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'SPEAKING DISAGREEABLE TRUTHS'

Leigh Hunt's Unpublished Memoir of William Hazlitt

Michael Steier

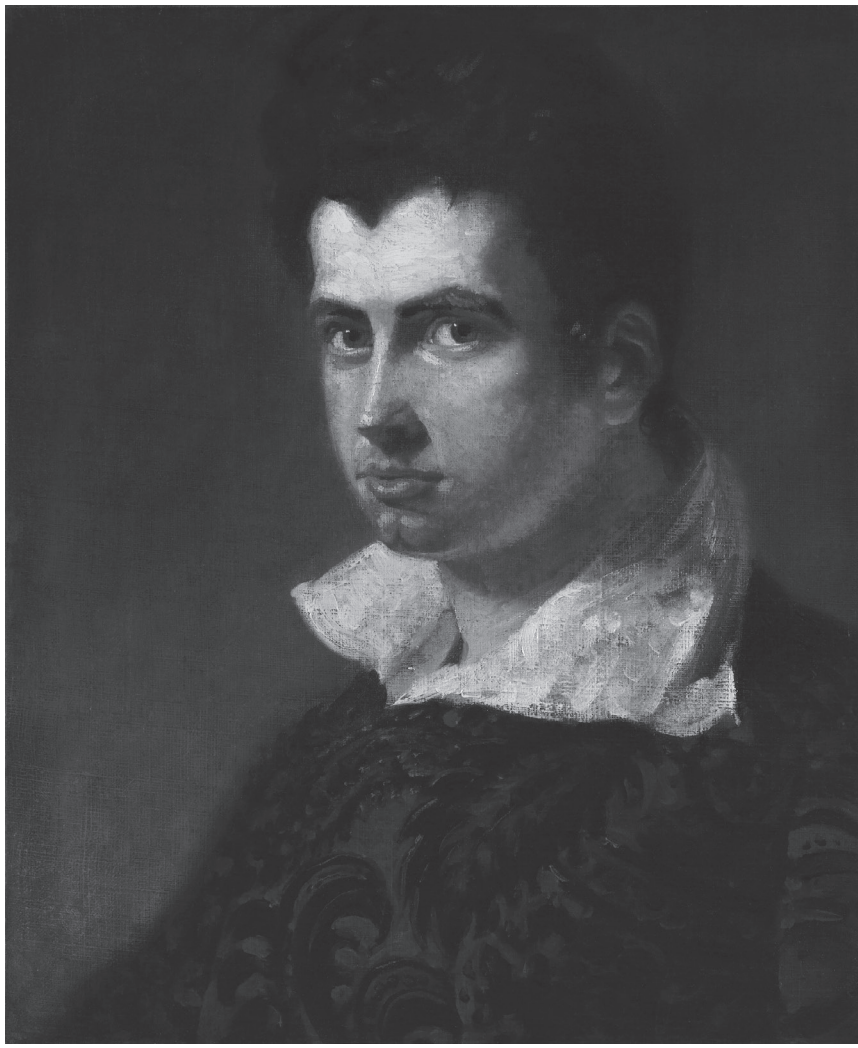
On Christmas Day, 1814, Leigh Hunt announced that he and a friend known as 'W.H.' would embark upon a journalistic collaboration: a new feature in Hunt's political weekly, *The Examiner*, to be called 'The General Examiner'. The series, according to Hunt, would consist of articles on 'subjects of Miscellaneous Interest, Literature, Manners, &c.' that would be modelled on the celebrated 'papers' of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele from the '*Tatler* and *Spectator*'.[1] When the first number appeared on 1 January 1815, the feature had already changed titles to 'The Round Table', but the collaboration held fast. True to their word, Hunt and W.H. would deliver forty-eight 'Round Table' numbers over the next two years until new political pressures and other journalistic demands brought the series to an end on 5 January 1817.[2]

