporters. In an effort to differentiate and make more diffuse the political positioning of the British Romantics in this period, Bosserhoff argues that their *volte-face* abandonment of 'radical' politics is a result of both rejecting the *terreur* abroad as well as accepting the repression at home. This is certainly reasonable but it also means, of course, that Coleridge's political voice is going to sound quite different in his poetry, private letters, and journal entries than in his public lectures and correspondence. Isolating and extracting that voice thus requires diligent readings of a great deal of material with careful attention to context and, Bosserhoff argues, with a rather sceptical attitude to the viewpoints adopted by M.H. Abrams, and a generation later, the New Historicists, who 'considered Romantic "apostasy" a given' and 'shared the fundamental assumption that the Romantics somehow transcendentalized, aestheticized and/or privatized

the political' (16). Bosserhoff's scepticism here supports yet complicates his attempt to trace Coleridge's shifting political thought in the apolitical vein he aspires to (30–1) while also confessing to having 'little patience with attempts to read encoded political messages into texts like "The Ancient Mariner", "Kubla Khan" or "Christabel"' (16), which indeed are not discussed in his study. And this scepticism is further given form in Bosserhoff's embedding of the terms 'apostasy', 'radical', 'liberal', and 'conservative' in quotation marks every time they are used in reference to the Romantic period. He cites the anachronistic nature of the terms 'radical' and 'conservative', both of which arise in this specific politicized sense only after the height of British agitation within the reformist camps, as well as the confused and complex nature of many of Coleridge's political opinions, some of which even late in life, as John Stuart Mill pointed out, 'were "sufficient enough to make a Tory's hair stand on end"' (24–5). The thematic thrust of this study is hence a mild reprimand to those who depoliticize Coleridge, or ascribe to him a fixed political position, or casually lobby accusations of 'radicalism' and 'apostasy' without taking his abundant contradictions into consideration.

To this end, the book is convincingly and cogently organized in two parts: 'Catching Fire: A Political-Biographical Account, 1792–96' which looks at Coleridge's initial political development, and 'Under Fire: Negotiating the Past', which examines Coleridge's attempts after the winter of 1796/97 to justify and recast many of the statements he had made previously. Interspersed between these two parts are a handful of smart colour reproductions, including Peter Vandyke's wonderfully rendered, paired portraits of Robert Southey and Coleridge. Also included are three political cartoons, including James Gillray's famous print, 'New Morality', which gently but firmly (and dangerously) mocks Coleridge and Southey (and Lloyd, Lamb, and Cottle) as 'Jacobin' poets (121–2). In the first part, we learn that while Coleridge's early poetry and letters from his time at Cambridge are decidedly non-political, upon meeting Robert Southey in the summer of 1794, he quickly adopts the basic tenets of 'radicalism', and his Bristol lectures, 'Religious Musings', and *The Watchman* espouse mainstream Whig attitudes in highly conventional forms. Coleridge's overarching need to be appreciated and respected in every social situation, though, is the key insight Bosserhoff provides here, an insight that contains much explanatory power in disentangling Coleridge's statements in the second part of the book. 'Coleridge's strategies', Bosserhoff explains, 'of satisfying presumed demands differed remarkably depending on whom he was dealing with: whether consciously or not, he always emphasized those parts of his personality he thought would be well received by his correspondent' (36). Discussing a fairly large amount of material, including political poems in 'Fears in Solitude', the essay 'Once a Jacobin Always a Jacobin', letters, most notably to Sir George Beaumont, and testimonies from those in contact with Coleridge, we are witness in the second part of this book to Coleridge's increased interaction with 'conservative' circles and his desire to distance himself from the enduring label of 'Jacobinism' as well as to defend himself against the painful accusations of apostasy hurled at him most forcefully by William Hazlitt and John Thelwall. These various writings amount to a great deal of refashioning and re-explaining, and point again

to Bosserhoff's insistence that 'As is so often the case with Coleridge's statements, be it in his letters or his published prose, the question of addresseeship is crucial here' (111).

