

# THE HAZLITT REVIEW

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

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Hazlitt and Art

'Boswell Redivivus': Northcote, Hazlitt, and the British School MARTIN POSTLE	5
The Elusive Mr Railton: Was Peggy Hazlitt Right? ELEANOR RELLE	21
The Pleasure of Painting LISA MILROY	35
'With Music and Painting in Mind': Religion and Art in Hazlitt's Imagery DANIEL LAGO MONTEIRO	47
<b>Reviews</b>	
William Hazlitt: Through the Eyes of a Critic – Display at Tate Britain, 29 September 2014 – 5 April 2015 reviewed by Philipp Hunnekuhl	59
Stephen Burley, <i>Hazlitt the Dissenter: Religion, Philosophy, and Politics, 1766–1816</i> reviewed by Timothy Whelan	63
Duncan Wu (ed.), <i>All That Is Worth Remembering: Selected Essays of William Hazlitt</i> reviewed by Gregory Dart	67
David Higgins, <i>Romantic Englishness: Local, National and Global Selves, 1780–1850</i> reviewed by James Vigus	73
Report on the 13th Hazlitt Day-school and 2014 Annual Hazlitt Lecture PHILIPP HUNNEKUHL	77
Obituary: Dr Peter Medway, 1941–2015 STEPHEN BURLEY	81



# ‘BOSWELL REDIVIVUS’: NORTHCOTE, HAZLITT, AND THE BRITISH SCHOOL

Hazlitt Society Annual Lecture, 2014

*Martin Postle*

I first came across Hazlitt about thirty years ago in the course of research relating to my PhD in the History of Art department at Birkbeck College. At that time Hazlitt was even less well known than he is now. Having splashed out on an old Penguin paperback copy of Percival Howe’s biography of Hazlitt, I settled down in the college library and began to work my way through the *Complete Works*.<sup>1</sup> Like Tom Paulin, who recalls his first experience of the *Works* in the Bodleian Library, I too had occasional recourse to a paper knife to liberate some unopened pages.<sup>2</sup> What I found was a revelation: a writer of muscular, independent-minded, provocative prose, who challenged not only his contemporaries’ views and values, but also my own prejudices and preconceptions. My specific object of interest then was Sir Joshua Reynolds, who, like Hazlitt, was not at the time attracting a great deal of scholarly attention. Today’s lecture takes me back to those years when I first discovered Hazlitt and serves to remind me why I found him so stimulating, and why he still matters so much to me. So let us begin.<sup>3</sup>

‘We shall speak first of Hogarth, both as he is the first name in the order of time that we have to boast of, and as he is the greatest comic painter of any age or country’ (xviii, 434). Writing in 1817 on ‘The Progress of Art in Britain’ for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, William Hazlitt begins his account of the rise of the British School of art with William Hogarth. An indigenous school of art could be

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- 1 P. P. Howe, *Life of William Hazlitt* (London: Penguin Books, 1949); *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1930–4). All quotations from Hazlitt are taken from Howe’s edition and are given by volume and page in parentheses following each quotation.
  - 2 Tom Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt’s Radical Style* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), 1.
  - 3 Much of the material cited in the present essay was first published in Martin Postle, ‘In Search of the “True Briton”: Reynolds, Hogarth, and the British School’, in Brian Allen (ed.), *Towards a Modern Art World: Studies in British Art I* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 121–43 and Martin Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Subject Pictures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 291–311.

traced back to the Middle Ages. And even if one were to begin in the sixteenth century with named artists, one could rehearse a roll call of famous painters who had contributed greatly to a British School – Holbein, Van Dyck, Lely, and Kneller. But these were continental artists who had been schooled abroad and who brought the traditions of European painting to Britain. Hogarth was born and bred in London. His subject matter was British. He was moreover a patriot – the self-styled 'Britophil' – who rallied to defending the honour and reputations of contemporary British artists against their foreign counterparts.<sup>4</sup> Who could therefore argue with Hazlitt's elevation of Hogarth in the context of the rise of the British School? Certainly, those in positions of power and influence in the contemporary British art world would have been aware that Hazlitt was stirring things up and being deliberately contentious. Because, while Hogarth was beloved by the public, in the opinion of those who knew about art (patrons, collectors, connoisseurs, the collective *cognoscenti*), Hogarth was a prodigy who had had a limited long-term influence on British art. According to these individuals the 'first name' and founder of the British School was Sir Joshua Reynolds, president of the Royal Academy of Arts and author of the celebrated fifteen *Discourses on Art*.

This afternoon I am going to explore Hazlitt's contribution to the debate surrounding the formation of a British School of art, a contribution which was mediated through his association with Reynolds's pupil, James Northcote, as he became 'Boswell Redivivus' to Northcote's Johnson.<sup>5</sup> When James Northcote began to converse with William Hazlitt, he was an old man, a relic from a bygone age: 'it is like hearing one of Titian's faces speak.'<sup>6</sup> But Northcote had once been young, and to understand why he was of such interest to Hazlitt, we need to turn back the clock from the mid-1820s to the early 1770s when Northcote had travelled from his native Devon to London to serve an apprenticeship under Joshua Reynolds.

James Northcote was Reynolds's best known, if not necessarily his most gifted pupil. He was in Reynolds's service from May 1771 until the spring of 1776. At first, as Northcote told his brother, he received preferential treatment from Reynolds, who bestowed more kindness on him than his fellow pupils.<sup>7</sup> But as subsequent correspondence reveals, Reynolds had little time for indulging in social niceties with his pupils and assistants, let alone providing them with any form of structured tuition. During his five-year apprenticeship, Northcote became increasingly disenchanted about his role and station in Reynolds's household. In the words of Hazlitt: 'I learnt nothing from him while I was with him: and none of

4 For Hogarth's 'Britophil' essay, see *St. James's Evening Post*, 7–9 June 1737, repr. *London Magazine* 6 (July 1737), 385–6.

5 'Boswell Redivivus' was first used by Hazlitt for the title of his first published conversation with Northcote in the *New Monthly Magazine* 17 (1826), 113–18: 113. As Duncan Wu has noted, Hazlitt had taken the title from a letter published in the *Edinburgh Magazine* in 1819: S. D., 'Boswell Redivivus, A Dream', *Edinburgh Magazine* 4 (October 1819), 304–10. See Duncan Wu, *William Hazlitt. The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 390–1; 394–6; 524 note 29.

6 Cited in Howe, *Life*, 384.

7 James Northcote to Samuel Northcote, 23 August 1771. Royal Academy of Arts Archive, ms. GB/0937/NOR/4.

his scholars (if I may except myself) ever made any figure at all. He only gave us his pictures to copy' (xi, 199). That, however, was untrue, for within less than a year of being in the studio, Northcote was not only copying pictures but also painting the draperies for Reynolds's commissioned portraits. And on one occasion at least he made a fair copy of one of Reynolds's *Discourses* to be read out at the Academy.<sup>8</sup> Northcote also served at times as a model for Reynolds – especially for hands – as well as posing for one of the figures in Reynolds's first major history painting, *Ugolino and his Children in the Dungeon*.<sup>9</sup>

When Northcote left Reynolds's studio in 1776 he confessed to his brother, 'I almost [sic] worship him'.<sup>10</sup> Reynolds, however, regarded Northcote as little more than a skivvy. Indeed, as the Swiss painter, Henry Fuseli, remarked acidly, while *he* was Reynolds's friend, Northcote was 'considered as little better than his palette cleaner'.<sup>11</sup> Many years later Northcote himself confessed how little he had meant to Reynolds: 'If Sir Joshua had come into the room where I was at work for him and had seen me hanging by the neck, it would not have troubled him'.<sup>12</sup> As it was, Northcote survived his apprenticeship. Following a tour of Italy and Germany he settled in London, where he made his name with large history paintings, including several for Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery.<sup>13</sup> Northcote's success was confirmed in 1787, when he was elected an Academician of the Royal Academy. He also proved himself to be a proficient society portrait painter over a career spanning more than fifty years. In addition to numerous society portraits, Northcote also painted a number of literary figures, including William Godwin and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, with whom he became personally acquainted. Most of all, Northcote loved to paint his own portrait; images which over the years accumulated to form a kind of pictorial autobiography.

Beyond his career as a painter, Northcote's significance to us today relates to his role as the biographer of Joshua Reynolds. *Memoirs of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Knt.*, was published first in 1813, and again in 1818, in a revised and expanded edition entitled *The Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*. By the time Northcote's biography was published, the status quo accepted that the foundation of a British School of art centred upon the twin pillars of Reynolds and the Royal Academy, a viewpoint summarised in John Gould's *Dictionary of Painters, Sculptors, and Engravers* of 1810. In his introduction, Gould compared what he termed the 'English School',

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- 8 James Northcote, *Memoirs of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Knt.* (London: Henry Colburn, 1813), 396.
- 9 David Mannings and Martin Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue of his Paintings*, 2 vols (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), I, 568–9, no. 2172.
- 10 James Northcote to Samuel Northcote, 3 January 1776. Royal Academy of Arts Archive, ms. GB/0937/ NOR/15.
- 11 David H. Weinglass (ed.), *The Collected English Letters of Henry Fuseli* (Millwood, NY: Kraus International Publications, 1982), 507.
- 12 Charles Robert Leslie and Tom Taylor, *Life and Times of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1865), II, 601.
- 13 For Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery, see Rosie Dias, *Exhibiting Englishness: John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery and the Formation of a National Aesthetic* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), passim.



Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Count Ugolino and his Children in the Dungeon* (1770), image ref. 129934 © National Trust Images

with the Schools of Rome, Venice, and France. His view was centralist. The 'English School of painting', he avowed, 'must acknowledge Sir Joshua Reynolds as its great founder, under Royal auspices, in the establishment of the Academy'.<sup>14</sup> In his *Dictionary*, Gould concentrated almost exclusively on artists whose careers had been bound up with the Royal Academy, such as Barry, Fuseli, Gainsborough, Lawrence, Northcote, and West. There was no mention of George Romney, George Stubbs, or Joseph Wright, all of whom had publicly distanced themselves from the Royal Academy, or William Hogarth, who had died before its foundation. However, such orthodoxy was already being challenged.

In 1811 Charles Lamb published an article entitled 'On the Genius and Character of Hogarth' in the radical periodical *The Reflector*.<sup>15</sup> The article was a watershed in the critical evaluation of Reynolds's reputation – and the British School. One of the aims of *The Reflector*, according to its editor Leigh Hunt, was to promote 'an uncommon ardour for the British School of Painting'.<sup>16</sup> Lamb in turn made it clear that his support for Hogarth was at the expense of Reynolds. 'It is the fashion', he noted, 'with those who cry up the great Historical School in this country, at the

14 John Gould, *A Dictionary of Painters, Sculptors, Architects, and Engravers* (London: Gale and Curtis, 1810), xxvii–xxviii.

15 *The Collected Essays of Charles Lamb*, ed. R. Lynd and W. McDonald, 2 vols (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1929), II, 240–55.

16 Cited in Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 292.



head of which Sir Joshua Reynolds is placed, to exclude Hogarth from that school as an artist of an inferior and vulgar class'. Lamb affirmed that although he had 'the highest respect for the talents and virtues of Reynolds', he resented the fact that 'his reputation should overshadow and stifle the merits of such a man as Hogarth'.<sup>17</sup> In order to drive home his point, Lamb drew an extended comparison between Reynolds's characterization of the central characters in *Ugolino* and *The Death of Cardinal Beaufort* and Tom Rakewell in the prison scene from Hogarth's *Rake's Progress*:

When we compare the expression in subjects which so fairly admit of comparison, and find the superiority so clearly to remain with Hogarth, shall the mere contemptible difference of the scene of it being laid in the one case in our Fleet or King's Bench Prison, and in the other in the State Prison of Pisa, or the bedroom of a Cardinal [...] so weigh down the real points of the comparison, as to induce us to rank the artist who has chosen the one scene or subject [...] in a class from which we exclude the better genius [...] with something like disgrace?<sup>18</sup>

Here Lamb was making three quite distinct points: first, that Hogarth's modern moral subjects could be considered as history paintings; second, that Reynolds's subject paintings were inferior to Hogarth's; and finally, that the prevailing canon in British high art was far too slavishly linked to established European models, paying little attention to indigenous responses to subject matter in art, which were more truly natural. Lamb concluded by affirming that far from fostering vulgarity, Hogarth, like Fielding and Smollett 'prevent[ed] that disgust at common life, that *taedium quotidianarum formarum*, which an unrestricted passion for ideal forms and beauties is in danger of producing'.<sup>19</sup>

Lamb was acutely aware that in promoting Hogarth at the expense of Reynolds he was not merely making a point about the relative merits of two British artists, or the prevailing artistic hierarchy. He was also challenging deep-seated prejudices within the political, as well as the artistic, status quo. The parliamentary reform which Lamb and Hunt sought had, in their mind's eye, an artistic counterpart in the power which the Tory establishment exercised over artistic taste. Lamb's comparison between Hogarth's gritty London prison scene and Reynolds's high-flown literary drama was shortly to achieve an added poignancy as Leigh Hunt and his brother John were jailed for libelling the same Prince Regent who had in the 1780s given his patronage to Reynolds.

Lamb's insights into the relative merits of Hogarth and Reynolds were almost certainly based on the evidence of prints after the original paintings in the collection of Lord Egremont. Two years later, in 1813, when he was able to inspect

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17 Lamb, *Collected Essays*, II, 245.

18 *Ibid.*, 245–6.

19 *Ibid.*, 255.

*Ugolino* and *Cardinal Beaufort* personally at the British Gallery, Lamb's opinion remained unmodified. He wrote in *The Examiner* that summer:

I know, Madam, you admire them both; but placed opposite as they are at the Gallery, as if to set the one in competition with the other, they did remind me of the famous contention for the prize of deformity, mentioned in the 173rd number of *The Spectator*. The one stares and the other grins; but is there common dignity in the countenances?<sup>20</sup>

These two pictures were among two hundred works by Reynolds on display in a major monographic exhibition sponsored by the British Institution, and held at the British Gallery on Pall Mall, originally the premises of Boydell's now defunct Shakespeare Gallery. It was a lavish spectacle, complete with candlelit private views and a banquet attended by the Prince Regent. According to the artist Joseph Farington, the exhibition was the first real public test of Reynolds's reputation since his death as 'almost a new generation had risen up, whose taste had been formed upon works that had been exhibited to the public since his time.'<sup>21</sup> A leading British connoisseur, Richard Payne Knight, wrote the introduction to the catalogue. As he explained, the exhibition was mounted not simply to honour Reynolds. 'On the contrary,' he stated, 'its chief object is to call attention generally to British, in preference to foreign Art.'<sup>22</sup>

The Tory press endorsed the Reynolds retrospective warmly. *The Morning Post* stated that the 'dictionary of praise would be exhausted before we could express the pleasure we experienced in viewing this noble collection.'<sup>23</sup> In a similar vein, *The Observer* concluded that the exhibition would 'for ever set at rest the question which by some has been so strangely raised as to the competency of Sir Joshua Reynolds to the attainment of excellence in the highest department of art', adding that no one 'can hesitate to pronounce in the affirmative who contemplates the *Ugolino*, the *Cardinal Beaufort* or the *Infant Jupiter*'.<sup>24</sup> It is significant that by this time the Prince Regent was already forming his own collection of miniatures after Reynolds's subject pictures, including *Cupid and Psyche*, *The Death of Dido*, *Venus*, *Hope Nursing Love*, and *Cimon and Iphigenia*.

In the same year a second retrospective exhibition was held by the British Institution of works by Wilson, Gainsborough, Hogarth, and Zoffany. Hogarth was represented by thirty-four works, twenty-two of which were accounted for by the 'series' paintings, *Marriage à la Mode*, *The Rake's Progress*, the *Election* series, and *The Four Times of the Day*. Hazlitt reviewed the exhibition. The *Election* series of

20 Ibid, 258–9.

21 Joseph Farington, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds; with Some Observations on his Talents and Character* (London: Cadell & Davies, 1819), 3.

22 Richard Payne Knight, 'Preface to the Exhibition in the Year 1813' in *An Account of all the Pictures Exhibited in the Room of the British Institution, from 1813 to 1823, belonging to the Nobility and Gentry of England* (London: Priestley and Weale, 1824), 3–10: 3.

23 *The Morning Post*, 13 May 1813, quoted in Farington, *Memoirs*, 247–8.

24 *The Observer*, 16 May 1813, quoted *ibid.* 251–2.

1754 he considered to be ‘very little above the standard of common sign painting’, although by contrast *Marriage à la Mode* ‘in richness, harmony, and clearness of tone, and in truth, accuracy, and freedom of pencilling, would stand a comparison with the best productions of the Dutch School’ (*The Morning Chronicle*, May 7 and 10, 1814; xviii, 23). Although Hazlitt, like Lamb, admired Hogarth, he did not hold identical views. Unlike Lamb, he did not seek to elevate the supposed vulgar aspects of Hogarth but attempted, via a critique of his favourite work, *Marriage à la Mode*, to demonstrate Hogarth’s ability to characterize the upper echelons as well as the lower orders of society, and thus to present a more rounded picture of the artist than had hitherto emerged. Hazlitt respected the traditions of high art more than Lamb, noting in a separate essay that he would rather ‘never have seen the prints of Hogarth than never have seen those of Raphael’ (‘On the Works of Hogarth – On the Grand and Familiar Style of Painting’, *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*; vi, 148). It was presumably for this reason that he took the opportunity to defend Hogarth’s widely ridiculed history painting, *Sigismunda*. It was, he asserted, ‘delicate in the execution, and refined in the expression, at once beautiful and impassioned, and though not in the first, probably in the second class of pictures of this description’ (xviii, 23).

Hazlitt was an enigmatic blend of radical and conservative, steeped in the traditions and mores of the Georgian cultural sphere. In 1796 he proclaimed his three favourite writers to be Burke, Junius, and Rousseau, and on a visit to the Louvre in 1802, he had complained in a letter to his father of being ‘condemned to the purgatory of the modern French gallery’ while he queued to inspect Napoleon’s assemblage of looted old masters.<sup>25</sup> In some ways Hazlitt’s background was not dissimilar to Reynolds’s own. Like Reynolds, he was the son of a cleric and from a large family. His elder brother, John, had studied in Reynolds’s studio, and copied a number of his portraits in miniature, including the portrait of Boswell and that of the actress, Mary Robinson.<sup>26</sup> William Hazlitt, too, had seriously entertained a career as a portraitist. The relatively few examples of his work that are known, such as the portrait of Lamb, reveal that he was quite competent, although according to Coleridge, he had no ‘imaginative memory.’<sup>27</sup>

As a youth, through his friendship with the Lake poets, Hazlitt had been on the fringes of the coterie surrounding Sir George Beaumont, art patron, collector, and leading light in the British Institution. While Hazlitt had initially hoped to gain Beaumont’s patronage, he offended him by admitting his admiration for Junius, as well as by having had the temerity to contradict Coleridge during a conversation the three men were having. But while Coleridge and Wordsworth increasingly relinquished their radical political stance, Hazlitt’s beliefs grew more fervent. By 1808, as we know, he had migrated to the company of Charles Lamb and the Hunt

25 Howe, *Life*, 84.

26 John Hazlitt’s miniature copy of Reynolds’s portrait of James Boswell is in the Maidstone Museum and Bentlif Art Gallery, Kent. His copy of Mrs Mary ‘Perdita’ Robinson is in the Wallace Collection, London.

27 Samuel Taylor Coleridge to Thomas Wedgwood, 16 September 1803, quoted in Howe, *Life*, 96.

brothers, Leigh and John. They regarded their frequent literary gatherings as free-spirited and egalitarian. And, as Hazlitt later recalled, they 'abhorred insipidity, affectation, and fine gentlemen'.<sup>28</sup> By 1812, he saw his future as lying in journalism rather than painting, and secured a post on the Whig newspaper, *The Morning Chronicle*. From the outset his pieces were outspoken and controversial, and his contract was soon terminated. And it was as a correspondent of *The Champion*, to which he transferred in the summer of 1814, that he began to 'deconstruct' Reynolds's reputation and articulate his own views on the nature of the British School.

Between October 1814 and January 1815, Hazlitt wrote six essays for *The Champion* on Reynolds as an artist and art theorist. Of his opinions concerning Reynolds's theory it is sufficient to say here that Hazlitt's principal contention was that Reynolds's claim that the 'Great Style' depended on the belief in the supreme importance of a 'central form' did not hold water. More pertinent are the two introductory essays on the 'Character of Sir Joshua Reynolds' he published respectively on 30 October and 6 November 1814. 'The authority of Sir Joshua Reynolds, both from his example and instructions,' began Hazlitt, 'has had, and still continues to have, a considerable influence on the state of art in this country.' 'From the great and substantial merits of the late president,' he continued, 'we have as little the inclination as the power to detract.' Even so, 'we certainly think that they have been sometimes overrated from the partiality of friends and from the influence of fashion' (xviii, 51). Throughout these essays, Hazlitt quite brilliantly damned Reynolds with faint praise, calling him at one point 'the most original imitator that ever appeared in the world' (xviii, 53). Reynolds's best works, affirmed Hazlitt – conscious of the unorthodoxy of his viewpoint – were his male portraits. Fancy pictures, hitherto the object of affectionate praise, were roundly criticized. Of *The Infant Samuel*, for example, Hazlitt stated that Reynolds 'had no idea of a subject in painting them, till some ignorant and officious admirer undertook to supply the deficiency' (xviii, 58). Hazlitt's deepest condemnation was reserved for the history paintings. He related how *Ugolino and his Children in the Dungeon* was not conceived originally as a history painting, but as a study of Reynolds's model, George White, which friends had persuaded him to adapt. 'The highest subject which Sir Joshua has attempted,' he wrote, 'was the *Count Ugolino*, and it was, as might be expected from the circumstances, a total failure' (xviii, 58).

However much Hazlitt disapproved of *Ugolino*, the real object of his scorn was the influential clique of connoisseurs that uncritically promoted Reynolds's art in all areas, rather than taking a measured account of his strengths and weaknesses. It was in part because of this feeling of betrayal, and in part because of innate journalistic instincts, that Hazlitt, although he admired Hogarth, devoted far more time and energy to debunking Reynolds than to redeeming the reputation of Hogarth. There was a further reason for Hazlitt's attitude, which stemmed from his views on the relevance of academies to artistic production. In 1814, in an essay entitled 'Fine Arts: Whether They are Promoted by Academies and

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28 Ibid, 131.

Public Institutions,' Hazlitt emphasized 'how little the production of such works depends on "the most encouraging circumstances"' (xviii, 37). Hogarth, the 'nonacademic' artist, was pitted against Reynolds, the arch Academician, in the same way that Hazlitt, the neophyte art critic, consciously pitted himself against the acknowledged arbiters of taste – to the point of evolving a whole new mode of art criticism which recognized the right of the layman to express a subjective opinion about art.