'The Round Table' was an important event for Hunt and William Hazlitt, or W.H. as he was known to *Examiner* readers. It was the first of several collaborations between them and it helped secure a personal as well as an intellectual friendship that would last until Hazlitt's death in 1830. It was in 'The Round Table', moreover, as Payson G. Gates writes, that Hunt and Hazlitt developed a 'habit of playing off each other in their published essays whenever a disagreement with what the other had written inspired a spirited riposte, or when they thought alike, a sympathetic and supportive response'.[3] That habit would persist with their private disagreements, in particular, increasing in later years and spilling over sometimes bitterly into their published and unpublished writings – the focus of the present article. Indeed, unlike the spirited 'Round Table' exchanges on literary or political

1 See 'New Prospectus of the Examiner' in *The Examiner* 365 (25 December 1814), 820.

2 *The Examiner* 471 (5 January 1817) contained the last number: 'Round Table No. 48'. In the preface to his two-volume collected edition, Hazlitt stated of The Round Table's demise: 'Politics called off the attention of the Editor from the Belles Lettres' – *The Round Table*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1817), I, vi.

3 Payson G. Gates, *William Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt: The Continuing Dialogue* (Essex, Conn.: Falls River Publications, 2000), 40.



Leigh Hunt (1784–1859), by Benjamin Robert Haydon, c.1811.

subjects,[4] the later biographical writings that Hunt and Hazlitt produced about their contemporaries and each other would become, as Hunt saw it, a matter of 'speaking disagreeable truths'.[5] Hazlitt had opened himself to criticism after publishing a thinly veiled critique of Hunt and an unapologetic *ad hominem* attack on Percy Bysshe Shelley – Hunt's 'friend of friends'[6] – in the first volume of *Table-Talk* in the spring of 1821.[7] A few years later in *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), Hazlitt continued to write about friends and contemporaries in a critical, often frustratingly contradictory, vein. In the volume's brief sketch of Hunt, for instance, Hazlitt celebrated his friend's 'natural gaiety and sprightliness of manner' and the '*vinous* quality of his mind', and in the same space dubbed him a 'coxcomb' like Lord Byron, albeit a coxcomb of a more 'delightful' cast than the author of *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan*.[8] The slighting remarks in *The Spirit of the Age* had stung Hunt to the core, but he insisted that it was Hazlitt's abuse of Shelley in *Table-Talk* and other outlets in the years that followed that had given him the most pain.[9]

Perhaps emboldened by Hazlitt's own example in *The Spirit of the Age*, Hunt issued *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* in 1828. The book, a series of loosely connected memoirs, was Hunt's contribution to a Romantic literary culture increasingly invested in biographies, memoirs, and 'personalities', the 'era's dark form of life-writing', according to Kim Wheatley.[10] Hunt's book was seen in its own time as one of the most egregious examples of the genre because of its vicious attack on Byron, who had died in Greece in 1824. Hunt, it turns out, had also intended to attack Hazlitt in the same volume. Yet, according to a note Hunt must have added to the volume's preface at a late stage, he decided to withhold the chapter on Hazlitt because 'readers might have mistaken the object of it'.[11] The chapter itself has never come to light until now. A recent discovery among the Hunt papers at Harvard University confirms that Hunt had directed his publisher

4 See, for instance, Hazlitt's 'Round Table No. 22' (*The Examiner* 408 [22 October 1815], 684–5) and Hunt's 'Round Table No. 24' (*The Examiner* 410 [5 November 1815], 713–16).

5 In the preface to *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries*, Hunt used the phrase to describe his unpublished chapter on Hazlitt. See the single-volume quarto edition, *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* (London: Henry Colburn, 1828), vii.

6 Leigh Hunt, *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt*, 3 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1850), I, 154.

7 Hazlitt attacked Shelley in 'On Paradox and Common-place' and Hunt in 'On People with One Idea'; see *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe, 21 vols (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1930–4), viii, 148–52; 689.

8 Hazlitt, *Works*, xi, 176–7.

9 Hunt wrote to Elizabeth Kent on 2 April 1825: 'I have seen Mr. Hazlitt's article on me [in *The Spirit of the Age*]. It contains a number of fine things, & was intended, I think, throughout to please me & do me good. But I do not like his calling me a "coxcomb," however the word may be sauced with epithets'. See *Leigh Hunt: A Life in Letters*, ed. Eleanor M. Gates (Essex, Conn.: Falls River Publications, 1998), 169.

10 Kim Wheatley, *Romantic Feuds: Transcending the Age of Personality* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 3.