This is an exhaustively researched piece of cultural and biographical history and reads as a dense and rich tapestry thickly woven with citations from a wealth of secondary material and long passages of primary material appended with interesting if somewhat cursory readings. The commendably apolitical posture adopted by Bosserhoff, however, often results in 'emplotted' readings marked with an effaced tone that take the 'face value' of these texts too much for granted while altogether skirting more theoretically robust interpretations of their metaphorical power. Nonetheless, this study, as the first of its kind to chronologically delineate the trajectory of Coleridge's political development, is no doubt an important addition to Coleridgean scholarship, especially with its extensive bibliography and source material, mild temperament, and keen emotional insights.

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# A MARSEILLAISE OVER THE RESTORED GRAVE OF HAZLITT

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One of the functions that newspapers with their sense of urgency can occasionally perform, and for better rather than worse, is that of a catalyst enabling an event, long desired but frustrated, finally to happen. Something like that more or less describes my role and that of the *Guardian* in the restoration of Hazlitt's grave in St. Anne's Churchyard in Soho. Michael Foot had been involved in one attempt some years earlier to rescue the grave from the oblivion to which it seemed to be heading. It had become little more than a paltry marker, a modest stone rectangle lying level with the churchyard grass, unknown to all but the very few who had found it and knew what it signified. There was little likelihood of the kind of chance encounter that might rekindle an interest in Hazlitt or, just imagine, prompt a first acquaintance with his work. Unfortunately, that earlier project had come to nothing and those involved eventually turned away to other things. Hazlitt continued to lie, so close to the centre of London, in the near anonymity to which the loss of the original gravestone almost a century and a half ago appeared to have consigned him. It seemed almost a metaphor for the neglect of him as a writer. When Claude Rawson reviewed David Bromwich's *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic*, in the *New York Times* on the book's first publication in 1984, he said with some justification, 'Hazlitt is the least recognized of the great English Romantic men of letters'.

What helped to change things, or at least to bring some adjustment, quite directly so far as the specific matter of the grave was concerned, was the publication of A. C. Grayling's biography *The Quarrel of the Age: The Life and Times of William Hazlitt*, in the millennium year 2000. As Michael Foot noted in his enthusiastic review of the book in the *Guardian* in December, it opened with a 'trumpet blast', with Grayling declaring: 'William Hazlitt is without question one of the greatest writers of prose in the English language'. But it was more the way the book ended that had a marked effect on me. I was already devoted to Hazlitt and for a very long time had had a copy of an edition of his *Selected Essays* from the 1940s edited for the Nonesuch Press by Geoffrey Keynes. I shall describe how, by way of this book, Hazlitt became a posthumous fundraiser for the restoration of his own grave.

Apart from the usual reasons for loving Hazlitt, I had an extra one and that was a special interest in the cultural and social life of London in a period covering the

last decade of the eighteenth century and the first couple of decades of the next. In particular, ages ago I'd arranged and written the catalogue for an exhibition of the work of the most prolific theatrical portrait painter of the time, Samuel De Wilde (c1751 to 1832), a man older than Hazlitt, who had been among the first students at the Royal Academy Schools. His career ran alongside Hazlitt's, although certainly less conspicuously, and indeed it was totally unremarked by Hazlitt although he must have been familiar with De Wilde's work: it was inescapable for anyone interested in the theatre in that period. (My exhibition in Northampton in 1971, opened by Sir Gyles Isham who had played Levin in Greta Garbo's 1935 film version of *Anna Karenina*, remains the only one devoted to De Wilde and his family.) Just as studying De Wilde opened up for me, and peopled, the London that he inhabited, so Anthony Grayling's book summoned up the contemporary and overlapping milieu in which Hazlitt lived.

I was particularly moved by Grayling's closing chapters describing the death of Hazlitt in his rooms in Frith Street, the sparsely attended funeral a few days later, close by in St. Anne's, that Charles Lamb had arranged; the strongly felt tribute paid by Leigh Hunt to 'the untameable lover of liberty' as well as to Hazlitt's talents as a critic of the theatre and of art – they had first met when Hazlitt visited Hunt in the Surrey gaol in Horsemonger Lane where he was serving his term for libelling the Prince Regent. (Incidentally, among the great many visitors who went to see Hunt in what Lamb called his 'fairy-tale' cell, from which he was editing *The Examiner*, was the 21-year-old John Edward Taylor who, eight years later in 1821, became the founding editor of the *Manchester Guardian*.) Most moving of all is the long inscription that had later been – in its closing words – 'raised by one whose heart is with him, in his grave'. Grayling, like several biographers previously, including Tom Paulin, gives the whole thing. By any standards it had been a long epitaph of more than a thousand characters. Reading it still affects me a bit like the resounding summons of the Marsellaise (especially in the scene where it is sung defiantly in *Casablanca*). What happened to this original stone? Paulin says (in *The Day-Star of Liberty*), 'it stood until 1870'. Beyond that its disappearance seems to be a mystery. And lastly, the pathetic appeal to Francis Jeffrey, not knowing perhaps that he was no longer editor of the *Edinburgh Review*: 'Dear Sir, I am dying. Can you send me £10…'. As Grayling reports, Jeffrey sent £50 (although by the time it arrived Hazlitt was dead).