Unlike France and Germany, there was no real tradition of interest in the visual arts by literary figures in England. Criticism – as well as art theory – was written by artists, their associates, and collectors. Hazlitt's *modus operandi* was quite new and quite different from the art criticism that had preceded it. In the past, even when dissatisfaction with Reynolds's subject pictures surfaced, it had been expressed in formal terms. In composing history paintings, narrative was of secondary importance to Reynolds; it was therefore of little concern to his critics except as the *lingua franca* of high art. Hazlitt maintained, however, that he would not 'attempt to judge them by scientific or technical rules, but make one or two observations on the character and feeling displayed in them' (xviii, 58). In other words, he would subject them to the kind of 'reading' that Hogarth was subject to – taking them out of the hands of the artists and connoisseurs who had a vested interest in maintaining their exclusive merits. In addition, he wished to undermine the nationalist bias which he felt underpinned the promotion of high art by the British Institution.

Hazlitt respected the 'Great Style,' an art that he considered to reflect 'the universe of thought and sentiment, that surrounds and is raised above the ordinary world of reality' (vi, 146). Paradoxically, in his belief that the British School was a microcosm of a larger European School of art, Hazlitt was closer to Reynolds's own position than many of those who sought to protect his memory. Hazlitt's writings during and after the Napoleonic Wars enraged both artistic and political figures in the establishment who strived to construct a pantheon of national 'heroes.' As the *Tory Quarterly Review* stated bitterly of Hazlitt in 1817:

[...] if the creature, in his endeavours to crawl into the light, must take his way over the tombs of illustrious men, disfiguring the records of their greatness with the slime and filth which marks his track, it is right to point him out that he may be flung back to the situation in which nature designed that he should grovel.<sup>29</sup>

Among those whom Hazlitt challenged was the cultural panjandrum, Richard Payne Knight, who in September 1814 wrote an anonymous panegyric on Reynolds in *The Edinburgh Review* in the course of a review of James Northcote's recently published biography of Reynolds.<sup>30</sup> In 1814 Knight was the most influential spokesman on artistic matters in the British establishment. A collector of old-master

29 'Hazlitt's Round Table,' *The Quarterly Review* 17 (April–July 1817), 154–9: 159.

30 'Northcote's *Life of Reynolds*,' *The Edinburgh Review* 46 (September 1814), 263–92.

drawings, Etruscan statuary, and cameos, as well as the work of artists as diverse as Westall, Wilkie, and Rembrandt, Knight was innovative in his championship of art which lay outside accepted canons of taste. An imaginative and pioneering scholar, Knight was in many ways far less of a traditionalist than Hazlitt. Hazlitt was not really interested much in contemporary British art and, like Reynolds, he revered Michelangelo, whom Knight regarded as a fundamentally corrupting influence, preferring colourists such as Titian and Correggio. Nonetheless, Hazlitt and Knight shared a common distrust of academies, even though their reasoning differed.

In his *Edinburgh Review* essay, Knight contrasted the 'academic' style of artists such as Batoni, Mengs, and David, with Reynolds, arguing that the former had promoted mechanical dexterity at the expense of instinctive ability. Significantly, in view of the promotion of Reynolds as a moral as well as an artistic paradigm, a further comparison was drawn between David and Reynolds, the respective figureheads of the French and British Schools. While David, stated Knight, could 'probably delineate human form and countenance with more accuracy, promptitude and facility, than most of his brethren' he was morally bankrupt, having 'as little feeling for the real beauties of liberal art, as he showed for the sufferings of his fellow-creatures, when a member of Robespierre's committee'.<sup>31</sup> Reynolds, on the other hand, was not only a good artist but also a moral one.

James Northcote's biography of Reynolds, the ostensible subject of Knight's attention in *The Edinburgh Review*, was dismissed in a few curt sentences. And yet, despite its makeshift structure, Northcote's book was, as I have intimated, the first major biography of Reynolds. Even so, it was by no means an independent effort. Henry Colburn, Northcote's publisher, had employed a team of researchers to comb old newspapers for Reynolds-related material, much of which was incorporated verbatim and unacknowledged into Northcote's text. The book's principal defects were dissected by *The British Critic*, notably Northcote's pretensions to intimacy with Reynolds, made evident by his 'impertinent digressions and quotations'.<sup>32</sup> Northcote had, however, known Reynolds and at least part of his text was transcribed directly from notes he had already made for his own projected autobiography. But Northcote was a practising painter, not a connoisseur or a scholar.

*Memoirs of Sir Joshua Reynolds* is a fascinating, if flawed, fly-on-the-wall biography, not least because it is tinged with the author's own bitterness and personal regrets. In the published text, Northcote steered clear of any outright criticism of Reynolds. However, the unpublished notes he made for his own autobiography reveal a more deep-seated dissatisfaction, including Reynolds's tendency to treat his pupils as wage slaves. '[H]e was not', confided Northcote, 'the master to produce good scholars, as most of his could never get a decent livelihood, but lived in poverty and died in debt, miserable to themselves and a disgrace to

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31 Ibid, 268–9.

32 *The British Critic* (February 1814), 150.

the art. I alone escaped this severe fate.<sup>33</sup> He also stated that Reynolds's private face was far less appealing than his public persona: 'the principal drawback on his character', he concluded, 'besides this selfishness, was a want of that firm and manly courage and honour which is so absolutely necessary to the highest degree of rectitude.'<sup>34</sup> Yet, in the published biography, Northcote expressed rather different sentiments, stating that '[w]ith respect to his character as a man, to say that Sir Joshua was without faults, would be to bestow on him that praise to which no human being can have a claim; but when we consider the conspicuous situation in which he stood, it is surprizing [sic] to find that so few can be discovered in him.'<sup>35</sup>

If Northcote, in his official capacity as a Royal Academician, felt unable to voice publicly his true opinions about Reynolds, Hazlitt – a professional outsider – felt no such compunction. In 1819, another Royal Academician, Joseph Farington also produced a biography of Reynolds. As with Northcote's earlier account, Farington's book was an agglomeration of second-hand facts, interlarded with personal reminiscences. Hazlitt dismissed it in a few sentences in a review of August 1820 in *The Edinburgh Review* (xvi, 181–211). However, he used it to promote his own views on the state of the British School. In the course of his essay, Hazlitt not only challenged the notion that a viable school of history painting could be built upon Reynolds's own achievement in that field, but the very basis of Reynolds's own ideas, which he had already questioned in *The Champion* some years earlier. 'Sir Joshua did not, after all', he noted, 'found a school of his own in general art, because he had not strength of mind for it' (xvi, 190). Having allowed some qualified praise of Fuseli and Barry, Hazlitt – with Reynolds clearly in the forefront of his mind – stated that 'Our greatest and most successful candidates in the epic walk of art, have been those who founded their pretensions to be history painters on their not being portrait painters' (xvi, 208). And yet he felt that such divisions between the various genres were artificial. He did not seek to champion the cause of 'high' art against low, but to measure the claims of both these genres against 'true' art. 'We speak and think of Rembrandt as Rembrandt', he noted, 'of Raphael as Raphael, not of the one as a portrait, of the other as a history painter. Portrait may become history, or history portrait, as the one or the other gives the soul or the mask of the face' (xvi, 206–7).

Despite Hazlitt's reservations, there was little sign that Reynolds's laurels were any less tarnished than they had been in the previous decade. In 1821, the largest existing collection of Reynolds's work, that of the artist's late niece, Mary Palmer, Marchioness of Thomond, was sold at Christie's. The sale generated intense interest among artists and collectors. Benjamin Robert Haydon, who was present, relished the way in which Reynolds's work not only matched, but surpassed, prices fetched by his collection of old masters, including Teniers, Titian, and

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33 Stephen Gwynn, *Memorials of an Eighteenth-Century Painter (James Northcote)* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898), 225–6.

34 *Ibid.*, 225.

35 Northcote, *Memoirs*, 400.

Correggio.<sup>36</sup> Two years later, in December 1823, Sir Thomas Lawrence, president of the Royal Academy, addressed students at a prize giving for history painting at the Academy. He began by recalling the past efforts of Barry, Fuseli, Opie, and the lately deceased Benjamin West, whose gallery of pictures, although the public was indifferent, 'remains Gentlemen for you, and exists for your instruction.'<sup>37</sup> Lawrence, nonetheless, contended that West 'would still have yielded the chief honours of the English school to our beloved Sir Joshua!',<sup>38</sup> who was the main subject of Lawrence's lecture. And his conclusion was that 'there can be no new PRINCIPLES in art; and the verdict of ages (unshaken, during the most daring excitement of the human mind), is not now to be disturbed.'<sup>39</sup>

Sir Thomas Lawrence's lectures were published in 1824. The same year a small octavo volume was published anonymously by Hazlitt, entitled *Sketches of the Principal Picture Galleries in England*. A compilation of articles he had been publishing since the early 1820s, the book's aim was to provide a critical survey of those galleries open to the general public. Among the pictures discussed were Reynolds's *Lord Heathfield* and *Mrs Siddons as the Tragic Muse*. Of the former picture, which then belonged to the prominent cultural grandee, John Julius Angerstein, Hazlitt acknowledged that it was 'well composed, richly coloured, with considerable character, and a look of nature' (x, 15). But, he concluded:

our artist's pictures, seen among the standard works, have (to speak it plainly) something old-womanish about them. By their obsolete and affected air, they remind one of antiquated ladies of quality, and are a kind of Duchess-Dowagers in the art – somewhere between the living and the dead. (x, 15)

Of the replica of *Mrs Siddons*, made in Reynolds's studio (the Dulwich Picture Gallery), Hazlitt remarked that it 'appears to us to resemble neither Mrs Siddons, nor the Tragic Muse. It is in a bastard style of art' (x, 26). By way of contrast, Hogarth was discussed appreciatively, with an encomium on the *Marriage à la Mode*.

At the same time that Hazlitt's *Sketches* was published, a second anonymous guide to Britain's art galleries emerged. This was *British Galleries of Art*, written by Hazlitt's close friend, Peter Patmore. Like Hazlitt's guide, Patmore's book was highly critical of Reynolds's contribution to high art. In the course, for example, of a perambulation through Lord Egremont's Gallery at Petworth, Patmore encountered

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36 *The Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, ed. W. B. Pope, 5 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960–3), II, 337.

37 Sir Thomas Lawrence, *Address to the Students of the Royal Academy, Delivered before the General Assembly at the Annual Distribution of Prizes, 10 December 1823* (London: W. Clowes, 1824), 19.

38 *Ibid.*, 12.

39 *Ibid.*, 19.



an execrable picture of Macbeth in the Witches' cave, by Sir Joshua Reynolds – which seems to me to evince a total want of sentiment, imagination, taste, and even execution. If Sir Joshua had discoursed no better about historical painting than he practised it, his lectures would have enjoyed a somewhat less degree of reputation than they do; and perhaps they enjoy too much as it is.<sup>40</sup>

Both Patmore and Hazlitt were aware that although an increasing number of private picture galleries had been made open to the public by the early 1820s, art criticism remained the province of artists and connoisseurs, and the public by and large felt intimidated. As one French visitor had noted, on visiting Sir John Fleming Leicester's gallery in Hill Street, London: 'the pleasures of the fine arts are enjoyed here only by the well-to-do. Why are the common people excluded from them? In Paris the poorest Frenchman may visit our magnificent Louvre.'<sup>41</sup> While neither Hazlitt nor Patmore had any intention of appealing to the poor – or even the 'common people' – they wished to broaden the franchise of those who could enjoy works of art, and to give gallery goers the confidence to make their own evaluations of a painting's merits or shortcomings. As a result they were keenly aware of the need to entertain, as well as inform, the reader. The hallmark of their gallery guides was a casual, irreverent, approach. 'In choosing the subjects of these papers,' wrote Patmore in his introduction to his Dulwich Gallery guide, 'I must also not forget that they are intended to be popular and amusing, rather than didactic [...].'<sup>42</sup>

In 1813, a statue of Reynolds, many years in planning, had been erected in St. Paul's Cathedral, above the crypt where Reynolds was interred. Although Reynolds's monument confirmed his position as a national treasure, there were signs by the mid-1820s that Reynolds was not as secure on his pedestal as he had been in the past. In 1826 the Irish art dealer and critic, William Paulet Carey, published *Some Memoirs of the Patronage and Progress of the Fine Arts in England and Ireland*. In it he traced the history of what he termed 'anti-British' prejudice among connoisseurs in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, manifested by their unwillingness to purchase the works of native artists. While Reynolds made a good living from portraiture, his subject pictures, noted Carey, 'were executed for commercial men in this country and for foreigners'. His conclusion, if ambiguous, was quite candid: 'if Reynolds had been necessitated to struggle for a living by history painting, he must have hazarded starvation.'<sup>43</sup> Carey had a genuine admiration for Reynolds's art. Even so, he could not conceal the damage that he felt the apotheosis of Reynolds had inflicted upon the wider interests of the British School:

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40 P. G. Patmore, *British Galleries of Art* (London: G. & W. B. Whittaker, 1824), 88.

41 William T. Whitley, *Art in England, 1821–1837* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1830), 25.

42 Patmore, *British Galleries*, 147.

43 William Paulet Carey, *Some Memoirs of the Patronage and Progress of the Fine Arts in England and Ireland* (London: Saunders & Ottley, 1826), 35–6.

It is a memorable satire upon the affected taste of some of his contemporaries, that those chief panegyrists of Reynolds looked with indifference or contempt upon the fine moral and dramatic compositions painted by Hogarth [...], the grand landscapes of Wilson, and the rural scenery and rustic groups of *Gainsborough*, were equally overlooked and neglected by the arbiters of taste, who were the eulogists of Reynolds.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to the criticism voiced over Reynolds as a history painter, the 1820s witnessed new revelations about his personal life. The prime mover in this was Hazlitt, although his stance had changed. His earlier pieces had been deliberately provocative. Now his arguments were couched in more assured language, designed to encourage popular, but informed, debate. His articles appeared in mainstream periodicals such as *The London Magazine*, *The New Monthly Magazine*, and the highly respected *Edinburgh Review*. In the summer of 1826 Hazlitt began to publish a series of 'conversations' with James Northcote in *The New Monthly Magazine*. These articles created a whole new context of discussion of Reynolds's personal and professional status.

Hazlitt had first met Northcote as early as 1802, probably through his brother, John. Now, in the mid-1820s, Northcote, aged eighty, was almost the only person living who had close first-hand knowledge of Reynolds, the foundation of the Royal Academy, and the formative years of the British School of art. Hazlitt probably wrote the bulk of the 'conversations' in 1826, the first six being published between August 1826 and March 1827, under the title 'Boswell Redivivus', although he had already published several related pieces. 'All you have to do,' maintained Hazlitt, 'is to sit and listen' (xii, 86). And yet, although Hazlitt was ostensibly acting as Northcote's amanuensis, in the guise of 'Boswell Redivivus,' he was the puppet-master. 'I have,' he admitted, 'forgotten, mistaken, misstated, altered, transposed, a number of things.' And sometimes,

I have allowed an acute or a severe remark to stand without the accompanying softenings or explanations, for the sake of effect; and at other times added whole passages without any foundation, to fill up the space. [...] I have also introduced little incidental details that never happened; thus, by lying, giving a greater air of truth to the scene – an art understood by most historians! (xi, 350n)

The format of the *Conversations* was intentionally casual, full of throwaway remarks and asides. Individually, Northcote's statements were quite innocuous, and not always uncomplimentary. And yet, owing to Hazlitt's subtle mode of presentation, the issues discussed seem as antiquated and anachronistic as Hazlitt's interlocutor. Reynolds's opinions, as presented by Northcote through the medium of Hazlitt, did not appear controversial so much as quaint: a miscellany of homespun aphorisms rather than a coherent body of art theory. The cumulative

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44 Ibid, 35–6.

effect of the published ‘conversations’ was to demythologize Reynolds, even to the point where he was capable of being regarded as a figure of fun.

In the course of their twentieth ‘conversation’, Hazlitt and Northcote discussed the first volume of a new biography of British artists, *Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters*, by the Scottish writer Allan Cunningham. Neither of them professed to care for it, not only because it made free use of material in Northcote’s biography, but ironically because of its consciously populist appeal. Unlike Hazlitt and Northcote, who both had an emotional tie to Reynolds, Allan Cunningham maintained that he had few preconceptions. His professed aim was to read all the available published information on the artists in question and transform it into a lively, unbiased narrative with popular appeal. The book was lively, but not unbiased. Cunningham reserved some of his most severe criticism for Reynolds’s history paintings, not least *Ugolino*, who ‘appears on Reynolds’s canvas like a famished mendicant, deficient in any commanding qualities of intellect, and regardless of his dying children, who cluster around his knees,’<sup>45</sup> a turn of phrase reminiscent of Hazlitt’s 1814 description of the same character as ‘a common mendicant at the corner of a street, waiting patiently for some charitable donation’ (xviii, 58). Elsewhere, Cunningham’s argument was also reminiscent of Hazlitt’s, not least in his promotion of straightforward portraiture.

Cunningham had been working in London for over twenty years, earning a living as a critic and a poet. Like Hazlitt, he had received some artistic training. And yet Cunningham’s artistic outlook was quite different. While Hazlitt respected the traditions of high art and appreciated the poetic power of allegory, Cunningham openly despised art that did not find its roots in the ‘real world’. Cunningham also argued, somewhat perversely, that there was an element of deceit in Reynolds who, although a portrait painter – and therefore at base a tradesman – had deliberately courted wealthy patrons, at the expense of the less well-off. When Reynolds raised his fees, his privileged patrons, stated Cunningham, were ‘glad of the increased price, for it excluded the poor from indulging in the luxury of vanity.’<sup>46</sup>

Asked by Northcote where Cunningham had derived his ideas on Reynolds, Hazlitt told him it could have been from Charles Lamb. The essayist Hartley Coleridge, son of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who knew both Cunningham and Hazlitt, thought otherwise. Hartley Coleridge made extensive annotations in his copy of Cunningham’s *Life of Reynolds*, which were published posthumously by his brother, Derwent. ‘With many acute observations’, stated Coleridge, ‘I must needs say, that this is the worst written, and worst natured of all Allan’s lives. What could have inspired him with so ungenial a feeling towards Sir Joshua I cannot tell.’<sup>47</sup> Derwent Coleridge edited out the following sentence, which appears in the

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45 Allan Cunningham, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters*, 2 vols (London: George Bell, 1879), I, 217.

46 Ibid, 230.

47 *Essays and Marginalia by Hartley Coleridge*, ed. Derwent Coleridge, 2 vols (London: E. Moxon, 1851), II, 259.

original manuscript note: 'Hazlitt hated Reynolds because he was a gentleman – and Hazlitt evidently exercised a considerable influence over Allan's mind'.<sup>48</sup>

Hazlitt died in 1830, in pain and penury, aged fifty-two. He was buried at St Anne's, Soho. Northcote outlived him by ten months, dying in July 1831, at the grand old age of eighty-four. In his will, he stipulated that his body should remain uninterred 'as long as it can be suffered', to ensure that he was not accidentally buried alive. He also gave three choices for his place of burial, including St. Paul's Cathedral, 'as near as possibly may be to the remains of my late lamented Friend and Master Sir Joshua Reynolds'.<sup>49</sup> In the event he was buried in St. Marylebone Church, while a statue of him by Francis Chantry was erected in Exeter cathedral – for which Northcote had with prescience provided funds. Although it was the bond with Reynolds that Northcote cherished most, his relationship with Hazlitt was arguably as significant. Using Northcote as a cipher, Hazlitt continued in the 1820s to challenge and undermine the hierarchies of the British art establishment, effectively creating through his journalistic writings a whole new audience, context, and meaning for the British School of art in the Age of Reform.

THE PAUL MELLON CENTRE, LONDON

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48 Hartley Coleridge, ms. annotation to Allan Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, 5 vols (London: John Murray, 1829), I, 318–9. Coleridge's copy is in the British Library.

49 Will of James Northcote, Royal Academician of Argyll Place, Middlesex, The National Archives – Prerogative Court of Canterbury, 27 July 1831, PROB 11/1788/91.

## THE ELUSIVE MR RAILTON

### Was Peggy Hazlitt Right?

*Eleanor Relle*

Among the thousands of English visitors who grasped the opportunity presented by the Peace of Amiens to go to Paris in 1802 and thus, as a matter of course, to visit the Louvre – Museum Central des Arts until November 1802, Musée Napoléon thereafter – was the ex-radical, ex-inmate of Dorchester Castle Henry Redhead Yorke, who describes the scene in the main gallery thus:

[...] the decency and orderly conduct of the spectators, who are all admitted without any respect of persons, present an example which the people of other countries need not be ashamed to adopt. It is extremely pleasing as one traverses the great gallery, to see a number of artists constantly employed in taking copies of the different originals; some elevated midway, between the cieling [sic] and the floor, on little pulpits; others a little lower; and some with tables before them, and seated on chairs. I have seen several female artists at work, and one of them who was occupied in drawing a very beautiful Madona [sic], was, I am sure, much handsomer than the original from which she was copying, and I took the liberty of telling her so [...].<sup>1</sup>

Had Yorke been able to tear his eyes away from this sight, it is possible that he was there at the right moment to see, among the other copyists at work, the 24-year-old William Hazlitt, or indeed some established English artist such as John Opie or Richard Cosway, taking advantage of the fact that by his appropriation of works of art in the wake of his conquests in Europe, Napoleon had, in Hazlitt's later words, 'shortened the road to Italy'.<sup>2</sup>

What was the nature of the project that took Hazlitt to the Louvre, and how did he manage to get there? The Cosways and Opies were in a position to travel under their own financial steam – the Opies, indeed, among a group of friends who were

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1 Henry Redhead Yorke, *Letters from France in 1802*, 2 vols (London: H. D. Symonds, 1804), II, 78–9.

2 *The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte in The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent, 1930–4), xiii, 212. At least a dozen Royal Academicians came to Paris in 1802; see Holger Hooke, *The King's Artists: The Royal Academy of Arts and the Politics of British Culture, 1760–1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 180.



John Hazlitt, *Miss Railton of Liverpool* (miniature) © Maidstone Museum and Bently Art Gallery

able to get together and enjoy that kind of excursion. Hazlitt, by contrast, was on his own, a young man at the beginning of (he hoped) his career as a serious artist, who had been eking out a rather precarious existence in England as an itinerant portrait painter. He was there at the expense of, and executing a commission for, his first and probably only patron, who wanted some copies of old masters from the Louvre.

It is possible, but by no means certain, that the story involves the subject of a portrait miniature on ivory by John Hazlitt which bears the label 'Miss Railton of Liverpool'. The portrait has had this identification since it was in the possession of the essayist's grandson, W. C. Hazlitt, who in 1909 presented it, among other miniatures and Hazlittiana, to the town museum of Hazlitt's birthplace, Maidstone in Kent, where it still is. It would seem to be more than a coincidence that the patron who financed Hazlitt's journey to Paris was a Mr Railton, for whom we have not even a Christian name. He is known to us only from Hazlitt's letters to his father from Paris, in which he is referred to simply as 'Railton'.