11 Hunt, *Lord Byron*, vii.

Henry Colburn to set up in proof a chapter entitled 'Mr. Hazlitt' for inclusion in *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries*. Presented below is what remains of Hunt's unpublished Hazlitt memoir taken directly from the proof, MS Eng 1668 (2), in the Houghton Library.[12] The memoir, which significantly broadens our understanding of the Hazlitt–Hunt friendship in its last phase, is preceded by a brief discussion of the contexts that led to the chapter's creation and subsequent shelving. Hazlitt's published reaction to the memoir from 'A Farewell to Essay-Writing' follows the transcription and serves as a coda.

MS Eng 1668 (2): Composition history

To understand Hunt's reasons for writing MS Eng 1668 (2), we must begin with Shelley. Fundamental disagreements about the author of *Queen Mab* led Hazlitt and Hunt away from a period of constructive dialogue in 'The Round Table' into a period governed, at times, by suspicious feeling, critical frustration, and bitter sentiment. It may surprise us, then, to recall that Hazlitt's first meeting with Shelley at Hunt's residence in February of 1817 seems to have been an agreeable affair. Both men were passionate about politics, and we learn from Mary Shelley that the party had stayed up until '3 in the morning' weighing the merits of 'monarchy & republicanism', with Shelley and Hazlitt arguing for 'republicanism' and Hunt for 'monarchy'.[13] Subsequent to this meeting, Hazlitt and Shelley met again at least twice in the ensuing weeks.[14] And yet for reasons not wholly discernible, this period of initial acquaintance did not result in a lasting friendship. Hunt later heard a rumour, which he seems to have believed, that Shelley had once 'cut up' Hazlitt at William Godwin's table and that Hazlitt, catching wind of the cutting, developed a personal grudge against Shelley and vowed revenge.[15]

Whatever the case may have been, Hazlitt had by the spring of 1821 come to see Shelley as a paradoxical figure: a visionary poet who believed he could be a useful philosophical reformer. In his *Table-Talk* essay 'On Paradox and Common-place', Hazlitt attacked the poet outright as a 'philosophic fanatic' and an 'overgrown child', adding among other slighting barbs that 'Mr. Shelley […] is chargeable with extreme levity; but this levity is so great, that I do not believe he is sensible of its consequences'.[16] Hunt, confounded by his friend's remarks, responded with an angry letter on 20 April 1821:

12 MS Eng 1668 (2), Houghton Library, Harvard University. For access to the MS, I thank Leslie A. Morris, Curator of Modern Books and Manuscripts, and the staff at the Houghton Library. I am also grateful to John Hodgson for his help with the bibliographical details.

13 *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 163.

14 See Duncan Wu, *William Hazlitt*: *The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 208–9.

15 *The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt*, ed. Thornton Hunt, 2 vols (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1862), I, 166.

16 Hazlitt, *Works*, viii, 148-9.

> I think, Mr. Hazlitt, you might have found a better time, and place too, for assaulting me and my friends in this bitter manner. A criticism on 'Table Talk' was to appear in next Sunday's *Examiner*, but I have thought it best, upon the whole, not to let it appear, for I must have added a quarrelsome note to it; and the sight of acquaintances and brother-reformers cutting and carbonading one another in public is, I conceive, no advancement to the cause of liberal opinion, however you may think they injure it in other respects.[17]

Hunt did not hesitate to confront Hazlitt privately with candour, adding, 'In God's name, why could you not tell Mr. Shelley in a pleasant manner of what you dislike in him? […] I have faith enough in your disinterestedness and suffering to tell you so privately instead of publicly'.[18] He continued, 'If you wished to quarrel with me you should have done so at once, instead of inviting me to your house, coming to mine, and in the meanwhile getting ready the proof-sheets of such a book as [*Table-Talk*]'.[19] Hazlitt, a notoriously infrequent letter writer, responded promptly to Hunt's letter the next day, declaring that he had 'no quarrel' with his friend, who was 'one of the pleasantest and cleverest persons I ever knew'.[20] Of Shelley, Hazlitt said little, claiming only, 'I do not hold myself responsible to him'.[21] Still, Hazlitt was unsettled by the exchange and ended his reply with a curious postscript in which he asked Hunt to write 'a character' of him for *The London Magazine*.[22] Hunt did not satisfy his friend's request at the time but he retained the idea nonetheless. In his follow-up letter, Hunt instead extended an olive branch but firmly reiterated the charge from his earlier letter: 'your attack on Mr. Shelley, which I must repeat was most outrageous, unnecessary, and even, for its professed purposes, impolitic, must account for my letter'.[23]