One lunchtime, having just finished Grayling's book, I walked from the *Guardian* offices in Farringdon Road to St. Anne's, up the steps from Wardour Street, to spend twenty minutes in the little green oasis thoughtfully cleared by Hitler's bombs. But I failed to find Hazlitt's grave, although I later realized I had practically walked over it. I returned to the office and asked Annalena McAfee, the editor of the paper's *Saturday Review*, if she would introduce me to Anthony Grayling who was writing a weekly column for her at the time. Armed with instructions for locating the grave – it was virtually the only one in the churchyard that remained in any way identifiable and known to be marking the original place of burial – I went back and this time found it, a poor shadow of the original, giving only his dates of birth and death.

I agree that Hazlitt's work is the most important thing, his true monument: of course it is. But at the same time, standing there, I felt that restoring the grave would counter the disdain that more than a century of relative neglect seemed to reflect, and it would indicate in a visible way the value placed upon him now, and declare that he was considered relevant to today. Everyone that I mentioned it to, starting with Grayling, agreed instantly that restoration incorporating the full original inscription, carrying as it did all the commitment, the love, with which its anonymous author had invested it, was a very good idea. In the years since then, and due partly to events in my own life, I have inclined more and more to the view that Sarah Stoddart, Hazlitt's divorced wife and mother of their son William Jr., must have been the author. It is those last lines again: 'This stone / is raised by one whose heart is / with him, in his grave.' It's an emotional thing.

I must pay tribute here to Alan Rusbridger who was editor of the *Guardian* at the time and was positively supportive from the beginning. As Tom Paulin would later note, 'It is particularly appropriate that the *Guardian* should honour Hazlitt, as they belong to the same Unitarian family' (the *Manchester Guardian* was founded by Unitarians and edited by Unitarians for the first 100 years of its life).[1] Paulin would also write, in the same essay:

> The appeal, coordinated by the *Guardian*, for a restored monument on his grave in St. Anne's Church in Soho represents one of the most heartening and ambitious attempts to put Hazlitt back where he centrally belongs, among the great Romantic writers such as his friends Keats and Shelley, and his friends, till they deserted the radical cause, Coleridge, Southey and Wordsworth.

'Coordinated' was a good word to describe the *Guardian*'s contribution: the appeal was meant to be, to use a word dear to the Unitarians, a disinterested act of restoration, not appropriation.

Rusbridger not only allowed me to conduct the fundraising operation from my office in Farringdon Road but to use, in the cause, the willing services of my assistants, first of all Rose de Paeztron and then Helen Hodgson. Helen remains Secretary of the Hazlitt Society to this day (her husband John Hodgson and his company, HWA Text and Data Management, has managed the design and production of the *Hazlitt Review*, gratis, since the first issue). Both the Society and the *Review* would be born out of the project to restore the grave. In many ways our Hazlitt activities provided pleasant light relief from the task for which we were actually employed. I was the readers' editor, the *Guardian*'s first resident ombudsman, in fact the first of its kind in the British newspaper industry, charged with responding to complaints about the *Guardian*'s journalism and authorizing corrections from a position of independence: in the ordinary course of events I couldn't be sacked. It could be rather grim and wearing work but there was too, alongside the more serious business, much comedy to be found in errors. This stimulated an appetite for the more amusing *faux pas* to be re-run in book form and

1 Tom Paulin, www.theguardian.com/books/2003/apr/05/society.history

when the *Guardian* published a second volume of my corrections and clarifications I was able to divert the fee of £1,000 to the restoration fund. They may have erred but they had not erred in vain. Furthermore, it had been the custom when I was away from the office to employ someone to write in place of my weekly column. This is where, from time to time during the two years of the appeal, Hazlitt stepped in. Edited extracts from his essays, culled from the Nonesuch edition I mentioned, covered my absence while a note at the end of each extract invited donations to the restoration fund and reported its progress. Apart from saving the expense of a freelance fee, Hazlitt never failed to bring in further donations.