W. C. Hazlitt's original version of events is that when at Liverpool in 1790, visiting the Tracy family, former neighbours of the Hazlitt family in Wem, William Hazlitt 'if I am not mistaken' made the acquaintance of, or even stayed with,

the Railtons,<sup>3</sup> and that this acquaintance was renewed when, in his twenties, he travelled north in search of portrait commissions. W. C. Hazlitt relates that his grandfather 'fell in love with one of the daughters',<sup>4</sup> but was disappointed, and that the portrait is a survival from an unsuccessful courtship:

She was possessed of considerable personal attractions, with very dangerous dark eyes. My grandfather was strongly smitten, and I have understood that the attachment was not wholly on one side. Something might have come of the affair, had the family approved of the alliance; but they did not view with a very favourable eye the prospect of a connexion with a struggling artist, and relations were broken off. I conceive that it must have been while the courtship was still in progress, that Miss Railton sat to John Hazlitt for that beautiful miniature on ivory of her [...]; and the presumption is, that, upon the discouragement of my grandfather's attentions by the parents, the likeness was returned.<sup>5</sup>

The portrait evidently excited W. C. Hazlitt; it seems to have been publicly exhibited only once in his lifetime,<sup>6</sup> but is reproduced in the *Memoirs* in support of this story.<sup>7</sup> Both portrait and story had a similar effect on George Saintsbury in 1887, as he explained in *Macmillan's Magazine* the commission that took Hazlitt to Paris:

The chief of these commissioners was a Mr. Railton, a person of some fortune at Liverpool, and the father of a daughter who, if she was anything like her portrait, had one of the most beautiful faces of modern times. Miss Railton was one of Hazlitt's many loves; it was, perhaps, fortunate for her that the course of the love did not run smooth.<sup>8</sup>

From then on, biographers of Hazlitt describe Mr Railton variously as a Liverpool merchant and as a prosperous manufacturer. Herschel Sikes in his edition of the *Letters* places him in Liverpool and also provides him with a Christian name – Joseph – and a daughter now named Frances Ann.<sup>9</sup> If the sitter for the portrait was Frances Ann Railton, John Hazlitt might indeed have painted her some time

3 W. Carew Hazlitt, *Memoirs of William Hazlitt: With Portions of his Correspondence*, 2 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1867), I, 104. W. C. Hazlitt identifies these Railtons only as 'descendants of an ancient Border family'; see *The Hazlitts: An Account of their Origins and Descent* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, Hanson & Co., 1911), 51.

4 W. C. Hazlitt, *Memoirs*, I, 104.

5 *Ibid.*, 104–5.

6 See *Catalogue of the Special Exhibition of Portrait Miniatures on Loan at the South Kensington Museum, June 1865* (London: Whittingham and Wilkins, 1865), 156.

7 W. C. Hazlitt, *Memoirs*, II, facing page 13.

8 Reprinted in George Saintsbury, *Essays in English Literature, 1780–1860*, 3rd edn (London: Rivington, Percival & Co., 1896), 141.

9 William Hazlitt, *The Letters of William Hazlitt*, ed. H. M. Sikes, W. H. Bonner and G. Lahey (London: Macmillan, 1978), 74, note to Letter 15.

before her marriage to the London merchant William Wentworth Deschamps in 1796, when she was 27. The teenage William Hazlitt might even have encountered her while she was sitting to his brother, but if there was anything more serious than an encounter, it must have been an episode of calf-love rather than the frustrated romance suggested by the biographers. Moreover, the whole connection would indubitably have taken place not in Liverpool but in London, and without any possible link to Hazlitt's visits to Liverpool, for the Railtons identified by Sikes were the family of a self-made attorney living in New Bridge Street, Blackfriars,<sup>10</sup> whose father had been a clergyman in Northumberland.<sup>11</sup> Nor does it seem likely that Frances Ann's brother, Joseph Benn Railton, who appears to have driven their father's legal practice smartly downhill after the latter's suicide in 1797, would have been particularly interested in commissioning copies from the Louvre in 1802. Frances Ann was a Miss Railton *not* of Liverpool, and the fact that the miniature stayed in the Hazlitt family would in her case need some other explanation than a Hazlitt courtship that came to nothing.

So back to Liverpool, in search of a patron for Hazlitt, and perhaps some other Miss Railton. We are certainly looking for a Mr Railton of some substance and with an interest in art; not hugely affluent or he could, and would, have looked for original old masters rather than copies if his taste ran that way, but nonetheless a man who would have made his mark, if only in the town directories. It is tempting to imagine him as an associate of the rich and generous Unitarian art lover and philanthropist William Roscoe, whom Hazlitt met in 1796 and later referred to as 'Mr. R-----, of Liverpool'.<sup>12</sup> We might even imagine that one or more Railton portraits were among the 'score of pictures' for which Hazlitt senior had hoped the Revd John Yates might help arrange commissions in time for a professional visit to the north planned by John Hazlitt back in 1790,<sup>13</sup> in which case William might naturally have sought to make contact with the family again when himself in search of commissions in 1802.

The trouble is that Mr Railton seems not to have been there. Liverpool directories contain no sign of him. During the crucial years when Hazlitt was looking for commissions, the Railtons in Liverpool were all apparently of modest means – joiner, lodging-house keeper, butcher. By 1811 a John Railton in Liverpool figures among the subscribers to the African Institution, to which Roscoe also subscribed, but the subscription was very modest and the Institution came into being only in 1807.<sup>14</sup>

10 The anomaly in Sikes's identification is pointed out in the digital archive *Lord Byron and His Times*, entry 'Mr Railton'. <http://lordbyron.cath.lib.vt.edu/persRec.php?&selectPerson=MrRailt1803>

11 See London Metropolitan Archive, reference number COL/CHD/FR?02/1065-1071 for his admission to the Freedom of the City of London in 1784.

12 'Conversation the Ninth' in *Conversations of James Northcote (Works, xi, 241)*. W. C. Hazlitt (*Memoirs, I, 104*), mistakenly identifies this Mr R as Mr Railton; but see P. P. Howe's note in *Works, xi, 362n*.

13 See W. C. Hazlitt, *Memoirs, I, 16*.

14 Neither Gore's nor Schofield's *Liverpool Directory* for 1800 lists any Railtons. A joiner is recorded in 1796 and a butcher in 1803. The Liverpool John Railton appears in *Fifth Report*



One possible clue, however, points us in a different direction: information provided by Hazlitt's sister Margaret, usually known as Peggy, born in 1770 and thus younger than John and older than William. Because she was old enough to form a fairly connected impression of the family's life in America between 1783 and 1787, her *Journal*, which is more of a memoir than a journal (written for her nephew William, son of the essayist, though never delivered to him) is used extensively by Hazlitt's biographers, though a complete text did not appear in print until 1967.<sup>15</sup> Peggy's story must be similar to the stories of very many intelligent young women of her time. She writes, often with great vividness, about the family's challenging but, for her, exciting and interesting life in America, and then records her father's decision, after returning to England, to accept a post as Unitarian minister in remote Wem – which she recognized as a place of exile for her father ('Wem in Shropshire, where it was my father's ill fate to settle and bury his talents until old age prevented his further usefulness') and which was also a place of exile for her ('Here in an obscure inland town, and far from all that were dear to us, it was our lot to live for many years, the best years of our lives [...]').<sup>16</sup> It was an exile her artist elder brother never shared, as he was launched on the artistic scene of London almost immediately after the Hazlitts returned to England, and an exile her younger brother, for the time being, quite enjoyed, and from which he made occasional escapes – notably on his visit to the Tracys in Liverpool – before moving on to Hackney College and London. Remaining at home, Peggy possibly found her prospects of marriage restricted by her Unitarian background, and in any case her family had no money.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, there were her parents to think about, and for almost her entire life, she thought about them. Her mother died, aged 90, four years before Peggy died herself.

Yet in her girlhood Peggy, like her brothers, had had artistic aspirations rather beyond those of the conventional young lady who painted a little in watercolours.<sup>18</sup> She was spoken of at Wem as 'highly gifted, like her brother, and very artistic.'<sup>19</sup> Eight of her paintings are at Maidstone; they are, as one might expect, derivative, but they show signs of ambition and promise. While the family was resident in America, when John was already taking his first steps as a professional artist, her father had shown some of Peggy's work to friends and received encouraging comments. The Revd James Freeman wrote from Boston afterwards to Hazlitt senior, 'I remember that

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*of the Directors of the African Institution* (London: Ellerton and Henderson, 1811), 136.

15 *The Journal of Margaret Hazlitt: Recollections of England, Ireland, and America*, ed. Ernest J Moyne (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1967).

16 Margaret Hazlitt, *Journal*, 102, 103.

17 A letter from Dr Joshua Toulmin to her father in 1802 expresses the hope 'that Miss Hazlitt has met with a situation encouraging to her abilities and merit' – which sounds very much as if there had been plans for her to become a governess. See 'The Hazlitt Papers', *The Christian Reformer, or, Unitarian Magazine and Review*, v (November 1838), 756–64: 762.

18 Indeed, as Susanna Avery-Quash pointed out at the 2014 Hazlitt Day-school, it is significant that Peggy painted in oils, no doubt encouraged by the example of her brothers and by the fact that the materials they used would have been available to her at home.

19 See William Carew Hazlitt, *Lamb and Hazlitt; Further Letters and Records Hitherto Unpublished* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1900), 11.

Miss Peggy gave some specimens of her talents in drawing before she left Boston,<sup>20</sup> and invited him to send over one of Peggy's recent landscapes. If Peggy was allowed to know that such comments were being made, they must have encouraged her to feel that there might be prospects for her, too, as an artist. The pictures by Peggy now at Maidstone had previously remained in the family – was it Peggy herself who had hung onto them, even in old age? – and she mentions in her journal her delight when, shortly after the return from America, her father took her to a London print shop and bought her a print, entitled *Fish Stealers by Moonlight*.<sup>21</sup>

What all this suggests is that Peggy had a genuine, though frustrated, interest in art, and took a corresponding interest in her brothers' activities as artists. Her comments on the quality of William's aspirations and achievements after his stay in Paris indicate both personal perception and artistic flair:

what he had seen [in Paris], so far above all that he could hope to attain to, made him despise his own efforts. What he was most deficient in was the mechanical part. Shall I say that if he had had less talent and his perception of what was beautiful in art had been more dim, he would have been more successful. But so it was, and many promising beginnings have been blotted that would satisfy many others who did not aim at perfection.<sup>22</sup>

From this assessment of William's rejected attempts at portraits she goes on to discuss the landscapes he painted at Winterslow not long after his marriage, and similarly left unfinished: 'I wish I had these rejected landscapes. I should prefer them to many highly finished pictures where the leaves look like silver pennies and country girls are dressed in robes of white satin.'<sup>23</sup>

And thus, when she tells us something about how he came to visit Paris, it seems reasonable to regard Hazlitt's elder sister as a source at least as reliable as Hazlitt's grandson. Although, writing 36 years later, she places the visit in the wrong year, her memory for detail appears otherwise clear:

For a year or two he practiced [sic] as a portrait painter in Liverpool and Manchester. A friend of his, in the latter place (on the conclusion of the short Peace of Amiens, in 1807 [1802]), made him an offer of an hundred guineas to go to Paris and copy for him ten pictures in the Louvre. This he gladly accepted, and rejoiced in the opportunity of seeing those monuments of ancient art of which he was an enthusiastic admirer. He spent the winter in Paris, working in the Louvre, from ten in the morning until four in the afternoon, suffering much from cold and many other deprivations. But he cared little for these things while he had those noble specimens of genius before his eyes.

20 'The Hazlitt Papers,' *Christian Reformer*, vi (January 1839), 15–24: 19.

21 Margaret Hazlitt, *Journal*, 101. A moonlit landscape is among Peggy's surviving paintings. Possibly she had caught the contemporary interest in moonlit scenes, for example, those by Abraham Pether and his sons.

22 *Ibid.*, 108–9.

23 *Ibid.*, 110.

He brought home some beautiful copies. *The Death of Clorinda*, the *Transfiguration*, and the Portrait of Hyppolito de Medici are all that I have seen. The *Transfiguration* he gave to Mr. Northcote; where the others are now I do not know.<sup>24</sup>

‘Liverpool and Manchester.’ ‘A friend of his in the latter place.’ Peggy does not mention Mr Railton by name, but could she be right in placing Mr Railton not in Liverpool but in Manchester? Her *Journal*, as previously noted, did not make its way to her nephew, for whom it was intended, nor did it enter the public domain for 46 years. It stayed with the family in whose house Peggy had died until, in 1884, a daughter of that family lent it to W. C. Hazlitt, who first published selections from it in *The Antiquary* that autumn, and afterwards incorporated some of the material into *Four Generations of a Literary Family: The Hazlitts in England, Ireland, and America* (1897), into *Lamb and Hazlitt* (1900) and into *The Hazlitts: An Account of Their Origin and Descent* (1911). It is noteworthy that in none of these later books is the beautiful Miss Railton located in Liverpool, or even mentioned. While Mr Railton of Liverpool reappears in *Origin and Descent*, and while subsequent biographers have generally preferred to stay with at least some of the original story, it looks as if, once Peggy’s journal became available, W. C. Hazlitt himself began to back away from the original story and to fall into line behind Peggy as he discussed the career of the struggling artist: ‘we shall appreciate the rapidity of progress which enabled him in 1802 not merely to secure sitters at Liverpool and Manchester, but to obtain a commission to execute for a gentleman in the latter town ten copies from the old masters at the Louvre for £105’ (my italics).<sup>25</sup>

Should we therefore be looking for a Mr Railton of Manchester, or indeed not so much a ‘Mr Railton’, as a friend and contemporary ‘Railton’, as Peggy’s account, and the references to him in Hazlitt’s letters home, rather suggest?<sup>26</sup> Such a Railton did indeed exist, and the available evidence about him, while it proves nothing, does seem suggestive.

John Railton of Manchester was born in Kendal in 1772, which makes him six years older than Hazlitt. His family, though based in Westmorland, had London connections: John’s uncle Isaac Railton had become a successful linen-draper in Cheapside, though he liked to give the impression that he had landed property in Cumberland, and perhaps he had.<sup>27</sup> There were several Railtons in the linen-

24 Ibid, 108. These were additional to the copies made for Railton. The *Clorinda* and *Hippolito de Medici* now at Maidstone, which Hazlitt kept all his life, must be the ones Peggy saw. The original paintings are now back in, respectively, the Galleria Estense in Modena and the Palazzo Pitti in Florence.

25 W. Carew Hazlitt, *Four Generations of a Literary Family: The Hazlitts in England, Ireland, and America*, 2 vols (London and New York: George Redway, 1897), I, 82–3.

26 W. C. Hazlitt remarks that ‘Mr. Railton [...] seems to have been on friendly terms with Mr. Hazlitt of Wem’ (*Memoirs*, I, 104), presumably because the familiar style of these references needed some accounting for.

27 He is often referred to as being ‘of Caldbeck, Cumberland’, in addition to his London address. Although baptized at Caldbeck, there is not much sign that he had significant property there.

drapery business in and around Cheapside, but Isaac was the most distinguished and successful of them, his firm being the then famous Railton & Ranking. John possibly started out in London under his uncle's wing, but by 1798 we certainly find him in Manchester, about to establish himself as a cotton manufacturer.<sup>28</sup> From then on he is evidently on the march. His subsequent career (he lived on until 1857) included being an eyewitness to the Peterloo Massacre,<sup>29</sup> forming a firm (Robert Graham, Railton and Company) with operations in both Manchester and London, going bankrupt,<sup>30</sup> playing a central role in the foundation of the Manchester Stock Exchange,<sup>31</sup> and pursuing a later career as a stockbroker, specializing in railway shares.<sup>32</sup> The stockbroking firm he founded – Railton & Sons, later Railton, Sons & Leedham – outlived him by many years.

However, at the point where Hazlitt might have met John Railton, the latter was still quite new to Manchester and just getting himself noticed. Although the picture changed later, and more Railtons appeared in Manchester, John was at this point, as far as the directories show, the only Railton worthy of note in the town. In 1801 he attended a public meeting to form a Coffee House, Tavern and News Room,<sup>33</sup> precursor of the second Manchester Exchange building, eventually completed in 1809. He found himself at once on the committee, probably one of its youngest members, as the others were all dead by 1829. In March 1802, he was elected to the newly enlarged Billiard Club. Today this may sound less than exciting, but contemporaries who knew the Manchester Billiard Club in those its early years relate that its members were 'all the best men' and that 'To be a member of the Billiard Room was, above all things, desirable to the rising man.'<sup>34</sup> 1802 also saw John Railton a member of the founding committee for the Portico Library, opened in 1806 and still in existence today.<sup>35</sup>

Where then might Miss Railton have come in, if in fact she did? John Railton of Manchester married only in 1808, and in 1802 he was in any case too young to have a daughter of the right age to match the 'Miss Railton' miniature, but he was the eldest in his family and did have five younger sisters,<sup>36</sup> in addition to a younger

28 A Land Tax Redemption Record for 1798 shows him occupying premises in Exchange Street, and Bancks's *Manchester and Salford Directory* for 1800 lists him as a cotton manufacturer with business premises in Peel Street and a house in Cooper Street.

29 M. L. Bush, *The Casualties of Peterloo* (Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing, 2005), 52, 54.

30 *The London Gazette*, issue 17765 (17 November 1821), 2269.

31 The Stock Exchange minute book, beginning with a meeting in 1836 chaired by Railton, is in the Greater Manchester County Record Office.

32 In the 1840s and 1850s, a 'Circular' from Railton's firm was regularly quoted in the *Morning Chronicle* and other London newspapers.

33 See 'Cowdroy Redivivus', *Manchester Times and Gazette*, issue 42 (1 August 1829), 342.

34 John Harland, *Collectanea Relating to Manchester and its Neighbourhood at Various Periods*, 2 vols (Manchester, Chetham Society, 1867), II, 48-50.

35 Railton was both a committee member and a trustee: see Ann Brooks and Bryan Haworth, *Boomtown Manchester 1800-1850: The Portico Connection* (Manchester: Portico Library, 1953), 121.

36 Mary (b.1773), Margaret (b.1775), Elizabeth (b.1777), Isabella (b.1778), Jane (otherwise Anne, b.1780).

half-brother, Joseph, who later settled in Manchester. One of the sisters, Isabella (who incidentally was exactly William Hazlitt's age),<sup>37</sup> was married from her uncle Isaac's substantial house near Clapham Common in 1799,<sup>38</sup> and it is not impossible that the miniature might be a portrait of her, though that does not explain how it remained in the Hazlitt family – perhaps there was, after all, a doomed romance at John Hazlitt's studio? Isaac Railton himself was not the kind of person the Hazlitt brothers would have found congenial; he was, for example, a member of the packed jury that had in 1792 tried Thomas Paine, in his absence, for seditious libel. However, as a commercial proposition, John Hazlitt might well have been pleased by a commission to paint Isaac's niece, especially as in the course of his life Isaac commissioned no fewer than three portraits of himself from Opie.<sup>39</sup>

That John Railton was still a bachelor in 1802 may make it seem improbable that he would have been commissioning copies of old masters for what Hazlitt, perhaps jocularly, termed his 'parlour',<sup>40</sup> but the project for the News Room does prompt a question: would an array of pictures in a news room, not genuine old masters but at least of undisputed provenance, have made a suitable cultural statement on behalf of the rising man who was known to have commissioned them? And would the probable dimensions of a news room help to explain the size of Hazlitt's canvases, and also the fact that Railton apparently gave him carte blanche for which pictures he chose to copy?<sup>41</sup> The Exchange News Room, when it finally opened in 1809, had a floor area of over 4000 square feet, though the original conception may have been on a more modest scale.<sup>42</sup>

For a patron to offer a commission of this kind was, in any case, unusual. One or two members of the aristocracy had in the past sent established artists abroad to copy old masters. James Stanley, tenth Earl of Derby, had for example sent the Lancashire artist Hamlet Winstanley to Rome for two years in the 1720s,<sup>43</sup> and in the 1770s the Earl of Warwick, through his agent, had requested George Romney, then in Italy, to find him 'a picture of effect and genius' to fill a space 63 inches by 43 inches in 'a magnificent room' at Warwick Castle and, furthermore, to give the Earl first refusal on any copies Romney might make while abroad.<sup>44</sup> However,

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37 W. C. Hazlitt believed Hazlitt and Miss Railton to have been 'about the same age' (*Memoirs*, I, 104).

38 She married James Bellis 'of St Petersburg' (see *The Sun*, issue 2036 [2 April 1799], 4) at St Martin in the Fields and was widowed in 1800. Isaac's house, The Shrubbery, is still standing.

39 See Ada Earland, *John Opie and His Circle* (London: Hutchinson, 1911), 309.

40 Letter from Paris, 10 December, 1802; see W. C. Hazlitt, *The Hazlitts*, 417.

41 In one letter he contemplates copying a Rubens landscape 'if Railton chooses' (*ibid*, 411), but the letters show no sign that the real choice lay with anyone but himself. He mentions the dimensions of one canvas in a later letter (*ibid*, 419).

42 See Thomas Allen *et al.*, *Lancashire Illustrated* (London: H. Fisher, R. Fisher, and P. Jackson, 1832), 4.

43 C. P. Darcy, *The Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Lancashire, 1760-1860* (Manchester: Manchester University Press for the Chetham Society, 1976), 3.

44 John Romney, *Memoirs of the Life and Works of George Romney* (London: Baldwin & Cradock, 1830), 107-10.

there seems to be no precedent, particularly among the Lancashire manufacturers of the new social order, for sending abroad, purely to make copies, an obscure itinerant portraitist at the outset of his career.

Again, one wonders if Peggy's reference to 'a friend' is right: was this, from Railton's point of view, a tactful act of friendship rather than actual patronage, even though the friendship was not apparently destined to last? The Manchester art market, at the time Hazlitt encountered it, still leaned towards old masters rather than towards the living artists who were gaining ground among London buyers, and what was bought in Manchester was frequently not genuine; contemporaries wrote of Manchester art buyers as 'old women'<sup>45</sup> and of the 'Picture Jockeys'<sup>46</sup> who took advantage of their lack of knowledge. From Railton's point of view, it might have made sense to pay for copies knowing that that was what they were – besides which, in matters of art, he had perhaps the advantage of some other Manchester men of business in that he was the son of a Kendal cabinet-maker.<sup>47</sup> Men who worked in upholstering and furnishing had more opportunity to see inside big houses than most tradesmen, and when a son was taken along to help on the job, he had a corresponding opportunity to form and even develop an interest in pictures. George Romney's father, too, was a cabinet-maker in Westmorland.<sup>48</sup>

William Hazlitt probably set out for Lancashire in 1802 in a positive frame of mind. Early in the year he had painted the portrait of his father, now at Maidstone, which marked a rapprochement between the two of them after Hazlitt had disappointed his father by abandoning his studies for the Unitarian ministry in favour of his hoped for career as a painter. This portrait, which he had sent to the Royal Academy 'with a throbbing heart',<sup>49</sup> had been accepted for their summer exhibition. Moreover, he probably had some contacts in Manchester already, as a trip there by either William or John had been planned, and presumably took place, the previous August, and was mentioned by Hazlitt senior in a letter now lost.<sup>50</sup> William was still in London in May 1802, but must have arrived in Manchester in the course of the summer. He describes in the essay 'On the Want of Money', a hungry fortnight when he lived on coffee while copying a portrait of a Manchester manufacturer (who, he says, 'died worth a plum'), and then invested part of the resulting five guineas in a meal of 'sausages and mashed potatoes'.<sup>51</sup> A. C. Grayling deduces that this visit was identical with the one mentioned in 'On Novelty and

45 Peter Romney, quoted in Darcy, *Encouragement of the Fine Arts*, 65.

46 William Ford, quoted in *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power, and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class*, ed. Janet Wolff and John Seed (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 51.