It all went swimmingly from the beginning. Through contact with the church we connected with the earlier project and with Tim Miller who was involved in that – he was a churchwarden at St Anne's – and of course with Michael Foot whom Grayling had visited at home in Pilgrim's Lane, Hampstead, while writing his biography of Hazlitt. Mr. Foot was delighted to see it all moving again. Tim Miller was a friend of Lida Kindersley (Lida Lopes Cardozo) who had been the apprentice and collaborator of the letter cutter, type designer, and sculptor, David Kindersley, whose third wife she became. One of their joint enterprises had been the gates of the British Library at St Pancras. David Kindersley's own career had started as an apprentice to Eric Gill at Pigotts, near High Wycombe – Gill's last workshop – and like Gill he ran his own workshop on a master/apprentice system, a way of life (that is what it amounted to) now continued by Lida Kindersley and her husband Graham Beck in Cambridge. Their workshop is an inspiring place and Lida is an inspiring person. Immediately after the first announcement of her connection with the project a reader wrote to the *Guardian* to say, 'I am absolutely delighted to learn that the Kindersley workshop is handling the commission. The result is bound to be as good as you can get.'

I remember a rainy day when Lida Kindersley, Grayling, and I stood under umbrellas in St Anne's churchyard, contemplating the task ahead. That must have been February-ish 2001. Perhaps we adjourned to the Athenaeum, a short walk away, of which both Lida Kindersley and Grayling were members. Tea and toasted teacakes in such an elegant setting became one of the compensations the fundraising campaign occasionally offered. Things moved very quickly. I have a note from Lida dated 8 April 2001, 'Dear Ian, That was an amazing first meeting, solving – in theory at least – almost all problems. Certainly the design problems ….'. Enclosed with it was a meticulous draft of the inscription as it would look on the two-inch thick slab of black Lakeland slate into which it would be cut, then to repose on a base of Portland stone. The meeting to which Lida referred probably took place where many subsequent gatherings were held, in Tim Miller's apartment – I beg his pardon, his 'set' – in Albany, off Piccadilly, where Byron had rooms.

The committee that accrued included Michael Foot, A. C. Grayling (in many ways the campaign's centre of gravity), Tom Paulin, and Duncan Wu, all of whom had written about Hazlitt – essays in Foot's case, and full biographies by the others, although Duncan Wu's *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man,* did not appear until 2008. Tim Miller, apart from hosting our meetings, liaised with the rector of

St. Anne's, the Rev. Clare Herbert, and with the Soho Society, who were warmly encouraging; and Annalena McAfee and I completed the committee. It was very soon augmented by Andrew Motion, the Poet Laureate, and Melvyn Bragg, who even then had for two decades been flying the flag for culture as editor and presenter of 'The South Bank Show'.

The real launch of the appeal came on 21 April 2001 when Annalena McAfee devoted the first two pages of the *Guardian*'s broadsheet *Saturday Rev*iew to a long article by Grayling headlined: 'A memorial for Hazlitt'. Above it was a line that read: 'He is one of England's greatest writers and radicals but his body lies in an obscure grave in Soho'.[2] This eloquent article by Grayling and the positive way in which it was presented got the appeal off to the best possible start. What gave it particular prominence was a drawing by Lucinda Rogers, across the whole width of the page, showing St. Anne's viewed from Wardour Street drawn before the view was obscured by the 'Wall of Light' perimeter fence that was erected in 2003/4. Grayling had finished his article:

> Hazlitt would not in the least mind the company of Soho's homeless and addicts, who are chief among those who make use of the churchyard as a quiet retreat: for he sympathized with the plight of such, whom he saw as victims of a harsh and selfish world.

Other priorities, however, pressed upon the community that lived day by day with these problems and the towering fence was put up partly to create a safer haven for the local children who were increasingly using the gardens. The illustration was subsequently used, by kind arrangement with the artist, to illustrate a flyer distributed in aid of the memorial fund. Grayling's article was also illustrated by Lida Kindersley's first scale drawing of the memorial, although – I notice now – it appeared to show the stone as a vertical installation, an idea that if it was considered was quickly abandoned. Apart from the flyer, fundraising was also helped by a signed letter of thanks from Michael Foot that was promised to subscribers. The arrangement of this provided me with an excuse for a memorable visit to Pilgrim's Lane.