47 His father's business card is reproduced in John F. Curwen, *Kirkbie-Kendall: Fragments Collected relating to its Ancient Streets and Yards; Church and Castle; Houses and Inns* (Kendal: T. Wilson, 1900), 118.

48 John Romney, *Memoirs of George Romney*, 3.

49 'On the Pleasure of Painting', Hazlitt, *Works*, viii, 13.

50 The letter was addressed to Dr. Toulmin (see note 17 above), who replied, 'I shall be glad to hear that your son's prospects improve at Manchester.' – *The Christian Reformer* v (November 1838), 762.

51 Hazlitt, *Works*, xvii, 180.

Familiarity',<sup>52</sup> during which he walked out 'to escape from one of the tenderest parts' of Mrs Inchbald's *Simple Story* and found himself in 'a summer-shower',<sup>53</sup> suggesting that Hazlitt was in Manchester for several weeks, during which time a commission from one Manchester manufacturer might well have led to the acquaintance of another, if indeed an introduction had not already been made indirectly through John Hazlitt or Isaac Railton.

Although Liverpool was no doubt on his itinerary, Hazlitt may have felt inclined to linger in Manchester, as, in retrospect, he found it the more congenial town of the two. In his *Table-Talk*, he contrasts his memories of conversation among Manchester manufacturers with his memories of William Roscoe and his circle in Liverpool:

When I was young, I spent a good deal of my time at Manchester and Liverpool; and I confess I give the preference to the former. There you were oppressed only by the aristocracy of wealth; in the latter by the aristocracy of wealth and letters by turns. You could not help feeling that some of their great men were authors among merchants and merchants among authors. Their bread was buttered on both sides, and they had you at a disadvantage either way. The Manchester cotton-spinners, on the contrary, set up no pretensions beyond their looms, were hearty good fellows, and took any information or display of ingenuity on other subjects in good part. I remember well being introduced to a distinguished patron of art and rising merit at a little distance from Liverpool, and was received with every mark of attention and politeness, till the conversation turning on Italian literature, our host remarked that there was nothing in the English language corresponding to the severity of the Italian ode – except perhaps Dryden's *Alexander's Feast*, and Pope's *St. Cecilia*! I could no longer contain my desire to display my smattering in criticism, and began to maintain that Pope's Ode was, as it appeared to me, far from an example of severity in writing. I soon perceived what I had done [...].<sup>54</sup>

Railton, on the other hand, was perhaps one of those very Manchester cotton-spinners who took in good part the information and ingenuity of an underferd young artist from London, and saw a way of putting it to some use.

Furthermore, although portrait commissions might have been slow in coming, Hazlitt was in the right place at the right moment, for Manchester too was in a positive mood. In 1802 it was a boom town, and the euphoria of the time was such that even a down-to-earth manufacturer might, in a burst of bonhomie and panache, have made a gesture to show his appreciation for information and ingenuity without expecting any particular financial return, if it would help a friend and impress at least some of his neighbours. While the war had inevitably affected a town reliant on imported raw materials and on marketing its finished products abroad, a Manchester newspaper

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52 A C Grayling, *The Quarrel of the Age: The Life and Times of William Hazlitt* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000), 72.

53 Hazlitt, *Works*, xii, 304.

54 Hazlitt, *Works*, viii, 204n.

had declared even in 1801 that ‘during a war which hath continued nine years, our Trade hath suffered less, perhaps, than any other manufacture in the Empire, and is even far more extensive than it was at the commencement of that period.’<sup>55</sup> As for the mood of the town about the negotiations and signing of the Peace of Amiens the following year, Joseph Aston of the *Manchester Herald* (1762–1844) recalled in 1822 his own memories of that time in his *Metrical Records of Manchester*, beginning with the anticipation of 1801:

This year was Mancunium, with the rest of the nation,  
 For weeks and for months in a wild agitation  
 Of hope and of fear, as the rumour prevail’d,  
 That the then pending treaty succeeded or fail’d; [...]  
 Meanwhile, Speculation attention full paid,  
 And prepar’d her cogg’d dies, for the hazard game, – Trade; [...]  
 At last, upon Rapture’s quick wing, the news came,  
 That OTTO and HAWKSURRY had settled each claim.  
 The news spread like wildfire throughout the glad streets,  
 And Affection’s thoughts turn’d to the armies and fleets; [...]  
 For Manchester thousands of men had supplied,  
 For the country’s defence – to Affection allied. [...]  
 It is not sufficient to say all were glad,  
 For joy was excessive, and joy made all mad. [...]

The prelim’nary articles were what was then sign’d,  
 For those that were definite still were behind;  
 But the next year, in March, at rent’s usual pay-day,  
 Dedicated to what Cheshire swears by – ‘Our Lady’,  
 After wrangling for trifles, with labour for pains,  
 The Marquis CORNWALLIS sign’d it at AMIENS.  
 Then again was the Coach met, that brought the news down,  
 And again Joy was Master and Lord of the Town;  
 And again Speculation took leave of her fears,  
 And found full employment for mills, looms, and shears.  
 Again the town grew, as it did ere the war,  
 Which, to promis’d increase, had so long been a bar;  
 Again its extension the wond’ring eye greets,  
 And fields, as by magic, are turn’d into streets!

Alas! a few months o’er the light cast a shade,  
 For hollow and false was the peace that was made [...].<sup>56</sup>

55 Letter from ‘Mercator’, *Manchester Mercury* (3 November 1801), quoted in Arthur Redford, *Manchester Merchants and Foreign Trade 1794–1858*, 2 vols (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1934), I, 61.

56 Joseph Aston, *Metrical Records of Manchester, in which Its History is Traced (currente Calamo) From the Days of the Ancient Britons to the Present Time* (London: Longman,



But those were the few months during which Hazlitt secured, and executed, his commission.

Where now are the copies Hazlitt painted for Railton? It is not wholly clear even how many there were, still less how long they survived. Peggy says there were ten, but one of Hazlitt's letters from Paris mentions five, and perhaps the plan changed as the visit to Paris went on. John Railton of Manchester followed a career trajectory that took him from Cooper Street in St Peter's parish to Cheetham Hill to Victoria Park, no doubt shedding some things and acquiring others as he went. He seems, surprisingly, to have died intestate, but his widow Mary, who settled at Alderley Edge after his death in 1857, left a number of paintings and engravings, including an Opie portrait of Isaac Railton of Cheapside,<sup>57</sup> and later portraits of herself and her husband by the French artist Firmin Salabert. Nothing in her will, however, suggests any memento of Hazlitt's time in Paris all those years before. It is conceivable, as suggested above, that Hazlitt's copies might have been intended for the News Room of the second Manchester Exchange (a building which John Railton lived to see twice enlarged, though he died shortly before it was demolished and replaced by a still larger third Exchange), but there seems to be no record of what, if anything, was eventually hung in the News Room when it opened in 1809.

It is recorded, however, that when that second Exchange was about to open, John Railton was one of the two committee members entrusted with overseeing the making of the uniforms provided for its porters: 'to consist of a lac'd cock'd hat, a staff with a silver head, on which shall be engraved the Manchester Arms and the words "Manchester Exchange", a dark blue cloak-coat with gold lace at the collar and gold twist at the button-holes.'<sup>58</sup> Was that, after all, the kind of thing a rising man in Manchester was given to do if he demonstrated an interest in art?

MAIDSTONE MUSEUM AND BENTLIF ART GALLERY

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Orme and Company, 1822), 37–8.

57 Two Opie portraits of Isaac Railton were in the possession of John Railton's descendants by 1911. The third, obtained by Isaac's grandson through an exchange, is now at Barnard College, New York.

58 Thomas Swindells, *Manchester Streets and Manchester Men*, 3rd series (Didsbury: E. J. Morten, 1907), 155.



## THE PLEASURE OF PAINTING

*Lisa Milroy*

In his *Table-Talk* essay, ‘On the Pleasure of Painting’, written in 1820, Hazlitt asks, ‘What is the state of mind of an artist while he is at work?’ (viii, 18).<sup>1</sup> He claims that painters are ‘the most lively observers of what passes before them in the world, and the closest observers of what passes in their own minds’ (viii, 10). ‘Artists [...]’, he states, ‘must know tolerably well what they are about, before they can bring the result of their observations to the test of ocular demonstration’ (viii, 10n). And he observes that while the artist paints, ‘The mind is calm, and full at the same time’ (viii, 5).

Painting for me is all about pleasure, a pleasure allied to art that in its nature is mysterious, challenging, a joy, difficult and simple, utterly satisfying. The activity of painting is catalysed by my need and desire, by love, beauty and my sense of curiosity, by my relation to the unknown and my connection to the everyday world, and by the sheer fun of doing it. Painting begins with my relation to myself. Hazlitt’s query about the state of mind of the artist at work, and his comments about the artist’s self-knowledge therefore strike a resonant chord with me personally as an artist, and, more generally, open up the fascinating subject of just what it is to paint.

Hazlitt begins ‘On the Pleasure of Painting’ with a focus on the *making* of paintings and further on, shifts to the subject of *looking* at paintings. It is on this basis of ‘making and looking / body and mind’ that I would now like to address the pleasure of painting and Hazlitt in light of my own practice. So, following in Hazlitt’s footsteps and his descriptions of the studio, I shall begin with ‘making’.

### **Making**

In ‘On the Pleasure of Painting’, Hazlitt posits that painting not only exercises the mind but also the body. He writes,

It is a mechanical as well as a liberal art. [...] Action is no less necessary than thought to the instinctive tendencies of the human frame; and painting combines them both incessantly. The hand furnishes a practical test of the

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

correctness of the eye; and the eye, thus admonished, imposes fresh tasks of skill and industry upon the hand. Every stroke tells, as the verifying of a new truth [...]. (viii, 11)

He continues, 'Painting [...] requires not indeed a strong, but a continued and steady exertion of muscular power' (viii, 11). 'Painting for a whole morning', he adds, 'gives one [an] excellent [...] appetite for one's dinner' (viii, 12)!

Hazlitt's recognition that painting is physical, of the body, that it takes muscular power, is crucial. Although I claim that painting begins with a state of mind and a deep correspondence with oneself, this mental connection is entirely related to the body. Painting involves my sense of rhythm, beat, and balance, and of time and duration. In its bodily reach painting embraces smell, touch, and sound, as well as sight. Painting creates body memories. The mere idea of painting stirs my physical, in-the-gut appetite for both making and looking at paintings. And in the studio, when this sensual appetite is sparked by my feelings and ideas, it makes me rush to pick up my paintbrush and start work. Painting for me is thus grounded in a fundamental creative accord between my mind and body.

My awareness of the elemental body-mind relation in painting was initiated while I was at art school in the early 1980s. It began with drawing. As a fledgling student at Goldsmiths, my drawings led the way – they were always more satisfying to make and to look at than my paintings. When it came to painting, I would begin the process by bringing into my studio space any number of ordinary objects that I valued both for their personal importance and their engaging visual qualities. What pleasure in all the preparation: arranging my chosen objects on a table and setting up the lighting, deciding on the right size of canvas, installing the easel. Then I'd begin to paint. Despite my delight in the anticipation of painting, I was never satisfied with the results. To me, these paintings looked old-fashioned, stodgy, and literal. They failed to capture the vital energy that had so animated my drawings, no matter how much I wished to see this vivacity embodied in paint.

It was only when I left art school and stopped working from observation that my paintings began to come alive. By picturing an object in my mind's eye and working from this mental image, I got rid of all that wasn't essential – the table surface disappeared, as well as the horizon line where the table met the wall. In my mind, the objects simply appeared in a neutral space. My painted equivalent for this space was an off-white ground, against which I depicted the objects. My depictions also became simplified, which somehow charged an object's painted presence.

Of course Hazlitt is a strong advocate of working directly from nature, stating that 'by comparing the imitation with the original, you see what you have done, and how much you have still to do' (viii, 7). His cautionary note, 'The test of the senses is severer than that of fancy, and an over-match even for the delusions of our self-love' (viii, 7), makes me even feel a little guilty for having abandoned working from nature so long ago! When he observes that the painter 'sees into the life of things' (viii, 10), he qualifies this rather 'fanciful' ability by claiming it grows

out of learning, out of 'the improved exercise of his [the painter's] faculties, and an intimate sympathy with nature' (viii, 10).

The reason why my paintings improved after art school lay in the fact that I simply was having a better time making them. Working from a mental image allowed me to put paint onto canvas in a way that I thoroughly enjoyed. By letting go of the observation-led approach, I discovered the joy of a fast gestural application of paint, and a physical way of making that was linked to the speed and spontaneity of drawing. A quick rendering with a sumptuously loaded paintbrush served to inject my painted depictions with energetic immediacy. This pleasurable bodily engagement with painting allowed me to somehow tap into the nexus of emotional and intellectual content stirred up by the object. Depiction was a hook through which I could join the emotional pull of the object and its conceptual value with the sensual materiality of paint. By working from an image held in my mind, the fast approach to painting became free of an inhibiting self-consciousness that stemmed from working from observation. As a result, the experience of painting became shot with a unique, enthralling intensity. Painting completely situates me in the present moment, as if I am escaping the past and future. It's exhilarating – painting makes me feel so alive!

Passion and painting! In the clutch of Hazlitt essays that I read in preparation for this paper, each associated in my mind with 'On the Pleasure of Painting', the word 'passion' often shone out. Hazlitt is forever on the side of passion, defending, analysing and promoting passion in art, especially in his glorious rants against Sir Joshua Reynolds.

I would now like to turn to the subject of materiality. After leaving art school, in my new observation-free mode of working, it took a while to establish my own natural pleasure and ease in how to handle the sheer stuff of paint. Oil painting with its potential for layering and different degrees of translucency is defined as such by a three-dimensional quality. But as my initial approach to art-making was through drawing, by habit I was locked into the graphic mechanics of pencil, charcoal, and watercolour on the flat, relatively smooth surface of paper. At art school I had always found the object-like aspect of oil paint and bumpy weave of cotton duck canvas difficult to manage. But as I began to experiment with paint more, handling it for its own sake independently of any other idea, I gradually opened up to its physical and visual possibilities. This increased material experimentation also stimulated my interest in the craft of painting – the importance of a good-sized palette, the right kind of paintbrushes, knowing about the difference in pigment content of various brands of paint. And in developing my relation to the workplace of my studio, my sense of discipline – also very important to Hazlitt – took root. As my experience of what paint could do grew, the knowledge settled into my mind and body and eventually began to inform my painting thoughts.

As my paintings evolved during the 1980s, I developed various compositional strategies that allowed me to maximize the benefits of my fast painting technique. Depictions of a single object gave way to stacks, lines, and groups, but the grid



Lisa Milroy, *Shoes* (1985) © Lisa Milroy

format proved most interesting. In the 1980s, I was so invested in fast painting that I made all my paintings in a single day.

When I painted *Shoes* in 1985, this was my daily regime: I began the morning by drawing out the composition in yellow ochre paint thinly diluted with turpentine. I then knuckled down to the real business of painting by adding linseed oil to the turpentine to plump up the medium. I fleshed out the monochromatic drawing with a rich layer of paint and by midday, had established the feel of the painting through tone and colour. By that stage I also felt thoroughly grounded in the momentum of making. Pleasure and excitement fortified my belief that I was on the right track, yet it was impossible to know if at the end of the day my painting would succeed or fail, which naturally made the performance all the more electrifying. After lunch, I re-did the painting with another layer of paint. Repeating the image as such was like turning up the volume – it was gripping to see how loud I could make it! By the end of the afternoon, the blacks in the painting were at their blackest, and the colours at their richest. The final, telling touch to the wet glossy surface was dashes of creamy white paint brushed with a flick of my wrist onto each shoe: highlights bouncing off the black.

Such was my *modus operandi* for all my 1980s paintings, no matter what the object depicted. The repetition at play in my painting *Shoes* allowed me to enjoy that critical white brush mark of the highlight over and over again – like eating

something delicious, often one bite isn't enough. But alongside this celebratory, sensual operation, I think the repetition was also charged with anxiety, and represented a fear of loss. Once I had made a brush mark, and the image of a shoe, both were gone forever. They of course did exist on the canvas, but I had lost them for myself. What an emotional relief to be able to re-create this curiously life-affirming shoe image and stage the action again and again, and through repetition stave off ultimate disappearance.

I painted fast throughout that entire decade. By the early 1990s, I was worn out, exhausted by this demanding, constantly exciting regime of a painting a day. I wanted and needed something different from painting. I had grown curious about what a slow application of paint might give. And I wanted to depict objects within the context of their place in the world, no longer against the off-white ground. I wanted to respond to painting through a range of energetic modes, not just the highly keyed. So, during the 1990s I focused on slow painting, through which photography came to play a role. The range of my object-based motifs expanded to include architecture, landscape, place and people. Towards the end of the 1990s, I was after another painting challenge – it was time to bring fast and slow modes of painting together.

In 'On the Pleasure of Painting', I was intrigued to discover Hazlitt's commentary on slow and fast painting techniques. Although he admires the work of Van Dyck and Rubens where 'colours seem breathed on the canvas as if by magic' (viii, 11), Hazlitt gains more satisfaction in looking at the 'slow, patient, laborious execution of Correggio, Leonardo da Vinci and Andrea del Sarto' (viii, 11). But he observes that both modes – 'the felicity of the one' and 'the carefulness of the other' – are combined in 'the rich *impasting* paintings of Titian and Giorgione' (viii, 11n), which he prefers above all. I share Hazlitt's ardour for Titian, and add my own heroes to the 'fast-and-slow' mode list, traveling up through time: Velazquez, Goya, and Manet.

I turned to Hazlitt's essay 'On Thought and Action' for more insight into his ideas on the relation between mind and body, and thought and action with specific regard to painting, but was disappointed not to find a mention. In this essay, Hazlitt probes the difference between cerebral persons and active persons as he puts it, and develops his observation that 'Thought depends on habitual exercise of the speculative faculties; action on the determination of the will. The one assigns reasons for things, the other puts causes into act' (viii, 101). Hazlitt's analysis of action and will prompted me to reflect on my own take on the role of will in painting. To me, will is like an engine that harnesses the bodily pleasure of materials and making to the cerebral pleasure of thought and imagining and drives them forward. A painting can fail when I do not have sufficient feeling to nourish the wilful drive to paint – the painting becomes mannered and looks depressingly 'hard-won'. On the other hand, without a kind of resistance that will seems to effect, unfettered imagination let loose in materiality also results in a failed painting – the painting looks sloppy, mushy, as if without a skeleton.

I would now like to move on to talking about a defining pleasure for me in painting: the genre of still life. It begins with the subject of transformation. In 'On

the Pleasure of Painting', Hazlitt expresses his fascination with how in painting, 'The air-wove visions that hover on the verge of existence have a bodily presence given them on the canvas: the form of beauty is changed into a substance: the dream and the glory of the universe is made "palpable to feeling as to sight"' (viii, 7). In my studio, while painting, I am a constant witness to blobs of pigment and canvas turning from mundane stuff into a complex picture that can reflect back to me something of myself. I find it a near miracle how the substance of paint and cloth can be crafted to take on form and meaning because of and yet beyond itself, with the potential to touch and move the viewer. Such transformation rests on the interplay between stillness and movement, a dynamic which is mirrored in the very term 'still life', and in the word 'painting': 'painting' as a verb is something to do, which signals action or movement; 'painting' as a noun is something to look at, which suggests contemplation and stillness. My focus on painting objects over the years has been underpinned by my sense of the union between the two, stillness and movement – to my mind at the heart of still life painting.

I would now like to very briefly tell you how still life came to define my practice. My engagement with the genre stems again from my early days at art school. A tutor set my class a seemingly simple, even banal exercise: we were to choose an object that we loved and make a drawing of it. My beloved object was a seashell that I had brought with me to London from my hometown Vancouver. I chose the shell both for its visual beauty and for how it made me feel. Bridging me to the home I'd left behind, the shell stirred up an affirmative sense of connection. Conversely, it heightened my awareness of being away from that familiar world, and so also triggered a sense of alienation and loss. For such a relatively ordinary object, the souvenir seashell churned up a complex cluster of feelings, which were filtered through my visual, sensual appreciation of it. And all that was framed by the tutor's significant qualifier: the word 'love'. After I finished my seashell drawings, I searched for other objects imbued with the same 'seashell-quality' of high visual impact and strong emotional pull, and eventually established a core body of objects from which to make drawings and paintings.

I was delighted to discover in Hazlitt a soulmate also invested in the emotional value of objects, tinged by a Proustian sense of longing, of lost happiness and the past. His insights and observations centred on the things of everyday life in relation to memory and the subject of presence and absence intimately chimes with my own approach to still life painting. I adored his essay 'On a Sundial', a kind of fabulous prose poem in which he explores the physical and metaphysical experiences of time through a list of various timepieces. Another wonderful essay that focuses on an object is 'The Letter-Bell', where in analysing his associations linked to the letter-bell, Hazlitt explores the way in which memory operates, stirring up distant connections and merging the past with the present. The sound of the letter-bell also reminds Hazlitt of learning to paint.



## Looking

Now, for the second part of my paper, I would like to turn from the pleasure of *making* paintings to the pleasure of *looking* at paintings. As Hazlitt states, ‘The painter not only takes a delight in nature [alluding to the act of painting], he has a new and exquisite source of pleasure opened up to him in the study and contemplation of art’ (viii, 13).

I spend much more time making my paintings than looking at them. A painting these days can take months to complete, day after day in the studio. But of course I never spend that long looking at them. Looking at paintings is a periodic activity, and knowledge of any one painting builds up over time. I return over and over to look at paintings in museums that I began to look at thirty years ago, the pleasure and fascination constantly renewed and unexhausted. The length of time I can give to any one painting appears to have increased with my own years – in a museum, I can now spend up to fifty minutes in solid concentration on a worthwhile painting, before my looking slips and I lose the connection.

In my studio, the nature of looking at a painting while I paint is quite different to looking at a painting detached from its creation. While I work, I’m usually standing quite close to the canvas surface, which obviously means that if the canvas is larger than me, I cannot see the whole of it as I paint. The entire painting comes into view only when I stand back and stop work. Yet I must hold a sense of the full painting in my mind’s eye to make the necessary decisions.

While I paint, my eyes continually shift between canvas and palette. The kind of looking linked to the palette, to mixing paint, deciding on colour, testing consistency and flow, is pragmatic, coolly evaluating. Then, as my hand transports the loaded paintbrush to the canvas, with my mind primed for painting-action, the mode of looking heats up – as I set to apply the paint, in an instant the nature of looking changes to facilitate the stream between what I hold in my mind and my right hand holding the paintbrush and the canvas surface. This is like a ‘not-looking’ type of looking, more like a visual form of feeling and touching the image as I picture it and then manifest it on the canvas. This triggering of different modes of looking is rather like causing gears to shift within my body, so that my focus can slip smoothly from one mental groove to another.

My chair in the studio workplace is as essential as the palette. It’s simple and sturdy, comfortable, but not too comfortable. I can’t think or look properly if I slouch or droop, like in an armchair. My studio chair represents a mental zone where looking is detached from painting, yet still joined to the action. When I critically gauge a painting while standing up, as the standing position is directly connected to making, my judgments are also on the move as I appraise the formal aspects in relation to the mechanics of working. But I never paint from a sitting position. And so when I sit to look at a work in progress, the stillness of sitting nudges apart the act of looking from making, and grows a contemplative space where I critically engage in looking more from within the depth of my mind.

To return to Hazlitt’s essay, ‘The Letter-Bell’, I was stunned to discover Hazlitt’s enjoyment of the task of brush cleaning at the close of a painting day, as it mirrors

a key 'looking' experience in my own studio, and, in its gentle idiosyncrasy, one that I assumed was privately my own. While washing his paintbrushes and clearing up, Hazlitt would sneak 'furtive, sidelong glances' (xvii, 380) at the painting he had just finished with. This 'theft' type of looking opened up a limbo in which he could digest that day's labours while mentally preparing for what might follow. Hazlitt claimed that if he gave up this menial task to an assistant, he would miss out on an indispensable aspect of the painting process. He so valued the ritual of washing his brushes that if the letter-bell rang to summon him to dinner and cut short his cleaning time, he would return to the studio and resume the task after eating (xvii, 380).

My own task of cleaning my paintbrushes or the palette, or sweeping the floor has precisely the same regulatory function, which I also associate with the studio chair – they all prompt a mode of looking that is critical yet appreciative, involved yet relaxed, detached from yet in communion with the painting and the act, and is mediated through the basic objects of the studio.

The fundamental role of looking in relation to painting singles out sight as paramount among the five senses. However my account of the studio chair perhaps suggests that all the senses are at play in the activity of painting and looking within the studio. The particular sensual feel of my chair; a Pavlovian recognition in the welcoming smell of turpentine whenever I enter the studio; the music or the silence that I listen to as I work, even the comforting warmth of central heating in winter – the sensory world of my studio as such anchors my sense of sight and rounds out all my various modes of looking. In a number of his essays, Hazlitt writes about his intense feelings for sensory events. In 'Why Distant Objects Please', he explores the comparative distinctness of visual and other sensory experiences, and expands on several of his deeply affecting memories stemming from taste, smell and touch. He observes that 'Sounds, smells, and sometimes tastes, are remembered longer than visible objects' because 'they are in their nature intermittent, and comparatively rare; whereas objects of sight are always before us [...]. The eye is always open' (viii, 258).

One result of the critical gauge of looking at a painting can be the re-inventing, revising or re-making of it altogether. Sometimes when I am finally able to accept that a painting is beyond revision and has failed, the decision feels perversely positive – as the reflection of newly-gained understanding, trashing a painting turns into an accomplishment! Revising or re-doing can be a way of sharpening my take, testing the threshold of the unknown or weaving new understanding and nuance into a known position. Doing another version of a painting is also allied to the rich terrain of repetition.

The subject of revision leads me to address Hazlitt's experience of writing compared to painting, which he also sets out in 'On the Pleasure of Painting'. Hazlitt disparages the act of writing. He states emphatically that he takes no pleasure in writing his essays or in reading them afterwards. He does admit to liking a turn of phrase now and again, but he cannot hold on to the satisfaction. Hazlitt dislikes writing mostly because of the tedium of labour involved, in re-writing, polishing, editing, proofing for publishers. He becomes over-familiar with his work, and, as

he observes, 'Familiarity naturally breeds contempt' (viii, 6). He states that once he has written on a subject, it goes out of his head. His feelings have been melted down into words, making him then forget the very thoughts that spawned them. Writing appears to make him resentful – he says that although his readers are left with his published texts, he himself is left with nothing. Painting, for Hazlitt, is different: in painting he sets down not what he already knows but what he has just discovered, so that he always gains in the mechanical transformation. Hazlitt observes that in painting, 'There is a continual creation out of nothing going on' (viii, 7). And revision is not the onerous task it is in writing. In painting, revision is charged with energy and desire. He writes that 'Refinement creates beauty everywhere' and that 'If art was long [in its demand for perfection], [...] life was so too' (viii, 8).

What does appear to give Hazlitt fulfilment in writing is his knowledge that the word endures. In his essay 'On Thought and Action', he writes, 'Words, ideas, feelings, with the progress of time harden into substances: things, bodies, actions, moulder away, or melt [...] into thin air! [...] Words are the only things that last forever' (viii, 107). However in 'On the Pleasure of Painting', Hazlitt writes that art also lasts forever. He movingly describes the happy experience of painting his father, who enjoyed being painted by his son as it made him the subject of so much continual attention. In the finished painting, Hazlitt would keep a souvenir to remind him of his father long after his father's death. As he states simply, 'The picture is left' (viii, 13). He also found it gratifying to see this very painting of his father included in the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition.

This mention of the Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy now introduces the topic of looking at paintings outside the studio and in the public domain of galleries and museums. In 'On the Pleasure of Painting', Hazlitt describes his first encounter with a painting and his initiation into looking at art, as well as pilgrimages to see the art that he admired. He describes the cataclysmic experience of looking at the actual paintings of the great masters after having, up to that point, only heard their names. In his deep appreciation of museums, Hazlitt warns the reader of his essay, "if thou has not seen the Louvre, thou art damned!" (viii, 16).

Hazlitt's pleasure in looking at art in museums triggered a recollection in me of growing up in Vancouver and my own first encounter with European painting: the Impressionist reproductions that my mother had framed and hung in our home. My childhood memory of these paintings embodies for me my mother's aesthetic pleasure in visual and interior design, infused with her imaginative spirit. Within the framed reproductions, my mother's flair and taste met her desire for creative stimulus in the comfortable setting of our home, attitudes for which I remain truly grateful.

As a teenager during the 1970s, I remember the distinctive oil paintings of the famous Canadian cohort of artists, 'The Group of Seven', at the Vancouver Art Gallery, and of course British Columbia's very own Emily Carr. But there was no access to European and 'Old Master' paintings that I can remember. My only experience of them was on the printed page, and on fridge magnets, posters, calendars, T-shirts and postcards. At age fifteen, I fell in love with a postcard image of a good-looking young man painted by Botticelli – *Portrait of a Young*

*Man in a Red Cap*, from around 1480. To me, his shoulder-length hair and soulful look epitomized the 1970s West Coast blues singer pin-up. How upsetting and confusing to feel nothing at all for the actual painting when I finally arrived in London and stood before the painted youth in the National Gallery! My crush had been entirely fuelled by the postcard, and had nothing to do with the real painting.

I started to make oil paintings as a teenager in Vancouver, and art was a favourite subject at high school, but my art education only seriously began in London where my study shifted from perusing reproductions in books to standing in a gallery redolent with history and encountering the beauty and strangeness of famous European paintings first hand. As I opened up to the complexities of making paintings at art school, I also opened up to looking at paintings – I had to learn how to look, to train in the act of looking. In ‘On the Pleasure of Painting’, Hazlitt observes that, ‘Where there is no conscious apprehension, there can be no conscious pleasure. Wonder at the first sight of works of art may be the effect of ignorance and novelty; but real admiration and permanent delight in them are the growth of taste and knowledge’ (viii, 19).

Picture frames are rarely included in book reproductions of paintings, but the picture frame when it is present in a museum affects the experience of looking at a painting – as does the glazing of a painting, the colour and texture of the wall upon which a painting hangs, the information card next to it, the quality of lighting and play of shadows, the ambient noise and even the smells, along with the presence of other viewers and gallery attendants: all are factors that shape the shared social experience of looking at art in a public venue.

On some days I go to a museum simply to explore the collection, to look at a painting or dip into a time period that I haven’t yet considered. Or I go because of a craving to look at a beloved painting in detail – it’s curious how sometimes as I head for the room in which it hangs, a certain colour or the composition of another painting can catch my eye and distract me from my mission. A museum is useful when I’m stuck in the studio – looking at the art of fellow painters can help me figure out a problem. Occasionally I’ll dash to a museum with a need to gorge on a particular painting as if it contained a soulful nutrient of which I had suddenly become deficient and, through looking, could absorb.

It’s surprising how unfamiliar a familiar painting can appear when redefined by its inclusion in a particular exhibition, or when I come across it away from its usual habitat, on loan to another gallery for example – a change to the architectural and critical context can profoundly influence my perception. When a museum rearranges the installation of paintings within a room, in my first encounter I often feel physically and emotionally disoriented. Over time, a known arrangement of paintings can grow beautiful, and the change of setting provokes a sense of sad loss. On the other hand, the shake-up of a new installation can reveal a painting that I had never before paid attention to, and it comes as a revelation. I have to say that I still haven’t recovered from my shock and even anger at the brutal transfer some twenty years ago of the Manet paintings in Paris, which were, as far as I’m concerned, ideally installed in the former Jeu de Paume and now hang from ugly metal rods, often with a raking light, against garish colours or cold stone walls in the Musée d’Orsay.

It's tedious to look at paintings in over-crowded galleries. In competing for space, looking is reduced to scanning for information, draining away a quintessential experience of painting based on close observation and contemplation. But I do savour the company of fellow viewers in looking at art in a public space. I feel touched and nourished by the human spirit and collective energy of a group of strangers all engaged in looking, in renewing their contact or discovering something fresh.

It is personally thrilling and an honour to see my work exhibited in a gallery or museum, in dialogue with other artists' work, or contributing to the content and energy of an exhibition. My paintings seem to me both intimately familiar and distantly formal. Even though they may belong to the museum collection, at some level I feel they still belong to me – after all, the artist retains copyright on their artwork, no matter who owns the actual object. Sometimes as I inspect my painting hanging on a museum wall, I spot a detail that I'd like to change or work on a bit longer, but it's only a mild nagging. Mostly I feel a comfortable detachment from the painting, signalling resolution.

Last June I went to see the new display of the permanent collection at Kunstmuseum Bonn. I had not seen my paintings held in the museum's collection for several years, and they were all now on show. It was surprisingly useful to re-visit *Painting a Picture* from 2000, as it relates to certain aspects of the work I am currently developing. My interest in this older painting triggers a familiar, slightly weird feeling: that I am perpetually moving laterally as an artist, not advancing in a forward direction – it's as if I am making the same painting again



Lisa Milroy, *Painting a Picture* (2000) © Lisa Milroy

and again, despite the formal differences that have emerged over the years. On the one hand, this stands as a compelling affirmation of a creative reality entirely my own. To paraphrase Hazlitt's reflection in 'The Letter-Bell' (viii, 378), painting is a testimony to my never having given the lie to my own soul. On the other hand, I despair that nothing I do ever changes, that I'm trapped in my own narrow fate.

At Kunstmuseum Bonn, best of all was seeing other people looking at my paintings. Looking is an action that leads to bringing paintings to life. Through looking, the viewer projects into a painting and makes it meaningful. The viewer's imaginative participation gives value to my own pleasure in creating. Somebody needs to look at my painting for it to become art.

In 'On the Pleasure of Painting', Hazlitt also cites the importance of learning from the past. Paintings come from other paintings, and painters are always responding to each other across time and different cultures, stirred by someone else's heritage, biography, invention and discovery in order to make their own form, perhaps to make something new. And here I am in correspondence with Hazlitt himself as if he were here in this room, testing affinities and finding many of his observations and comments about painting timeless.

To bring this paper to a close: when Hazlitt asks in 'On the Pleasure of Painting', 'What is the state of mind of an artist while he is at work?', he follows with the answer,

He is then in the act of realising the highest idea he can form of beauty or grandeur: he conceives, he embodies that which he understands and loves best: that is, he is in full and perfect possession of that which is to him the source of the highest happiness and intellectual excitement which he can enjoy. (viii, 18)

I am struck by Hazlitt's use of the word 'love' in his inspiring answer, the very word used by my tutor so many years ago to catalyse my enduring alliance with drawing and painting objects.

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## ‘WITH MUSIC AND PAINTING IN MIND’

### Religion and Art in Hazlitt’s Imagery

*Daniel Lago Monteiro*

Readers and scholars of Hazlitt have often found occasion to return, for pleasure or instruction, to Virginia Woolf’s famous portrait of the essayist in *The Second Common Reader* (1932).<sup>1</sup> In the space of a few pages, and with the honesty of a ‘solid brush’, Woolf presents the sitter’s character in full: his ‘passion for the rights and liberties of mankind’, derived from the Unitarian heritage; his taste, divided between painting and philosophy; the internal struggles within his character, ‘as if two minds were at work’; the urge to write for the press ‘at the right moment’, to stay out of debt; ‘his susceptibility to the charms of the other sex’, leading to humiliation and disillusionment.<sup>2</sup> In particular, Woolf touches the string of the craft of Hazlitt’s essay writing, when she describes it as practised by one who ‘will suddenly glow red-hot or white-hot if something reminds him of the past.’<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, for Woolf, Hazlitt the thinker always went hand in hand with Hazlitt the artist. It is for this reason, as David Bromwich contends, that Hazlitt’s depth of taste was often received ‘with some show of embarrassment’, for example, by T. S. Eliot, at a time when the rise of academic criticism and its ‘yearning for system’ were already well underway.<sup>4</sup> Not so for Virginia Woolf, however, who, in her portrait of Walter Sickert, places Hazlitt at the forefront of a battle against non-malleable precepts and the language of specialisation fostered by the rigidity of literary scholarship:

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- 1 I owe my first readings of Hazlitt to Professor Pedro Paulo Garrido Pimenta, University of São Paulo, to whom I am deeply grateful. I also wish to thank Gregory Dart and Uttara Natarajan for giving me the opportunity to present an earlier version of this article at the 2014 Hazlitt Day-school. Their comments on that day and on other occasions, as well as the comments and conversations with Luisa Calè, James Grande, and Philipp Hunnekuhl, made the writing of this paper possible.
  - 2 Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader: Second Series* (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), 173–85: 173–6.
  - 3 *Ibid.*, 178.
  - 4 David Bromwich, *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 13. For T. S. Eliot’s account of Hazlitt, see *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932), 268–9.

The best critics, Dryden, Lamb, Hazlitt, were acutely aware of the mixture of elements, and wrote of literature with music and painting in their minds. Nowadays we are all so specialized that critics keep their brains fixed to the print, which accounts for the starved condition of criticism in our time, and the attenuated and partial manner in which it deals with its subject.<sup>5</sup>

Woolf's remark is worth developing particularly for the attention she draws to a kind of non-professional criticism that delights in what lies beyond print: the picturesqueness and musicality of language. To some extent, Hazlitt's development of a unique voice in personal and critical essay writing sprung from an attempt to offset in words his thwarted ambition as a portrait painter – it is worth remembering that parts of the author's extensive critical work were written in the form of literary portraits, some of which he gathered in his 1825 *The Spirit of the Age: Or, Contemporary Portraits*. Additionally, however, as this article will show, the vital ingredient in the art of the mixing of elements which characterizes the inventive criticism of Hazlitt's later essays came to him from his Dissenting heritage, and was acquired during his earliest pilgrimage, on 'the road from [Wem] to [Shrewsbury]', by which he claimed, in his last essay, 'The Letter-Bell', to have set out on his 'journey through life' (xvii, 377).<sup>6</sup>

My expression 'inventive criticism' is based on Hazlitt's own phrase, in 'The Letter-Bell', for his writing: 'inventive prose' (xvii, 380). If Hazlitt's mind is one whose happiness rested – as his later essays bear witness – on his earliest recollections, on what he wished things had been before he found himself disappointed in his public and private hopes, not surprisingly, his language is more plastic and sonorous precisely when he 'unlock[s] the casket of memory' – when he is turned into a 'child again' (viii, 257).<sup>7</sup> In 1798, he heard Coleridge's sermon in the Unitarian congregation of Shrewsbury, in Shropshire; 'for myself', Hazlitt wrote many years later, 'I could not have been more delighted if I had heard the music of the spheres' (xvii, 108). From Coleridge, he learned to express his admiration of books, pictures, sculptures and plays with music and painting in mind, or, in his own words, 'in motley imagery or quaint allusion' (xvii, 107). This article will focus on the autobiographical sections of two essays, 'On the Pleasure of Painting' and 'My First Acquaintance with Poet', where Hazlitt relates his youthful pilgrimage and moment of conversion to a world of arts, when, as he says, '[a] new sense came upon me, a new heaven and a new earth stood before me' (viii, 14). An overview of Dissenting culture and its relation to his writings, through an analysis of particular images contained in these two essays,

5 Virginia Woolf, 'Walter Sickert' in *Collected Essays*, 4 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), II, 233–44: 242.

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

7 For Hazlitt's unfulfilled public and private hopes, the first, of the triumph of liberty, the second, of a happy marriage, see 'On the Pleasure of Hating' (xii, 127–36), and Stanley Jones, *Hazlitt: A Life, From Winterslow to Frith Street* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), especially the chapters entitled 'The End of Public Hopes' (161–84) and 'The End of Private Hopes' (319–42).



is important to understanding the radical political content that permeates key emblems such as the 'evening star' and 'dew drops', and, more specifically, to understanding the paths by which Hazlitt was initiated into a world of literature and art. To start with, I will foreground his early Dissenting education in connection with his use of the imagery of gleams and twilight as 'emblem[s] of the *good cause*' (xvii, 108), and elaborate on the vocal and musical implications that are so frequent in the language of his essays as he looks back to a time when he first found himself to be an artist of his own kind.

### Images of light

In the winter of 1805, after Hazlitt had finished the portrait of his father,<sup>8</sup> the news of Napoleon's victory at the Battle of Austerlitz travelled across the country, and once again the partisans of the cause of the people dreamt of a world of social justice. In the essay 'On the Pleasure of Painting', Hazlitt describes the moment when he first welcomed the news:

I walked out in the afternoon, and, as I returned, saw the evening star set over a poor man's cottage with other thoughts and feelings than I shall ever have again. Oh for the revolution of the great Platonic year, that those times might come over again! I could sleep out the three hundred and sixty-five thousand intervening years very contentedly! (viii, 13)

It was not the first time, nor would it be the last, that the 'fair-hair'd angel of the evening', as the like-minded William Blake described it,<sup>9</sup> shed its light on the path of Hazlitt the young writer. Later, in the essay 'On the Connection Between Toad-Eaters and Tyrants', he resorted to the same image for the definition of a true Jacobin: 'We formerly gave the Editor of *The Times* a definition of a true Jacobin, as one "who had seen the evening star set over a poor man's cottage, and connected it with the hope of human happiness"' (vii, 151). Indeed, the frequent recurrence of this and similar dawn and twilight images in Hazlitt's texts – the day-star and rising sun, among others – to describe a sentiment and a political engagement, puts him in close connection with a Dissenting culture that brought together some

8 Although Hazlitt says he finished the portrait of his father on 'the same day that the news of the battle of Austerlitz came' (viii, 13), Howe argues that the portrait was completed much earlier, in 1802. Duncan Wu, however, hints at the possibility that the portrait had been made in 1804; see *Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu, 9 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), VI, 298, n.30. The seemingly distorted facts suggest that the truth of the author's account is poetic or allegorical, as opposed to minutely historical.

9 See William Blake's 'To the Evening Star', *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 410. Blake's sympathy with Napoleon is clear from his writings. In a poem written to George Cumberland, for instance, he positively associates his cottage with 'a bright light over France', the very image that Hazlitt's essay evokes. For the passage quoted and a discussion of the topic, see Jon Mee and Mark Crosby, "'This Soldierlike Danger': The Trial of William Blake for Sedition" in Mark Philp, *Resisting Napoleon: The British Response to the Threat of Invasion 1797–1815* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 111–24: 112.

of the most eminent English writers and radical thinkers.<sup>10</sup> Hazlitt's vision of an evening star setting over a poor man's cottage is inwardly and consciously allied with his Unitarian heritage.

Tom Paulin's book *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style* (1998) as well as other studies of Hazlitt and British Romanticism, most notably Stephen Burley's ample research on the topic, offer some guidelines to understanding the importance of Dissenting culture and language for Hazlitt.<sup>11</sup> As a pupil at New College, Hackney, he became fully acquainted with a range of Dissent's most radical ideals and met several of the leading figures of its intellectual vanguard. New College was, as we learn from Burley, 'an important centre of reformist and radical endeavour [...], [bringing] together the leading Dissenting and radical figures of the era.'<sup>12</sup> There, Hazlitt attended Joseph Priestley's history lectures, as well as parties and meetings where William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft were present, and began his training in the conversational powers of the 'collision of minds', in which no one was better than Wollstonecraft herself.<sup>13</sup> John Thelwall, too, was often present and, Hazlitt wrote in *The Plain Speaker*, was '[t]he most dashing orator I ever heard [...]. In speaking, he was like a volcano vomiting out

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- 10 In 'The Letter-Bell', which alludes to the 1830 Revolution (the second one Hazlitt witnessed in his life), he defined the revolutions thus: 'Two suns in one day, two triumphs of liberty in one age' (xvii, 377). Daniel White has accurately shown, in *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), that it was not until the mid- to late 1790s, and mostly within the Godwinian circle, when middle-class Dissenters embraced a radical discourse similar to that of the predominantly working-class and secular societies. White emphasizes further that Hazlitt would have been a different man 'had he been born the son of a Dissenting minister in Shropshire in 1758 rather than 1778' (182–3). Contrary to White's interpretation, however, when Hazlitt says at the end of 'On the Tendency of Sects' that 'It would be in vain to strew the flowers of poetry round the borders of the Unitarian controversy' (iv, 51), his conclusion should not be understood as an attempt to leave unresolved the 'controversial cabal' of Dissenters on the one hand, and 'taste and genius' on the other, as White puts it (1). It actually implies a lashing critique of Coleridge's apostasy and not a divorce between Dissenting religiosity and art.
- 11 Tom Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998). Stephen Burley's recently published book, *Hazlitt the Dissenter: Religion, Philosophy, and Politics, 1766–1816* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), provides a unique account of Hazlitt's early life and a profound evaluation of the importance of Unitarian culture for his formative years. To an extent, Burley's work ends where my own begins, namely at the turning point when Hazlitt, having been a sermon writer, embraced and expanded the form of the artistically wrought essay to an original level of picturesqueness and musicality. It is the moment when he was able to say, with Correggio, about his own writings: "I am also a painter" (viii, 13).
- 12 Stephen Burley, "A Slaughter-House of Christianity": A Short History of New College, Hackney', *The Hazlitt Review* 5 (2012), 55–9: 57.
- 13 In 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', Hazlitt is pleased to find in Coleridge an admirer of 'Mrs Wollstonecraft's powers of conversation' (xvii, 112), but is rather stunned by the poet's low opinion of Godwin. According to Hazlitt, such an opinion revealed a mind full of 'caprice or prejudice, real or affected' (xvii, 112). For a discussion of Wollstonecraft and Godwin's model of conversation that stimulated intellectual exchange without forfeiting politeness, see Jon Mee's comprehensive study of the topic, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), chapter 3, 'Critical Conversation in the 1790s: Godwin, Hays, and Wollstonecraft' (137–67).