Lida Kindersley had been able from the beginning to indicate that the cost of the project would be in the region of £20,000. When the prospect of raising it might have caused me some anxiety, not to say panic, Paul Myners (now Lord Myners) who had recently been appointed chairman of the Guardian Media Group put his head round my door and said, 'Would £1,000 help?' He was the first of several supporters, both in Britain and abroad, who would make substantial personal donations. The vast majority, however, came in small sums often accompanied by touching notes of devotion: 'My father (a Lancashire cotton weaver) introduced me

2 You can read the full text at: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/hazlitt-society/hazlitt-bibliography/articles/memorial or https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/apr/21/artsandhumanities.socialsciences or see it with the illustrations if you have access to the ProQuest archive of the *Guardian* such as that provided through membership of the London Library.

to Hazlitt's writing during the 1930s … What continues to amaze me is how a man, who left school at 12 in 1900, with virtually no education could have a penchant for Hazlitt. It proved to be my gain'; 'I got out my book of Table Talk and started reading it again. I first read [it] when 19, aboard a merchant ship in the 1950s. I loved the book … especially "On Living to One's Self"'. Contributions came from places associated with Hazlitt, from Maidstone and Hackney. One came from a Unitarian minister who preached sometimes in a church where Hazlitt's father had preached.

The flow of contributions was reassuring and reported regularly to contributors via the *Guardian*: £4,000 in the first two weeks, most of it donated by the 200 people who wrote in response to Grayling's article; £7,000 by the end of May; £10,000 by the beginning of September; £12,000 by January 2002. At the beginning of the year Helen Hodgson replaced Rose de Paeztron as my assistant and became responsible for coordinating the final stages. On 25 March 2002 Lida Kindersley copied to me the first detailed estimate of the cost given that day in the following letter to Grayling:

> Dear Anthony,
>
> As always it has taken a little more than a few days to get the cost sorted out.
>
> For designing, supplying slate, ledger-stone, drawing and cutting inscription, the cost will be £18,600 + VAT
>
> The Portland stone base with added inscription will be £5,400 + VAT
>
> Fixing it in situ will be £1,500 + VAT
>
> We will no doubt be in touch as soon as we have the Faculty.
>
> Yours, Lida

The total amount of £25,500 excluding VAT did not by then come as too much of a shock. The Faculty that Lida referred to was the necessary permission from the church authorities. The reference to the 'added inscription' on the Portland base reminds me of a certain amount of merriment surrounding that particular detail. It had quickly been agreed that the face of the base towards the entrance to the churchyard would bear the one word, 'Hazlitt'. Anthony Grayling had then suggested that the other side of the base should discreetly record the names of the members of the organizing committee, an idea that was shouted down by all its other members, one or two of whom thought it would be an unseemly way of piggybacking to posterity. Instead they approved the wording: 'Restored by public subscription April 10, 2003', but that too in the end was abandoned, as an unnecessary statement of the obvious, the cost of which could be sensibly saved. Well before the end of the year the project was going ahead in the atelier in Cambridge, with the letters being cut into a slab of black Lakeland slate by Lida Kindersley, Annika Larsson, and Fergus Wessel working in rotation. Just before Christmas the fund received £2,000 from an anonymous wellwisher taking it to £22,000.

By then the plans for Hazlitt Day, Thursday, 10 April 2003, the 225th anniversary of Hazlitt's birth, and the celebratory unveiling of the monument, were virtually complete. My article in the *Guardian* on 30 December 2002 makes clear that it was never the intention to leave it at that. It ended, 'We shall announce the formation of the Hazlitt Society with a founding membership of those who have subscribed to the restoration. In addition it is hoped to announce a Hazlitt lecture, to encourage appreciation of his work and to keep his memory bright.' All these things came to pass.

On the Saturday before Hazlitt Day Tom Paulin wrote the cover story for Annalena McAfee's *Saturday Review*, now in its most handsome format as a freestanding magazine. It is the essay that perhaps more than any other I would urge young readers who want an introduction to Hazlitt to read, and one that speaks strongly of Hazlitt's relevance today. Paulin has referred to Hazlitt's essay on Coriolanus, an essay with 'a desperation' that he wrote 'in the tormented aftermath of Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo'.