*lava* [...]. The *lightning* of national indignation *flashed* from his eye' ('On Writing and Speaking'; xii, 264; my emphases).

Rejecting some central dogmas of the Church of England – Trinity, Hell, and the Devil – the Unitarians emphasized a humanized image of Christ. In the introductory lecture *On the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth*, Hazlitt traces a portrait of Christ as a champion of social causes, 'leaving religious faith quite out of the question' (vi, 183). The portrait's final words are as follows:

The gospel was first preached to the poor, for it consulted their wants and interests, not its own pride and arrogance. It first promulgated the equality of mankind in the community of duties and benefits. It denounced the iniquities of the chief Priests and Pharisees, and declared itself at variance with principalities and powers, for it sympathizes not with the oppressor, but the oppressed. It first abolished slavery, for it did not consider the power of the will to inflict injury, as clothing it with a right to do so. Its law is good, not power. It at the same time tended to wean the mind from the grossness of sense, and a particle of its divine flame was lent to brighten and purify the lamp of love! (vi, 185)

The 'divine flame' in the concluding line of the excerpt, like the preacher Thelwall's 'flashing' eyes in Hazlitt's comments in *The Plain Speaker*, and indeed the general occurrence of luminous bodies as archetypes in Dissenting culture, stand against the reduction of puritan religiousness to a practice exclusively characterized by rational and inner-worldly asceticism.<sup>14</sup> Inner light, the key element which characterizes protestant religiousness in general, does not lead to an 'inner separation from the world', individualistic delusion, or break from community ties,<sup>15</sup> at least not within the radical religious groups that proliferated in Britain during revolutionary times. The seventeenth-century English Revolution, for instance, has been comprehensively examined in this light by Christopher Hill, in *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (1991). Such groups dreamt rather of a world of social justice which they knew would be impossible to attain without a strong "collectivist" spirit', in Hill's expression.<sup>16</sup> To be a Dissenter, argues Hazlitt in another essay, rephrasing what he said earlier on the spirit of Christianity, is to look out of oneself, and to claim

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14 On this topic, see Max Weber's seminal book *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism: and Other Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), particularly Part II, 'The Idea of the Calling in Ascetic Protestantism' (67–202). However, the sociologist's sole interest in a 'protestant ethic', understood as the ideology of the propertied classes, makes my reading run against the grain of some of his conclusions.

15 Ibid, 101.

16 According to Hill, common religious practices within Protestant groups – for instance, conversion – stand in opposition to individualism: 'Conversion gave a sense of strength too through oneness with a community of like-minded people. The "collectivist" spirit of early Calvinism has often been noted. The same sense of common interests and beliefs inspired the early sectarian congregations.' – Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 154.

sympathy 'not with the oppressors, but the oppressed!' (vii, 242). In *The Round Table* essay, 'On the Tendency of Sects,' he again emphasises the community ties of Dissenters, in his comment that the safest partisans are frequently the steadiest friends: 'Indeed,' he writes, 'they are almost the only people who have any idea of an abstract attachment either to a cause or to an individual' (iv, 51). As Duncan Wu claims, notwithstanding the diversity of creeds among radical Dissenting groups, 'all had one thing in common: the aspiration to a fairer world.'<sup>17</sup> In this context, the light from heavenly bodies is the consubstantiation of a utopian idea of social and political changes which is, on the one hand, abstract and distant – an idea of times to come – and, on the other hand, concrete, firmly grounded in worldly matter, because of its perpetual presence and influence over mankind. Hence the dense beam of light which traverses the chapel's windows and enfolds the left side of the Reverend William Hazlitt in the young Hazlitt's portrait of his father; hence also the evening star setting over a poor man's cottage as an archetypal image of the hopes of mankind.

To elucidate further what I have said so far, I shall now move on to the core of this essay – Hazlitt's narrative of his first encounter with Coleridge, his pilgrimage from Wem to Shrewsbury – and in particular, to a few emblematic passages from 'My First Acquaintance with Poets' about his moment of conversion to a world of art, an event pregnant, as it were, with the hopes of social justice. Hazlitt's rich linguistic devices in these passages, which evoke the vocal and musical allusions described earlier, deserve careful attention.

According to common Unitarian practice, the Reverend William Hazlitt exchanged visits to Shrewsbury's congregation with two other ministers: John Rowe and a certain Jenkins of Whitchurch, preserving a line of communication among non-conformists across Britain, 'by which,' says Hazlitt, 'the flame of civil and religious liberty' was 'kept alive' (xvii, 107). However, in January 1798, John Rowe left his position, which was then to be taken up by the young Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Those were the years when, as Hazlitt recalled, the poet 'dipped his wing in the Unitarian controversy,' and which were particularly fruitful for his poetic compositions and collaboration with Wordsworth ('Mr. Coleridge,' *The Spirit of the Age*; xi, 30). The nineteen-year-old Hazlitt attended Coleridge's sermon on the Sunday morning after he arrived in Shrewsbury, and the conversations he held with the poet, first at his father's home and then in the adjoining fields, lit his way to new hopes and prospects, like the 'silver star of evening' (xvii, 115).

It is worth noting that the gleaming light that emanates from Coleridge is the first element mentioned in Hazlitt's narrative of conversion. That is to say, in line with protestant religiousness, the divine light shines upon the converted before the divine voice produces an echo from the bottom of his or her heart, which from then onwards will serve as guidance to those who stride along to greet the advent of a new life.

17 Duncan Wu, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 67.

I had no notion then that I should ever be able to express my admiration to others in motley imagery or quaint allusion, till the light of his genius shone into my soul, like the sun's rays glittering in the puddles of the road. I was at that time dumb, inarticulate, helpless, like a worm by the way-side, crushed, bleeding, lifeless; but now [...] my ideas float on winged words, and as they expand their plumes, catch the golden light of other years. My soul has indeed remained in its original bondage, dark, obscure, with longings infinite and unsatisfied; my heart, shut up in the prison-house of this rude clay, has never found, nor will it ever find, a heart to speak to; but that my understanding also did not remain dumb and brutish, or at length found a language to express itself, I owe to Coleridge. (xvii, 107)

The author's comparison of himself to a worm, in the alliterated sentence 'worm by the way-side'; the use of triple adjectives, which occurs twice in the same clause ('dumb, inarticulate, helpless'; 'crushed, bleeding, lifeless'); the soul's imprisonment in the body ('prison-house of this rude clay'); the acquisition of a new language which moulds the heart and understanding: all these images and linguistic recourses were wrought from an extensive tradition of conversion narratives common to Dissenting culture or to Christianity in general. Yet, by the expedient of assonance and an internal rhyme, Hazlitt directs the reader's attention to the comparison of his soul to the 'puddles of the road'; hence the sentence, 'the light of his genius shone into my *soul*, like the sun's rays glittering in the puddles of the *road*'. The rhyme reinforces the simile and the long sonorous vowel /o/ of *soul* and *road* in connection with /r/ produces a solemn tone proper to a conversion experience. If the sombre tone of *soul* and *road*, chosen by the author to refer to himself (the converted), clashes with the less solemn diphthong of /aɪ/ in *light* and /eɪ/ in *ray*, to refer to Coleridge (the preacher), so as to structure the sentence into two sets of words semantically distinct (one, buoyant and sparkling; the other, stiff and telluric), then the semi-open vowel /ʌ/ in *sun* and *puddle* suggests the moment when light infiltrates the inert and muddy matter.

Inventive criticism, which Hazlitt describes as that art of expressing oneself to others 'in motley imagery or quaint allusion', or in Virginia Woolf's words, with painting and music in mind, depends, at least in the first moment, on that state in which the soul is in ferment; that is to say, in Hazlitt's imagery, when the sun's light penetrates the wet and muddy ground. From here onwards, a companion would guide the 'saunterer' when setting out on his journeys by untrodden paths: 'the voice of Fancy' (xvii, 115).<sup>18</sup>

18 In its prevailing sense, the word 'saunterer' stands for those who stroll along or ramble. However, as Henry Thoreau observes in his 1862 essay 'Walking': 'which word is beautifully derived "from idle people who roved about the country, in the Middle Ages, and asked charity, under pretence of going à la Sainte Terre", to the Holy Land, till the children exclaimed, "There goes a *Sainte-Terre*", a Saunterer – a Holy-Lander [...]. Some, however, would derive the word from *sans terre*, without land or a home, which therefore, in the good sense, will mean, having no particular home [...]. But I prefer the first, which indeed is the most probable derivation. For every walk is a sort of crusade, preached by some Peter the Hermit in us, to go forth and reconquer this Holy Land from the hands of Infidels' (Henry

### Imagery of music and dew

During Coleridge's visit to Hazlitt's father, the poet was clearly impressed by the nineteen-year-old's striking observations. Thus, on the morning of his departure, he called for ink and paper and left a card with his new address – a 'precious document' (xvii, 112) – urging Hazlitt to pay him a visit in the spring. Hazlitt stammered out his gratitude and accompanied the poet for 'six miles on the road' (xvii, 112). As they walked along, Coleridge talked the whole way about subjects of shared interest (philosophy, politics, literature), moving randomly between them. Similarly, he walked 'shifting from one side of the foot-path to the other' in 'an odd movement' (xvii, 113). After their walk, Coleridge described Hazlitt in a letter to Thomas Wedgwood thus:

brow-hanging, shoe-contemplative, *strange* [...]; yet [...] oftentimes when he has warmed his mind, & the synovial juice has come out & spread over his joints, he will gallop for half an hour with real Eloquence. He sends well-headed & well-feathered Thoughts straight forward to the mark with a Twang of the Bow-string.<sup>19</sup>

Coleridge's observation on the way Hazlitt sounded, in this half-length portrait, coalesces perfectly with the general tone of the impressions that Hazlitt preserved of him ever after: Coleridge's imagination was musical. Hazlitt's own portrait of the poet in *The Spirit of the Age* is accordingly imbued with musical images: the 'string of his own early promise of fame rather jars than otherwise' (xi, 31); 'bookish studies' mingled with the 'music of thought and of humanity' (xi, 31); 'shattered chords vibrate of themselves, making melancholic music to the ear of memory' (xi, 34); and many more. The rich descriptions of conversations with Coleridge that Hazlitt's writings contain insinuate to modern readers a sense of loss at never having heard Coleridge's sentences *viva voce*. In *The Spirit of the Age*, he writes, alluding to *The Tempest*, that Coleridge's voice 'is like the echo of the congregated roar of the "dark rearward and abyss"' (xi, 29). Likewise, 'the *Ancient Mariner* [...] gives a distant idea of the lofty or changeful tones of Mr. Coleridge's voice' (xi, 35). To Hazlitt, Coleridge's mellifluous voice spoke a music of thoughts without which his own words would never have caught the light of former years. Once more we

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David Thoreau, *Collected Essays and Poems* [New York: The Library of America, 2001], 225). Curiously enough, the verb *sauntering* occurs in a crucial and famous passage from 'My First Acquaintance with Poets' where Hazlitt narrates his lonely pilgrimage to Nether Stowey to greet Coleridge and Wordsworth: 'I stopped these two days at Bridgewater, and when I was tired of sauntering on the banks of its muddy river, returned to the inn, and read Camilla. So have I loitered my life away, reading books, looking at pictures, going to plays, hearing, thinking, writing on what pleased me best' (xvii, 116).

19 Quoted in Wu, *First Modern Man*, 94. This early impression of Hazlitt which Coleridge retained is widely known. Virginia Woolf's essay *William Hazlitt* expatiates on it: 'Soon, so thin is the veil of the essay as Hazlitt wore it, his very look comes before us. We see him as Coleridge saw him, "brow-hanging, shoe-contemplative, strange". He comes shuffling into the room, he looks nobody straight in the face, he shakes hands with the fin of a fish; occasionally he darts a malignant glance from his corner' (*Second Common Reader*, 173).

should return to that Sunday morning and the way in which his narrative confirms Virginia Woolf's remark that for Hazlitt, criticism as an art form is carried out with painting as well as music in mind.

At a time of war, when the outcry against anti-monarchists and radicals (groups to which Dissenters regularly belonged) was strong, Coleridge's sermon 'was upon peace and war; upon church and state – not their alliance, but their separation' (xvii, 108). We can guess the content of the sermon and Coleridge's reservation about Britain's military campaign in France from the poem *France: An Ode*, composed early that year.<sup>20</sup> His excursion through such a thorny topic 'added grace to the Unitarian cause' (xvii, 111) and bore all the fragrance of poetry: 'his voice "rose like a stream of rich distilled perfumes"' (xvii, 108). Hazlitt's impression of the sermon reads as follows:

And for myself, I could not have been more delighted if I had heard the music of the spheres. Poetry and Philosophy had met together. Truth and Genius had embraced, under the eye and with the sanction of Religion. This was even beyond my hopes. I returned home well satisfied. The sun that was still labouring pale and wan through the sky, obscured by thick mists, seemed an emblem of the *good cause*; and the cold dank drops of dew that hung half melted on the beard of the thistle, had something genial and refreshing in them; for there was a spirit of hope and youth in all nature, that turned every thing into good. (xvii, 108–9)

In the Old Testament, there are few images which occur more often, or are more fraught with richness and meaning, than that of dew. As a general rule, the image stands for the safety and blessing God poured over the chosen people. During the forty-year journey through the desert, the children of Israel were only able to survive because of the distilled drops of dew served as repast in the form of manna:

when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, 'What is this?' For they knew not what it was. And Moses said unto them, 'This is the bread which the Lord hath given you to eat.' (Exodus, 16.14–15)

Nourishment to the body as well as the mind, the word of God spreads like dew-drops. In the book of Haggai, the prophet says that because the people of Israel did not employ themselves in rebuilding the temple of Jerusalem, 'the heaven over you [Israel] is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit' (Haggai, 1.10). Equally, in Blake's poem, 'To the Evening Star', mentioned previously, the poet writes: 'The fleeces of our flocks are cover'd with/ Thy sacred dew: protect them

20 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 16 vols, *Poetical Works*, ed. by J. C. C. Mays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), xvi, 1, 465.

with thine influence!<sup>21</sup> The archetype also relates to the promise of a redeemer, hence its absence from the New Testament. For the prophet Micah, Jacob's people, dispersed across other nations, will be 'as a dew from the Lord [...] that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men' (Micah, 5.7).

Hazlitt, as we have seen, had been prepared by his father from an early age to be a Unitarian Minister.<sup>22</sup> He had studied theology at New College, Hackney, and had thus acquired a thorough knowledge of the Bible.<sup>23</sup> He must, therefore, have been well acquainted with the multiple meanings of *dew* when he chose the word to express the spirit of hope and youth in the excerpt quoted above. However, the rich play on words in the passage points to the emphasis he places on the musicality of Coleridge's voice and makes palpable, borrowing an expression from 'On The Pleasure of Painting' (viii, 7), the moment when he first heard the preacher's words. To return to his account:

The sun that was still labouring pale and wan through the sky, obscured by thick mists, seemed an emblem of the *good cause*; and the cold dank drops of dew that hung half melted on the beard of the thistle, had something genial and refreshing in them [...]. (xvii, 108–9)

The description that precedes this excerpt, of Hazlitt's first arrival at the church, is inundated with musical impressions: the piping of an organ heard from the distance, the quotation from Milton's musical poem, *Comus*, to describe the sonorous voice of Coleridge,<sup>24</sup> and the contrast between a boy who leads the flock with a pipe and the other who sets the pace of battle with drums, to name only a few. In this respect, the excerpt is a corollary to these musical allusions. The sequence of nasal phonemes and semi-open vowels which runs through it – the /ʌ/ of *sun* and *hung*, the /v/ and /a/ of *wan* and *dank* respectively – seems to mimic the half-clouded skyscape that the author describes, engulfing the reader in an atmosphere at once penetrating (light breaking through the thick mists) and welcoming (the emblem of the *good cause*). In this semi-enclosed environment, the echo of Coleridge's 'congregated roar' becomes more audible. 'I had a sound in my ears,' said Hazlitt after bidding Coleridge farewell, 'it was the voice of Fancy' (xvii, 115). The sacred dew, however, produces silent music when it falls: 'that prayer might have floated in solemn silence through the universe' (xvii, 108). It requires a

21 *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 410. For an extensive study of Blake's interpretation of the Bible, and how the poet's exegesis centred more particularly on the Bible's imaginations and visions, rather than its moral virtues, see Christopher Rowland, *Blake and the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

22 Wu, *First Modern Man*, 61.

23 For the centrality of Bible studies in Hazlitt's early education, see Stephen Burley, *Hazlitt the Dissenter*. In Burley's words: 'The Bible was thus the keystone of his ministerial apprenticeship [...]. Stories from the Old and New Testaments were studied, discussed, and learned by heart until their narratives became second nature to him, interwoven in the fabric of his mind' (42).

24 The phrase 'rose like a stream of distilled perfume' is taken from John Milton's *Comus*, l. 556.



certain open-mindedness to listen to it. Suddenly loud and clear, it struck the ears in consonant alliteration: *dank drops of dew*. The dental voiced /d/, repeated three times in sequence and at the beginning of monosyllabic words, forms a sonorous suggestion of the minimalistic music which so much struck a chord with Hazlitt. However, in line with other twilight images, this too has a fleeting existence. The aspirated /h/ which immediately follows in another consonant alliteration, *hung half*, seems to push it away. Finally, the open sound of /a/ in *half* and *had* gives way to a rising day with its pronounced rhythm less wont to dreaminess and reveries.

Hazlitt's contribution to the history and form of essay writing is of course manifold and extends far beyond his own time. What I have attempted here is to shed light onto the poetical and inspiring energy that runs through his later essays precisely at those moments when he looks backwards to his first entrance to life, when nature itself, as he said, was clad in the spirit of youth and of hope. At these revealing moments, the essayist re-creates his Dissenting heritage, seen through the eyes of an artist. Although, as David Bromwich has acutely observed, 'for Hazlitt the loss of belief in God did unquestionably coincide with an awakened receptivity to art,'<sup>25</sup> it is also the case, as recent studies have shown, that he incorporated his early Dissenting education into a unique essay format, 'leaving religious faith quite out of the question' (vi, 183). Along with plain speaking – the combative polemical vigour of his prose and the extempore quality of his conversation – the archetypal images discussed here – the evening star and dew-drops – were wrought from an extensive tradition of Christian, and more specifically, Dissenting written culture. If the flowers of poetry are strewn round the borders of critical essay writing, equally, colours and sounds are patiently extracted from poetic subject matter – for, as Hazlitt observed, the prose essayist 'has a journey to go, sometimes through dirty roads, and at others through untrodden and difficult ways' (xii, 9).

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25 Bromwich, *The Mind of a Critic*, 6.



## WILLIAM HAZLITT: THROUGH THE EYES OF A CRITIC

Display at Tate Britain,  
29 September 2014 – 5 April 2015

Shortly after the 2014 Hazlitt Day-school on ‘Hazlitt and Art’, the display ‘William Hazlitt: Through the Eyes of a Critic’ opened at Tate Britain: one fairly small, unassuming room – a kind of appendix somewhat tucked away in the vast intestines of the grand riverside building – dedicated for half a year to Hazlitt’s art criticism. The man, I am sure, would have been delighted by such an absence of bombast, fuss, or even too dazzling a spotlight. How Hazlitt would have felt about becoming a part of the ‘BP Spotlight’ series, however – that PR-campaign attempting to divert attention away from the global energy giant’s long record of devastating natures human, faunal, vegetal, and maritime – is an altogether different question. Why a truly edifying and publicly educational exhibition such as this could not have been supported solely by public funds, rather than by allowing corporations to usurp public space in order to manipulate public opinion, is beyond my comprehension.

The display ‘William Hazlitt: Through the Eyes of a Critic’ in fact sets out on a note both educational and emancipatory. The third and final paragraph of the text panel introducing Hazlitt to today’s audience states that ‘Hazlitt’s writing appeared in widely read newspapers and periodicals at a time when public galleries were just beginning to be established and access to great paintings was limited’. Making art accessible to as wide a public as possible was of course what Hazlitt aimed to achieve, though certainly not at the expense of self-styled benefactors appropriating art for their own ideological, and thus ultimately financial, purposes. BP’s arts patronage is, after all, an investment aiming to secure the acquiescence, or at least complicity, of critical consumers. Thankfully, however, Hazlitt’s commentary, exhibited in the Tate alongside the paintings to which it relates, constitutes a strong indictment of any such self-interest too thinly veiled as benevolence.

From the outset, Hazlitt frees himself from being patronized. The very text panel that begins by introducing him as a ‘pioneering art critic’ ends by downplaying his uniqueness: ‘This display places some of Hazlitt’s influential comments on British art alongside paintings in the Tate collection, allowing us to consider the artist concerned through the eyes of *an* [my emphasis] early-nineteenth-century critic’. By contrast, the distinctiveness of the benefactor behind this seemingly free chunk of education, remains unquestioned: the name ‘BP’ is mentioned five times in the footer of the text panel with as few unnecessarily distracting words

as possible. Any problematic associations that the omnipresent description 'oil on canvas' suggests with elements outside of the gallery – sails, nature, water, and multicoloured streaks of hazardous petroleum shimmering on it with deceptive beauty – begin to seem too simple, too naïve, too childish to be permissible, let alone welcome. But still Hazlitt manages to keep his visitors from purchased acquiescence in posterity's manipulative patronage.

To the right of the introductory text panel, Hazlitt's famous 1802 self-portrait proves that he did in fact practise what he preached, that he was *almost* as good an artist as he was an art critic. What he set out to achieve in the painting, and later emphasized in his theory of 'gusto', then emerges most clearly, not between the history paintings and commentary exhibited on the next wall (proceeding clockwise), but at the far end of the room, with his treatment of Hogarth. Hogarth's paintings were, on the one hand, more deeply 'rooted in narrative' for Hazlitt than, for instance, Reynolds's *The Infant Samuel*. The text panel 'Hazlitt on history painting' explicates this distinction, and Reynolds's painting is shown along with the relevant extract from Hazlitt's 'Fine Arts' supplement to the 1816 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. More importantly, though, a citation from the same source placed next to the eighth (and final) plate of Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress* declares that Hogarth 'had an absolute power in moving the affections and rendering the hearts of the spectators, by depicting the effects of the most dreadful calamities of human life on common minds and common countenances.' This is 'gusto' par excellence, and Hogarth's plate – the famous 'Bedlam Scene' which Hazlitt found 'unanswerable proof' for his assertion – allows the spectator to scrutinize at first hand what the critic meant.

The plate's subject matter is the nemesis of Tom Rakewell, fallen from riches and privilege through his own pride and exorbitance. Rakewell's only remaining allegiance from his days of affluence is Sarah Young, the love he had then rejected. Affection, however one-sided (for in his madness he still rejects her), prevails in this smallest nucleus, regardless. And yet, the surrounding scene highlights not a degradation of the protagonist and his fellow inmates – their pursuits are no more laughable, though certainly more truthful, than those of the higher orders of society depicted on the preceding plates – but the dissimulations and detached, self-absorbed amusement of the two visiting ladies. These paying visitors, seemingly benevolent patrons, part with a (for them) negligible share of their funds, not to support the unfortunate victims of societal corruption, but to flatter their own vanity, purchase confidence, and be confirmed in their sense of superiority. Inequality is, by their patronage, consolidated psychologically so that it may, in the end, prevail materially. The 'dreadful calamity', then, is not that Rakewell has lost his mind and fortune; it is that he has become the instrumental vantage point against which the hypocrisies of hierarchy and inequality come to pass.

The craftsmanship underlying 'gusto' emerges more fully from the next printed quotation from Hazlitt, also taken from the 'Fine Arts' supplement to the 1816 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and exhibited next to Hogarth's *Henry the Eighth and Anne Boleyn*. 'Hogarth's pictures are true history,' Hazlitt writes here, going on to state that 'Every feature, limb, figure, group, is instinct with life and motion.' The

effect of this is that the ‘scene moves before you: the face is like a frame-work of flexible machinery’. The vivacity of the depicted scene reaches out into its historical context and is therefore (unlike Reynolds’s *Infant Samuel*) ‘the reverse of still life’. All the while, passions and nature prevail in Hogarth:

If the mouth is distorted with laughter, the eyes swim in laughter. If the forehead is knit together, the cheeks are puckered up. If a fellow squints most horribly, the rest of his face is awry. The muscles pull different ways, or the same way, at the same time, on the surface of the picture, as they do in the human body.

What this truthfulness accomplishes is, once more, not a celebration but a satire of power and hierarchy: the gloss of biased or commissioned historiography does not withstand the truthfulness of psychological motive reflected in Hogarth’s figures. The faces and body language of Henry VIII, Cardinal Wolsey, and Anne Boleyn tell the whole tale of power, desire, and intrigue, from the first moments of royal lechery via the inevitability of conflict to the denouement and triumph of the lecher. It is the contemporary equivalent of depicting the giant BP as the usurper of new lands in order to frack the life out of them for immediate, unsustainable gratification, against the half-hearted resistance of not-quite-powerful-enough landowners and with the full awareness that the bill for the long-term devastation caused will be footed by someone else.

This point naturally leads me on to ‘Hazlitt on landscape’, the next section of the display. The first words on the accompanying text panel, that ‘Hazlitt’s comments on landscape generally confirm his preference for true to life and highly finished depictions of nature over idealized scenes’, highlight what I have already observed in relation to human nature. It is a matter of imitation over idealization. Artistic licence here, too, ought to render things as they are, and not as they should be or should have been, in order to free itself from the corrupting interference of the artist’s – and behind that, quite possibly a patron’s – interest. The section’s text panel points out how relevant the conclusions that Hazlitt drew from this principle still are, and ultimately states that, despite his overall admiration for Turner, Hazlitt’s criticism of the painter was that ‘Turner’s work was more about the way he painted than the subject itself’. This becomes clearer in the passage from Hazlitt’s ‘Review of works at the British Institution’, originally printed in the *Morning Chronicle* on 5 February 1814 and here exhibited next to Turner’s grand *Apullia in Search of Appullus*. Hazlitt’s initial praise of the painting’s ‘powerful execution’ soon grows faint. He ironically mentions as its ‘one recommendation’, its composition, borrowed ‘verbatim’ from Claude Lorrain’s *A River Landscape with Jacob and Laban and his Daughters*, owned by Turner’s patron Lord Egremont. Hazlitt’s praise and playfulness, in his unique manner, only prepare the ground for the severest, most direct criticism to be levelled against Turner. ‘The figures in the present picture are execrable’, Hazlitt writes, adding that ‘they are impudent and obtrusive vulgarity’. Their stylized rendering is, for him, a gross violation of the

duty that the artist has to truth, and stands in stark contrast both to Turner's skill in depicting the borrowed subject matter as well as to Hogarth's achievements.

And while the Tate's text panel on 'Hazlitt and landscape' alerts the audience to the fact that Hazlitt preferred Gainsborough's early 'imitations of nature' to his later 'ideal of common life', Hazlitt's commentary from *The Champion* of 31 July 1814 entitled 'On Gainsborough's Pictures', placed next to 'The Bridge', concludes the display by emphasizing this distinction. Gainsborough's 'subjects', Hazlitt elaborates, 'are softened and sentimentalized too much' in the process of artistic idealization. Hence it is 'not simple, unaffected nature that we see, but nature sitting for her picture'. Whilst the aesthetic consequence is a 'regular insipidity' and 'systematic vacancy [...] to which real nature is a stranger', Gainsborough's 'gloss of art' stems from an 'idea existing in the painter's mind' that distracts from his 'studies of natural history', denies nature's autonomy, and so opens it up to third-party appropriation. This is Hazlitt's warning to us that reverberates throughout the display and flies in the two faces of his unwanted patron. We had better heed it.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**Stephen Burley, *Hazlitt the Dissenter: Religion, Philosophy, and Politics, 1766–1816***

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Stephen Burley's *Hazlitt the Dissenter: Religion, Philosophy, and Politics, 1766–1816* significantly alters our understanding of Hazlitt's intellectual contribution to Romantic writing, culture, and literary criticism, moving beyond the work of such figures as John Kinnaird (1978), David Bromwich (1983), Tom Paulin (1998), and Duncan Wu (2008) 'by exploring the myriad ways in which [Hazlitt's] work seeks to recover the lost cultural, intellectual, and political legacies that were central to his identity as a nonconformist' (3). Burley shifts the emphasis away from Hazlitt's later career as a journalist, lecturer, and critic towards his early years, when his writings and philosophical ideals were more reflective of 'rational' Christianity than Romanticism, grounded more in eighteenth-century religious Dissent than nineteenth-century secularism. During this phase of Hazlitt's career, he was a writer of books and editions rather than reviews and essays, and his major turning point was not his meeting with Wordsworth and Coleridge at Nether Stowey in 1798, as is generally perceived, but rather his experiences at the Unitarian college in Hackney in the mid-1790s and his response to the death of Pitt in 1806.

Hazlitt's identification with Dissent began prior to college, however, through the tutelage of his father, William Hazlitt, Sr. (1737–1820), Unitarian minister at Wem, Shropshire, from 1787 to 1813. Burley provides a full accounting of the life and writings of Hazlitt, Sr., including his place within the Priestley circle of the 1760s and 1770s, his role in bringing Unitarianism to New England, and his efforts to prepare his son for the Dissenting ministry. Burley demonstrates conclusively through a discussion of his published writings and his activities in America as a Unitarian missionary (1783–7) that Hazlitt's father was not only a significant influence on his son but also a major figure in the early development of Unitarianism in England and America in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. His father educated young William for the Dissenting ministry, and to complete his studies, sent him to New College, Hackney in 1793, a 'centre of unrestricted intellectual inquiry founded on the principle of religious tolerance' in 1787 (6), Burley writes, where Hazlitt studied until 1795, a year before the college closed its doors as a result of a variety of theological disputes, personal

animosities, radical political intrigues, and financial woes. Founded by a mix of Arians and Socinians, including Gilbert Wakefield, Andrew Kippis, Abraham Rees, Thomas Belsham, Richard Price, and Joseph Priestley, New College was from its beginning a hotbed of 'radicalism and revolution' (53). It sought to bring change to English Christianity through open inquiry, not creedal confirmation, but in so doing, became known more for its scepticism than its faith. Such open enquiry and diversity of opinions would prove too much for the faith of many of its students, including a young Hazlitt, more sympathetic by 1795 to Godwin and Holcroft than his father and Priestley (89). Based on an array of little-known archival resources, Burley's examination of Hazlitt's years at New College not only sheds new light 'on the history of metropolitan radicalism in the 1790s' but also on Hazlitt's career as a writer, for it was here that he was introduced to 'books, ideas, and people' (55) that would have a lasting influence on him for the remainder of his life, especially his writings between 1805 and 1816, when Hazlitt exchanged the materialism and determinism of Priestley for the idealism of Price and the doctrine of disinterestedness (7).

Burley argues that Hazlitt's rejection of Priestley's self-centred materialist philosophy was one of the chief reasons for his decision to quit New College and the Unitarian ministry. Within a few years Hazlitt would also reject Wordsworth's 'passive' mind, opting for something closer to Godwin's social state of disinterested benevolence, a condition, however, Hazlitt never restricted to a future perfection in humanity but rather something capable of being enacted by the human will in the present moment (100). Some of these ideas appeared in Hazlitt's first publication, *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805), which, though not widely discussed, is central to Hazlitt's thought, Burley argues, for it is in this work that Hazlitt sets forth his desire to overturn two of the leading principles of late eighteenth-century English philosophy:

first, the belief that every human action – even the most apparently benevolent – derives from originally selfish motives; and second, that the doctrine of the mechanical association of ideas accounts for all of the operations of the mind. (102)

To Burley, Hazlitt's argument for disinterestedness is not based on the material senses as much as the imagination, emancipating 'the future from the claims of philosophical necessity' (103) that, in this regard, positions him closer to Kant and the Scottish Common Sense philosophers than Priestley and the Unitarians.

Burley presents a young Hazlitt confident enough in his philosophical ideas to upend long-held views among Unitarians like Priestley and Belsham about the nature of man: to Hazlitt, we do not temper over time our innate self-love with enlightened disinterestedness, but rather we acquire habits of self-love that, as we age, diminish our original state of disinterestedness (104–5). By rejecting a view of human nature bound by self-love and a mind dependent upon the senses, Hazlitt created a basis for the formative power of the human mind. He expanded upon these ideas in *An Abridgement of the Light of Nature Pursued by Abraham Tucker*



(1807), *A New and Improved Grammar of the English Tongue* (1809), and *A History of English Philosophy* (an abstract was printed in 1809 and 1813, though many of his ideas were presented in a series of lectures in 1812) (119). In these works Hazlitt makes a case for the power of the human mind to embrace the noumenal as well as the phenomenal world, a continuation of his rejection of Lockean sensationalism. Though the nature of his writing would change dramatically upon the commencement of his position as a journalist for James Perry's *Morning Chronicle* shortly after his 1812 lecture series, Hazlitt's opposition to the 'modern Philosophy' was clearly honed in the preceding two decades in his thoughts and writings about language, human nature, and the powers of the mind.

These ideas were also influential in his other writings from the first decade of the nineteenth century – *Free Thoughts on Public Affairs* (1806), *The Eloquence of the British Senate* (1807), *A Reply to Malthus's Essay on Population* (1807), and *Memoirs of Thomas Holcroft* (composed in 1809–10, but not published until 1816) – writings directed now toward politics, public affairs, and religious Dissent, the latter clearly informing, according to Burley, Hazlitt's response to the death of Pitt, the failure of Fox and the Administration of the Talents, and even (later in life) the legacy of Napoleon. Burley challenges a body of recent critical opinion attaching Hazlitt to 'an idealized form of eighteenth-century Whiggism' (7), drawing instead upon previously unexplored material 'to show that Hazlitt's political radicalism was deeply indebted to the practices of eighteenth-century Rational Dissent' (8). Burley bolsters his argument with some previously unattributed writings of Hazlitt in Cobbett's *Political Register*, presenting a connection between Hazlitt and Cobbett much closer than previously thought as both men around 1806 sought to 'combat the parliamentary endeavours of the Foxite Whigs.' '[D]rawing heavily on the historicizing and obituarizing practices of eighteenth-century Rational dissent,' Burley presents a Hazlitt determined to 'recover independent forms of opposition in order to renovate the corrupted political culture of the early nineteenth century' (8).

To Hazlitt, Pitt's long war with France saw the rise of a corrupt form of patriotic sentiment (132), a trend that could have been reversed after Pitt's death if the nation's leaders had adopted a 'virtuous, honourable, and pacific foreign and domestic policy founded on honest patriotism and disinterested motives,' grounded in 'love of liberty' and 'hatred of oppression' (135). Heavily influenced by the writings of radical religious Dissenters (supporters of both the American and French revolutions) that valorized the liberty of the common man against an overbearing state, Hazlitt found his allegiance to these opinions by 1806 closer to Cobbett than the Foxite Whigs (137). Hazlitt's *Eloquence of the British Senate* was, in essence, an historical survey of the rise and eventual 'debasement of liberty at the hands of corrupt and disingenuous parliamentarians' and the Crown (138). The men of the earlier Commonwealth possessed 'gusto' in their speeches and liberty in their ideals, but by the end of the eighteenth century, that gusto was gone and with it, true Whiggism, a victim of the corruption that originated with Walpole and was perfected by Pitt. Pitt's father, along with the eloquent Burke and a flamboyant Charles James Fox, offered glimpses of a return to traditional English liberties, the oratory of these men not far removed from the fiery sermons of

Dissenting preachers prior to the onset of a general political ‘apostasy’ in the 1790s. Burley extends our understanding and appreciation of Hazlitt’s early writings far beyond previous assessments, arguing that Hazlitt’s *Eloquence* reclaims ‘the rhetoric and idioms of bold, non-partisan political opposition in order to recover a powerful weapon of resistance against the legacy of Pittite Britain’ (148). In his *Reply to Malthus* (1807), which appeared in Cobbett’s *Register*, Hazlitt officially broke with the surviving remnant of the Foxite Whigs, viewing them as ‘apostates’ and proposing a new radicalism based on disinterestedness and altruism (149), ‘something of a compromise’, Burley suggests, ‘between the impracticability of Godwinian optimism and the nihilism of Malthusian necessity’ (157).

Hazlitt’s Dissenting past comes into play in much of this discussion, for it was the Dissenters who fought against corruption in the previous centuries just as Hazlitt was doing *circa* 1806, though by that date many Dissenters were acting more like Tories than traditional Whigs. It was that earlier ‘legacy’, however, that Burley is convinced Hazlitt refused to relinquish, but its demise within his own day inevitably led to a ‘mournful, elegiac tone’ in his writings, reflecting ‘an underlying entropy’ that led to ‘disillusionment’ (160). Since the old radical voice had been corrupted, Hazlitt called for a new radicalism similar to that offered by Holcroft in the early 1790s, a figure who served *circa* 1810 as one of Hazlitt’s ‘disinterested patriots’ (163). Holcroft was to Hazlitt an emblem of a Jacobin tradition Pitt had tried to destroy but one that, through the ‘obituarizing tendencies’ gained from his Dissenting past, Hazlitt reconstructs through ‘elegy and lament into polemic’, with Holcroft becoming ‘a living symbol of radical resistance’ (163). Hazlitt links biography (Holcroft) with Dissenting history and traditions (Hazlitt’s cherished past) to form a continuous legacy of radical opposition to corruption in Crown and parliament emblemized in the ultimate human example, the life of Christ. As Burley so eloquently and persuasively argues in his conclusion, Dissent to Hazlitt was ‘not simply the religious and cultural milieu’ that framed his upbringing, ‘but rather a felt presence throughout his canon of writings’ (166), a presence that shaped his literary, political, and religious thought as early as 1795 during his last year at Hackney New College, some three years prior to his meeting with Coleridge and Wordsworth in the West Country and his introduction to Romantic ideology. As Burley’s book makes clear, the claim that 1798 is the pivotal year in Hazlitt’s intellectual growth demands serious reconsideration.

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**Duncan Wu (ed.), *All That Is Worth Remembering: Selected Essays of William Hazlitt***

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By aficionados and non-aficionados alike, Hazlitt is frequently referred to as 'full of contradictions.' The epithet is not necessarily pejorative, but it can often sound so when applied to him. Partly the problem lies in the double meaning of contradiction. In its primary etymological sense, contradiction is the act of *speaking against* somebody or something – and every reader of the Cockney Aristotle would agree that he is a virtuoso in this art. But often when reference is made to Hazlitt as a 'contradictory' writer, there is another sense at work, one that is not always fully articulated, of the essayist as an inconsistent or purely tactical thinker, an intellectual opportunist. Though not without foundation, I think this view is ultimately inaccurate, and often the product of mere local exasperation, or sheer laziness, on our part. For the fact is that contradiction *as* self-contradiction, whether within or between essays, is generally a highly self-conscious act in Hazlitt's writings, and one not solely brought about by the exigencies of periodical journalism. That he often exchanged positions and argued against some of his own favourite propositions is readily and universally acknowledged. But what we might do well to remember, now and again, is that there is invariably an underlying logic to these seemingly whimsical reversals. Looked at with the proper degree of detachment, they can be seen as the conscious willed expression of a felt Romantic tension. In *All That is Worth Remembering* Duncan Wu's new selection of seven of Hazlitt's most characteristic performances, we can see an admirable illustration of this principle, for in it Hazlitt emerges as a writer as mobile as he is irascible, always contradictory and yet never merely self-cancelling.

One thing that Wu's selection does, better than any other currently on the market, is dramatize how Hazlitt can appear to take both sides in a debate, across or even within individual essays, and yet remain perfectly consistent at another, higher level. At the beginning of the seminal essay 'On Reason and Imagination' (1822), for example, we find Hazlitt insisting on the insufficiency of moral generalities, arguing that it is 'individual impressions' that seize the imagination, excite the passions, and provide the conduit to moral truth. 'Moral and poetical truth is like expression in a picture,' he argues, 'the one is not to be attained by smearing over a large canvas, nor the other by bestriding a large topic' (85).

Suppose, for instance, that in the discussions of the Slave-Trade a description to the life was given of the horrors of the *Middle Passage* (as it was termed), that you saw the manner in which thousands of wretches, year after year, were stowed together in the hold of a slave-ship, without air, without light, without

food, without hope, so that what they suffered in reality was brought home to you in imagination, till you felt in sickness of heart as one of them, could it be said that this was a prejudging of the case, that your knowing the extent of the evil disqualified you from pronouncing sentence upon it, and that your disgust and abhorrence were the effects of a heated imagination? No. Those evils that inflame the imagination and make the heart sick, ought not to leave the head cool. (70–1)

Expatiating further on the importance of an imaginative sympathy, or moral sense, in matters of social and political morality, Hazlitt goes on to criticize Rousseau, one of the champions of modern freedom, for the uncharacteristically passionless approach that he adopted in his *Social Contract*, considering it a work ‘too ambitious of an exceedingly technical and scientific mode of reasoning’ (81). Here Rousseau is contrasted with his near contemporary Edmund Burke, whom Hazlitt praises for his defence of ‘the moral uses of the imagination’, while also suggesting, as it were by way of a cautionary supplement, that the latter was ‘himself one of the grossest instances of its abuse’ (81). By cultivating a particular network of examples (and not letting thoughts of Burke’s ‘abuse’ derail his local argument), ‘On Reason and Imagination’ manages to imply that the imagination is not only kind and sympathetic in nature, it is also naturally in league with liberal humanist values. ‘The boundary of our sympathy,’ Hazlitt writes, ‘is a circle which enlarges itself according to its propulsion from the centre – the heart. If we are imbued with a deep sense of individual weal or woe, we shall be awe-struck at the idea of humanity in general’ (85).

Appropriately enough, therefore, ‘On Reason and Imagination’ concludes by putting ‘Reason’ in its place. In this essay it is depicted as a cold thing when there is no imaginative sympathy to warm it. And yet in the very next piece in Wu’s selection, the same, or a very similar opposition of values is seen from an inverted perspective. In ‘On the Spirit of Monarchy’, which was written a year after ‘On Reason and Imagination’, the imaginative focus on individual objects is no longer slave-freeing but slavish; it leads not to humanitarian sympathy but to displaced narcissism and idolatry. ‘The slave admires the tyrant,’ Hazlitt writes, ‘because the last *is*, what the first *would be*. He surveys himself all over in the glass of royalty’ (88). Suddenly and without warning, all the polarities of the previous essay have been reversed. Imaginative projection, which had fought so heroically through the deadening world of statistics in the passage quoted on the Slave Trade, is here shown clinging to the self-deluding fictions of monarchy: ‘Man is a poetical animal, and delights in fiction,’ Hazlitt opines, ‘There is something in the mock-sublimity of thrones, wonderfully congenial to the human mind’ (89). The essay continues, and as Imagination’s stock falls, that of Reason rises: ‘Oh, Reason! When will thy long minority expire!’ he cries, near the middle, ‘it is not now the fashion to make Gods of wood and stone and brass, but we make kings of common men, and are proud of our own handiwork’ (96). Later, ‘On the Spirit of Monarchy’ tries to move towards something like a conclusion:

That which is true, the understanding ratifies: that which is good, the heart owns: all other claims are spurious, vitiated, mischievous, false – fit only for those who are sunk below contempt, or raised above opinion. (106)

In one sense, this might appear to settle the matter – and to act as an apt conclusion to the earlier essay as well. But it is to Hazlitt's credit that he seems deeply suspicious of all such pat resolutions even when in the act of presenting them – and to seize eagerly on the next opportunity to re-open the debate.

How can the imagination be presented as a hero one minute and a slave the next? Surely Hazlitt contradicts himself, if not within then at least across these two essays? In Wu's clever juxtaposition we are positively invited to see this tension, and yet we are also shown how the problem might be more apparent than real. Let us think for a moment about what the essays have in common. Both are written from an unambiguously radical position: both are in favour of 'humanity' and against 'tyranny'. This much is certain, and this much is consistent. The only thing that is inconsistent in the two essays is the angle from which the essayist attacks the seminal opposition between 'reason' (rationality, statistics, social science) and 'imagination' (moral sense, aesthetic suggestibility, individual experience). In each case the battle lines are marked out slightly differently, and the particular realm and mode of contest is altered as a result. And what we discover from these moveable bouts is that Hazlitt is far less interested in providing lasting formulations of the relative merits of reason and imagination (say) than he is in dramatizing the continuing struggle between them, both out there in the world of experience, and in the mind of the essayist himself.

What essays such as 'On Reason and Imagination' provide, then, is not a definition of the moral sense *per se*, but a depiction of the processes of that sense in action, as it struggles into being, and as it competes with reason's claims. Like a true essayist Hazlitt is committed to trial – *expérience* – experiment – and it is for this reason that he is so willing to return to the same issue over and over again. When arguing in company, friends remembered how Hazlitt would struggle over his formulations, framing them and reframing them, until he was satisfied he had got his point across. Clearly, for him, the communication of truth, in conversation as in writing, was something living and contingent, a thing of the moment whose effect would not last forever. Hence his anxious sense that in the pursuit of truth the performance is as important as the product; hence also his neo-pugilistic eagerness to make his blows *tell*. The paradoxes, or apparent self-contradictions, in his work, such as the ambiguity surrounding the political nature of the imagination, were for him primarily tensions to be inhabited, vital contests to be re-enacted, before they were problems to be solved. It is for this reason, I think, that he is not as worried as some of his readers have been about the apparent inconsistencies in his work. However partisan he was, and there was never any doubt which side his bread was buttered on, politics for him was always less about picking a party (for he had made his choice on that matter long before), than it was about understanding the true nature of the battle. Hence his perverse fondness for ventriloquizing all sides.