> Hazlitt wants the left to trust in and to employ an intensely passionate imagination in argument. He wants images, anger, risk-taking, eloquence, the elastic stretch of combative and confident prose – prose which is wild, lunging, rich in imagery and unfair like Burke's. For what he terms 'the friend of liberty', the love of truth is a 'passion in his mind', and the love of liberty is the love of others, while 'the love of power is the love of ourselves'.[3]

An endnote read: 'Any money exceeding the sum required for the monument, (… most of which has been raised) will be passed to the Hazlitt Society for the maintenance of the monument and the promotion of an annual lecture. All subscribers will automatically become founding members of the Hazlitt Society.'

Hazlitt Day itself, the culmination of two years of effort – although it has to be said it was entirely enjoyable effort – was a wonderful event. Several hundred people turned up. The speakers included A. C. Grayling, Tom Paulin and, they will not mind my saying, most memorably Michael Foot, who defied his frailty to make the speech that he had waited so long to make. Andrew Motion, who was to have spoken, was unable to be there, but, I have the words, sent to me in an email (25 February 2003), read out for him. Here they are:

> I feel genuinely sad not to be able to be with you on this important day. The unveiling of this monument marks a very significant moment in the evolution of what we hope will become a Hazlitt Society, and restores to us a memorial to one of the finest writers this country has produced. As an essayist he worked his way into the Romantic mind more deeply than almost any of his contemporaries, expressing its moods and ambitions with extraordinary subtlety. More generally, he was a man whose genius encompassed the whole spread of English literature, and who brilliantly well understood how to

3 www.theguardian.com/books/2003/apr/05/society.history

> combine grand ideas with local touches of colour and character. Furthermore, he never shirked the writer's duty to speak truth to power. For all these things, and for the deep humility of all his thinking, we honour him.

Bill Nighy, whom Tim Miller knew, recited the entire epitaph. He sought guidance on the pronunciation of the Latin phrase and Grayling, I think, said 'Don't worry, just say it loudly and with feeling'. He did the whole thing with feeling. Perhaps, for Hazlitt, however, the sweetest moment would have been when four young brass players from the Royal College of Music, penetrated the air of central London with the strident chords of the Marseillaise.

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# REPORT ON THE CONDITION OF HAZLITT'S MEMORIAL STONE, ST. ANNE'S CHURCHYARD, SOHO

*Helen Hodgson*

Further to the publication of the poem, 'At Hazlitt's Grave', by David Cote in the *Hazlitt Review* (2016), I went to see the grave twice and on each occasion the litter was negligible, considering the churchyard is in the middle of Soho. The groundsman also keeps the grass well-trimmed, the trees have been pruned and flower beds well maintained. I did note, however, that the Portland stone is quite stained and mossy now, and there is a distinct tilt to the right.

I duly arranged to meet Lida Kindersley (who carved the memorial) and Ian Mayes at the churchyard on 24 November 2016 for a proper inspection. Lida was very reassuring, she says the stone is weathering nicely and entirely appropriately.

*Figure 1* Lida Kindersley at Hazlitt's Memorial Stone

Portland stone absorbs the colours of its background, and as the memorial is on the ground and under trees, it will become brown and green. Neither was she disturbed by the moss in the letter incisions and at the bottom of the inscription. It is, she says, perfectly normal and to be expected. She did say that we could clean off the moss if we like, but not to use abrasives or bleach. She also recommended a visit once a year with a bottle of water and a soft nailbrush to clean up the slate. Others have noticed the chip in the slate between 'William' and 'Hazlitt' at the top of the inscription, which Lida thinks was probably caused by a scaffolding pole when the nearby lavatory was constructed. However, it hasn't damaged the lettering and is not immediately noticeable. Regarding the tilt to the right, Lida confirms that the stone has foundations, but we cannot know what lies under the foundations. She also considers this a part of the general weathering and settling of the stone.

I am volunteering to visit the grave on a regular basis, as well as once a year with my nailbrush and a bottle of water, and will keep the Committee informed of any developments.

1 February 2017

# *HAZLITT SOCIETY*



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

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

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

The Society publishes *The Hazlitt Review.*

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