One final and even more striking example of Hazlitt's dialectical suppleness is contained in two of his best essays, which are both included in Wu's new selection, and once again placed next to one another. They are the essays 'Sir Walter Scott' (1824) and 'The New School of Reform' (1826). Of the struggles played over in these two essays, that between reason and imagination is again a feature, but even more prominent are the oppositions between the past and the future, and between culture and morality. Wu puts the essay on Scott first – and reminds us what a wonderful performance it is. Scott is a novelistic Shakespeare, Hazlitt announces, the creator of a new edition of human nature – but he is also a loyalist who has prostituted his genius to Toryism. Imaginatively, Hazlitt is strongly drawn to Scott's investment in the good, old times of English and Scottish history, but politically he feels he has to deplore the latter's resistance to 'improvement'. Viewed as a whole, the essay is one of Hazlitt's subtlest and best 'Characters', balancing acute aesthetic appreciation against unshakeable political disapproval. But wonderful as it is, it looks even more interesting when read alongside 'The New School of Reform'.

In the Scott essay Hazlitt gets a certain kind of critical – and comic – purchase by adopting a quasi-rationalist line on the author of *Waverley's* literary performances. Speaking of a moment in *Ivanhoe* he writes:

And it is at this moment (when the heart is kindled and bursting with indignation at the revolting abuses of self-constituted power) that Sir Walter *stops the press* to have a sneer at the people, and to put a spoke (as he thinks) in the wheel of upstart innovation! [...] The Author of *Waverley* might just as well get up and make a speech at a dinner at Edinburgh, abusing Mr McAdam for his improvements in the roads, on the ground that they were nearly *impassable* in many places 'sixty years hence'; or object to Mr Peel's Police-Bill, by insisting that Hounslow Heath was formerly a scene of greater interest and terror to highwaymen and travellers, and cut a greater figure in the *Newgate Calendar* than it does at present. (125–6)

'Improvement' is here the perfect stick with which to beat Scott, and make fun of his disingenuous nostalgia. So far, so straightforward. But no sooner do we open the pages of 'The New School of Reform' than we find that we are plunged back into the same argument, only this time the daggers have been switched. Suddenly Scott has become the tool with which to beat up the philosophical radicals, his work providing, it would now seem, the perfect counter and antidote to their new-fangled 'police-philosophy'. The philosophy of the utilitarians pretends to be about pleasure, Hazlitt argues, but in fact it's a form of puritanism disguised. It is at war with all art and culture, everything that makes life worth living. Notwithstanding Scott's unfortunate Toryism, Hazlitt turns Scott's work into a symbol of all those things that Bentham, Mill, and Malthus have excised from their moral economy, and uses it to critique their hedonistic calculus in its own terms. One reason the new school of reform cannot forgive the author of *Waverley*, Hazlitt argues, is that 'he has enlarged our sympathy with human happiness beyond their pragmatistical limits' (133). What Scott has shown, in other words, is that there is a form of

pleasure – imaginative, fictive, nostalgic, utopian – that has not been dreamt of by the utilitarian philosophy. To Hazlitt, Bentham's much-touted pleasure principle has been flatly refuted by *Waverley's* popular success.

In one sense, of course, it is an index of Hazlitt's Romanticism that he should so often have found himself see-sawing between such positions, now championing Scott against Bentham, now Bentham against Scott, suspended forever, as it were, between reason and imagination, past and present. But the really distinctive thing about him was not his occupation of this interstitial realm *per se*, for Godwin, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey and Shelley were all, to a greater or lesser extent, stuck in that very same no-man's land with him. What was distinctive was the splendid rhetorical drama that he made out of his lack of a political home. And it is for this reason, I think, that there often seems something utopian about Hazlitt's self-contradictions or 'paradoxes', as he himself preferred to describe them. They are utopian in the sense that they often look forward to possible future resolutions even if they seldom seem able to achieve or even envisage those resolutions themselves. At the most downright political level, Hazlitt often had difficulty looking forward. Reformist optimism, of the kind that Leigh Hunt had in abundance, was not in his nature. But in his ability to throw together political opposites and ride them alternately and dialectically, he does provide a powerful model, if not a manifesto, of free, progressive thought.

Several other very Hazlittian oppositions get worked out in Wu's delightful collection: between the French and the English, between those with 'gusto' like Milton, who bring a kind of visceral impact to everything they do, and those, like Shakespeare and Claude, who are always hurrying away from their subject and neglecting to deliver the knockout blow. There is also that between the spirit of party (prejudiced and unthinking) and the spirit of writers (who are not good joiners, essentially because they are always arguing with one another). Taken together, the seven essays collected here cover the whole spectrum of Hazlitt's journalistic career, beginning in the 1810s and running through to 1830. They also reflect the astonishing range and intensity of his intellectual and emotional interests. Hazlitt's oeuvre being what it is, there is still plenty of room in the catalogue for more selections from the writings, but Wu's Notting Hill Editions volume is a very welcome addition to the fold.

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**David Higgins, *Romantic Englishness: Local, National and Global Selves, 1780–1850***

pp. xi + 225. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. £55.00

Perceptions of English national identity now stand at the centre of controversies about both education and political power in the UK. Policymakers claim, for instance, that the national curriculum in English and History should teach ‘the national narrative’. Such pronouncements tend to posit a strong distinction between English and British identities, while, at the same time, subordinating Europe and the wider world. But does it have to be like that? Why shouldn’t constructions of Englishness be, if not radically rejected (‘I’ve never really understood the point of nations’, protested Hans Magnus Enzensberger; no-one listened), at least formed in the light of a concern with a larger scale, even a global one?

David Higgins’s timely book shows that during the Romantic period the pressure of the global on the local did shape discursive constructions of English identity. The book’s ‘key area of interest [is] localized autobiographical representations in relation to national and transnational formations’ (9). In Higgins’s view, the influence of Linda Colley’s *Britons* (1992) has obscured the importance of Englishness in the period. He is careful to point out that such categories were (as they still are) unstable: there was considerable ‘discursive slippage between Englishness and Britishness’ (107). But the writers whose broadly autobiographical works Higgins discusses – William Cowper, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Samuel Bamford, Thomas Bewick, William Cobbett, John Clare, William Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, and Thomas De Quincey – are all concerned with asserting or exploring an English identity. It is striking that with one minor exception the authors just listed are all male. In the ‘Introduction’, in which terms such as ‘complex’, ‘heterogeneous’, ‘porous’, and ‘surprising’ seem a little awkwardly overworked, Higgins offers an apology and an explanation for this predominance of masculinities: female writers were not ‘invested in Englishness (specifically) in the same ways, or to the same extent’ (14). This may be debatable; but the tight organization of the chapters that follow amply justifies Higgins’s selection of material.

Chapter 1 investigates the ‘glocal’ vision of Cowper. This is a happy starting point, especially given that Cowper is still too often treated as a minor ‘pre-Romantic’. Beginning from the neglected pro-exploration and anti-slavery poem ‘Charity’, Higgins nicely outlines the influence of travel literature on Cowper’s verse. ‘For Cowper, knowing the world was carried out through a process of sympathetic identification’, and Higgins points out that some of his favourite conceits involve the idea that reading in a particular locality ‘transports the self geographically and allows for a glocal vision’ (25). Drawing on Cowper’s letters, Higgins concludes the chapter with readings of passages of *The Task*, from which

he quotes generously. It becomes apparent that the poem's speaker is both 'static and shifting', rooted in a bucolic England yet ranging in imagination across and beyond the empire.

Here, as elsewhere in the book, I felt that Higgins underplays religious concerns. (There is a brief exception when Higgins acknowledges the effect of the model of dissenting confessional autobiography on Bewick's *Memoir*, 78.) Not only is Cowper's poetic stance indebted to his evangelicalism, but it seems to me that he also registers religious unease about his own position in a retired 'nook' through allusions to Milton. Reading reports of world affairs in a newspaper, he comments: 'Tis pleasant through the loop-holes of retreat/ To peep at such a world' (qtd. 38). The 'loop-holes' recall *Paradise Lost* (book 9, l.1110), where they appear in the context of Adam and Eve's state of newly acquired guilt. Further, Cowper describes himself as 'Thus sitting and surveying thus at ease [...]' (qtd. 38). The line recalls the 'soft and pampered Sofa' with which *The Task* began; but it also invites comparison of the narrative voice with the fallen angel Belial's recommendation of 'ease' in Hell, the ultimate exotic destination: 'Is this then worst,/ Thus sitting, thus consulting, thus in arms?' (*Paradise Lost*, book 2, ll. 227, 163–4, italics mine). Cowper's ambivalence towards his own 'glocalism' may thus be even greater than Higgins suggests. In any case, however, Cowper's combination of faith in the superiority of English religious and political principles with dismay about the actual effects of imperialism proves paradigmatic for Higgins's argument.

Given the importance of Cowper to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Higgins's transition in Chapter 2 to the Wordsworths and Coleridge is apt. Like Cowper, for instance, Coleridge in 'Fears in Solitude' (1798) anxiously surveys a war-torn, slavery-ridden world from the temporary safety of a rural idyll. Higgins's terms enable him to account convincingly for the poem's uneasiness: the imaginative movement from locality outwards to the whole 'native Isle' of Britain is followed not by a return to the 'soft and silent spot' but rather by 'a retreat into a domestic fantasy of universal benevolence'. This benevolence is a fantasy because it cannot extend to Britain's nearest neighbour, the 'Impious and false' French nation (63).

The next two chapters focus, by contrast, on working-class writers. In Cobbett, who was forced to leave England twice, Higgins discovers a now-familiar pattern: *Rural Rides* (1830) portrays 'the ramifications of [Cobbett's] experience of the English countryside within wider geopolitical contexts' (64). Only apparently 'insular' (68) and opposed to cosmopolitanism, Cobbett's work in fact shows an acute understanding of the 'capitalistic systems fundamental to Britain's global power' (71). And even the little-known writers Bewick and Bamford, we learn, struggle productively in their attempts to assert an autonomous, unified idea of England.

Chapter 5, 'William Hazlitt's Englishness', which provides a detailed reading of 'The Fight', will be of particular interest to readers of this journal. By explaining the features that Hazlitt's essay shares with the contemporary patriotic and masculine genre of pugilistic literature, Higgins reveals its original qualities. In contrast to Tom Paulin's well-known reading, Higgins is less concerned

with pugilism as a metaphor for plain speaking than with 'The Fight' as 'a self-consciously public document' (112). This approach makes it interesting to consider Hazlitt's manuscript draft of the essay, as published by Stuart C. Wilcox in *Hazlitt in the Workshop* (1943). Higgins notes that in this manuscript, the pose of bellicose English manliness is disrupted by confessional passages about Hazlitt's love for Sarah Walker. Although Hazlitt wisely removed these passages for the publication, re-deploying some of them in *Liber Amoris*, an incongruous sentimentality remains in 'The Fight' in the form of references to Rousseau. Higgins's explanation neatly exemplifies his critical approach throughout the book:

That the appearance of Rousseau's novel [*La Nouvelle Héloïse*] may strike us as a rather unconvincing *deus ex machina* is because the discursive contradictions that lie behind 'The Fight' are beyond repair. Hazlitt is trying to find an ideal of masculine Englishness that can contain his Jacobinical political views and the confessional writing with which they were associated. But pugilism's association with the crudest nationalism and monarchism was so powerful that it was impossible, even for Hazlitt, to redescribe it in those terms. (125)

Hazlitt has to look beyond England, to a Swiss-French writer, to construct a paradoxical kind of English national identity.

The next chapter, which discusses several essays and letters of Charles Lamb, is another highlight of the book. Higgins deftly traces the ambivalence of Lamb's thought-experiments about the 'orient': Elia's localized and parochial identity took shape under the ironic pressure of the tobacco-smoking, East India Company employee's conscious recognition of his dependence on imperial trade. Higgins's conclusion, which also informs the discussion of De Quincey's essay 'The English Mail-Coach' in the final chapter, is persuasive:

Lamb may seek to identify himself as a 'Christian, Englishman, Londoner, *Templar*' but his writings consistently undermine the stability of such categories, and the idea that intense local attachments separate the English self from the rest of the world. (161)

Again, though, a nuance may be overlooked where religious identity is concerned. In a letter to the explorer Thomas Manning, Lamb 'presents himself as a religious fanatic' (155), to be sure, but when he exhorts Manning to leave China, I suspect a diabolical pun. Lamb's exhortation: 'Come out of Babylon [...] for [...] the child that is native, and the Proselyte of her gates, shall kindle and *smoke together*' (italics mine) is perfectly consonant with the doggerel poem 'A Farewell to Tobacco' that Higgins discussed earlier in the chapter.

*Romantic Englishness* is a suggestive and thought-provoking rather than an encyclopaedic book. Its tone is modest, and Higgins tactfully avoids placing too strong an emphasis on one of the aspects of Englishness that he finds attractive:

an attitude of ecological concern towards particular localities. Indeed, his chapter on Clare warns against 'an ecocritical tendency to fetishize the local' (108). It is consistent, then, that the book should conclude by deploring the inadequacy of present-day ways of imagining nationhood to the task of addressing environmental disaster. Higgins has no ready solution to this problem, of course. But Romantic writers, he suggests, may at least help us to think about what 'a confident and tolerant acceptance of the global ramifications of the local' (175) should involve.

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REPORT ON THE 13TH HAZLITT  
DAY-SCHOOL AND 2014  
ANNUAL HAZLITT LECTURE

‘HAZLITT AND ART’

University College London, 20 September 2014

*Philipp Hunnekuhl*

By an unexpected coincidence, the theme of the 2014 Day-school, ‘Hazlitt and Art’, happened to overlap with the Hazlitt display at Tate Britain (reported separately in this issue) and the related symposium that took place at the National Gallery on 28 November 2014. At first glance, it might have seemed that the Day-school’s venue and visuals could hardly compete with the aura, to borrow Walter Benjamin’s famous term,<sup>1</sup> that greeted the visitors at Tate Britain and the National Gallery: the grand architecture, the display of original paintings, and the presence of academic celebrities like A. C. Grayling and Peter de Bolla. In the less glamorous environment of UCL’s seminar rooms, the Day-school’s speakers – Eleanor Relle, Luisa Calè, Daniel Lago Monteiro, Lisa Milroy, and Martin Postle – had to rely on electronic reproductions of those works of art that illustrated their Hazlittian talks. Without extraneous distractions, however, the Day-school’s participants were able to engage all the more closely and directly with the new perspectives on Hazlitt and art that the speakers provided throughout the day.

Eleanor Relle from the Maidstone Art Gallery made the start. Her paper, entitled ‘Mr Railton: Was Peggy Hazlitt Right? The Hazlitt Collection at the Maidstone Art Gallery’, was very much concerned with the means and motives of mechanically reproducing works of art in Hazlitt’s day. What emerged most impressively from Relle’s paper were the material circumstances that enabled Hazlitt to transport the old masters out of the awe-inspiring context of the gallery, and make them more directly accessible to a British audience. Relle’s positivity and vigour as a speaker and intellectual impressed, not only during the course of her paper, but throughout the day: her lively, insightful, and inquiring contributions sustained

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1 Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999), 211–44.

every single paper's discussion, all the way through to the concluding drinks and round table at the Marlborough Arms.

Both speakers on the late-morning panel – Luisa Calè (Birkbeck) and Daniel Lago Monteiro (São Paulo) – subsequently provided plenty of contextual information and digressions during their talks. But this was no mean feat, because from time to time, when the audience found themselves on territory that was either too familiar or seemingly irrelevant – and were hence on the verge of distraction – unexpected and original reflections on Hazlitt caught them off-guard.<sup>2</sup> Calè explored the interrelation of different art genres and media in the Romantic period, and situated Hazlitt's role in it. Monteiro spent a fair amount of time describing his digital images of familiar paintings by Hazlitt, but the audience was kept engaged by sudden offerings of startling new perspectives on, and connections between, these images, prompting clear and compelling new insights into the persistent influence of Hazlitt's Dissenting background.

After lunch, Lisa Milroy from UCL's own Slade School of Art presented an intriguing foray into her practices as an artist in the light, mainly, of Hazlitt's essay 'On the Pleasure of Painting'. Showing numerous reproductions of her work to illustrate her discussion, Milroy continually granted fascinating insights into her own psyche – her habits, predilections, fears, and challenges – during the process of artistic creation, never losing sight of possible comparisons and contrasts with Hazlitt. In the wider context of the conference, her talk became an exploration of artistic originality and public engagement with it.

The subsequent reading from Hazlitt's *Conversations of Northcote* by Uttara Natarajan and Gregory Dart continued to do away with the artist as a kind of mythical genius lending himself to political or economic exploitation – and it prepared the ground for the highlight that was about to come: the 2014 Annual Hazlitt Lecture, entitled "'Boswell Redivivus": Northcote, Hazlitt, and the British School' and delivered by Martin Postle from the Paul Mellon Centre for British Art. Postle's argument hinged on the way in which Hazlitt encouraged a participatory and egalitarian aesthetic (in a manner anticipating Benjamin, I should add): he invoked Hazlitt's 1814 essay 'Fine Arts. Whether they are promoted by Academies and Public Institutions', stressed Hazlitt's predilection for the 'non-academic' Hogarth over his 'academic' counterpart Reynolds, and against this backdrop explicated Hazlitt's refutation of the learned artist-critics who pretended to a more authoritative judgement of taste than laypeople. Postle highlighted that Hazlitt did so in order to emancipate art from the vested interests of its proclaimed practitioners and connoisseurs. He developed this argument to the point of asserting that Hazlitt, in his function as 'puppet-master' behind the *Conversations of Northcote*, directed his seemingly 'innocuous' and 'quaint' dialogues with the painter according to a larger objective, namely, to 'de-mythologize' Reynolds and thereby strip away the layers of exclusiveness that had accumulated through self-serving academic constructions of aesthetic judgement, as well as through wealthy patronage. If Hazlitt, by means of his art journalism, thus created 'a whole new

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2 For Benjamin on reception in distraction, see 'Mechanical Reproduction', 231–3.

audience, context, and meaning for the British School of art in the Age of Reform, as Postle claimed, and constantly challenged and opened up to public debate the hierarchies within the art establishment, then this too anticipates the emancipatory aesthetic envisaged by Benjamin.

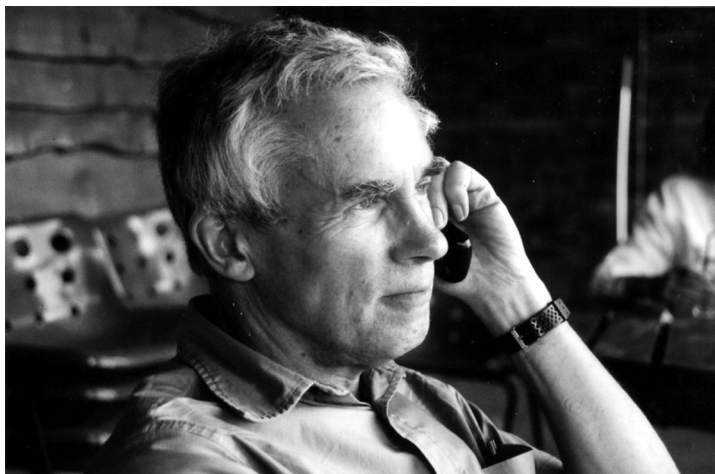
The day's – and aura's – post-mortem then went ahead at the Marlborough Arms, where speakers, organizers, and members of the audience agreed over a drink that the 2014 Hazlitt Day-school had been much more than a mere forerunner to larger events on the horizon. Nonetheless, a fair number of participants expressed their intention to attend the Hazlittian events at Tate Britain and the National Gallery. And who could blame them? (Certainly not I, for I went myself.) But at the Day-school, we had engaged, I would like to think, with Hazlitt and art in ways which the impenetrable aura of first-rate galleries does not permit.

GOLDSMITHS, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON





## DR PETER MEDWAY, 1941-2015



It was with great sadness that I learned of the death of Pete Medway. A staunch supporter and founding member of the Hazlitt Society, Pete was regular presence at the Day-school and Annual Lecture for more than a decade. He was at St Anne's Churchyard on 10 April 2003 to commemorate the 225th anniversary of Hazlitt's birth and to celebrate the unveiling of Hazlitt's restored gravestone, to which he had contributed generously. He died at home on 17 January. His funeral service was held in Kingston-upon-Thames on 9 February.

I first met Pete when I began my teacher training course in the Education Department at King's College, London. I spent a year learning from Pete and Bethan Marshall and was enormously fortunate to have benefited from his warmth, humour, and expertise. Born in 1941, Pete attended Bradford Grammar School and Christ Church College, Oxford. He completed a PGCE at the London Institute in the early 1960s and taught in secondary schools in London and Wakefield for sixteen years. An inspiring and creative teacher, he combined his work in the classroom with a thirst and talent for research. He enrolled at Leeds University in 1982 to study for a PhD, and, in 1985, was appointed Senior Research Fellow in the School of Education. In 1989 he was appointed to a lectureship. During his time at Leeds he worked and led major research projects that helped to shape the government's education policy and to change teaching practice in secondary schools. Such was Pete's impact at Leeds that the flag on the Parkinson Building was flown at half-mast in his memory.

In 1991 Pete moved from Leeds to Canada, where he was made Professor of Linguistics at Carleton University in Ottawa. Here he worked on semiotics in education and design disciplines with Dr Aviva Freedman. Their research culminated in a book entitled *Relearning Writing for Work: Transitions Into and*

*Within the Changing Workplace.* In recognition of his outstanding work, Pete gained a Visiting Honorary Professorship at Middlesex University in the mid-1990s. He returned to the UK in 2002 when he was appointed to a lectureship at King's College London, where he pursued his primary interest in the teaching of English in secondary schools. Following his retirement in 2006, he continued as a Visiting Senior Research Fellow, working on a major collaborative research project on secondary English teaching. This resulted in the publication of *English Teachers in a Postwar Democracy: Emerging Choice in London Schools, 1945–1965* (Palgrave, 2014), an important and impressive work of scholarship that proved to be a fitting culmination to Pete's career.

An inspiring teacher and meticulous researcher, he will be sorely missed by a wide and international circle of friends and colleagues, not least those in the Hazlitt Society. A great enthusiast of Hazlitt, he was especially fond of the political writings. I remember vividly my discussions with Pete on Hazlitt, politics, and education, and greatly appreciated his kindness and support throughout the twelve years that I knew him. I am sure that thousands of students and colleagues throughout the country will remember him with great fondness too. He is survived by his daughter Helen, his son Jim, and four grandchildren whom he adored.

STEPHEN BURLEY



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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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