When Hazlitt toured the continent with his wife and teenage son three years after this heated exchange with Hunt, he did not shy away from visiting his old friend, who had ventured to Italy in 1822 to work on *The Liberal* (1822–3) with Byron and Shelley. We have few details about Hazlitt's initial meeting with Hunt and his family at their farm in Maiano near Florence in February of 1825, but the meeting must have involved feelings of 'unresolved pique', as Duncan Wu speculates.[24] Hazlitt, in the July 1824 issue of the *Edinburgh Review*, had just criticized Shelley's *Posthumous Poems*, published in June through the efforts of Mary Shelley. Of her recently deceased husband's first collected volume, Hazlitt

17 See William Carew Hazlitt's *Memoirs of William Hazlitt*, 2 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1867), I, 305.

18 Ibid, 305–6.

19 Ibid, 306–7.

20 *The Letters of William Hazlitt*, ed. Herschel Moreland Sikes, Willard Hallam Bonner, and Gerald Lahey (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 204.

21 Ibid, 206.

22 Ibid, 206: '[I] wish you would write a character of me for the next number. I want to know why every body has such a dislike to me'.

23 *Memoirs of William Hazlitt*, I, 311.

24 Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 368.

thought little, arguing that his poetry, like his person, had been 'a confused embodying of vague abstractions'. Echoing his earlier criticism of Shelley's failure as a philosophical reformer, Hazlitt further argued that the poet had 'wast[ed] great powers by their application to unattainable objects'.[25] John Hunt sent his brother advance notice of Hazlitt's review on 19 June 1824, and Hunt had learned the nature of its contents from Mary Shelley in late October.[26] By March of 1825, he had read Hazlitt's review and answered it in his own review of *Posthumous Poems*.[27] Although it is not clear when exactly Hunt first read Hazlitt's review, or wrote his own, by the time Hazlitt arrived in Maiano, Hunt was certainly aware of his friend's latest attack on Shelley. With that in mind, he seems to have set himself upon the task of writing the character sketch that Hazlitt had asked him for in April of 1821.[28] It was this sketch that William Carew Hazlitt, Hazlitt's grandson, later learned about and described in his *Memoirs of William Hazlitt* (1867). W.C. Hazlitt claims that when his grandfather arrived in Maiano, Hunt presented a 'paper' he had written about Hazlitt, who was advised to read it before dinner out of fear that it might make his stomach turn. In the end, Hunt's apprehensions on this score proved to be unfounded, for Hazlitt finished reading the article only to declare, 'By God, sir, there's a good deal of truth in it'.[29] It was at that moment, Wu suggests, that Hazlitt and Hunt 'were reconciled'.[30] Hunt's lone reference to the Maiano meeting provides some support for Wu's suggestion, but the reconciliation, as MS Eng 1668 (2) now shows, was only a temporary salve.[31] Hunt apparently retained a great deal of animus towards his friend and kept close the thought of giving the British reading public a critical portrait of Hazlitt in due time.

That time was 1828. Hunt, having returned to London in the fall of 1825 after three years abroad, found himself with little money and few prospects. *The Examiner* had been under new editorship for several years, and a long-standing

25 Hazlitt, *Works*, xvi, 265.

26 John Hunt's letter to Leigh Hunt is in the British Library (Add MS 38108, ff. 325–6). Mary Shelley wrote to the Hunts on 10 October 1824 of Hazlitt's review, declaring that she 'did not like it at all'; see *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bennett, 3 vols (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980–8), I, 452.

27 Hunt's review of *Posthumous Poems* had been 'sent off' on or just before 12 March 1825; see *Leigh Hunt: A Life in Letters*, 166. The review was rejected for publication, but Hunt later published a revised version of the review in the Shelley chapter in *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries*, 174–229. See also Payson G. Gates, 'Leigh Hunt's Review of Shelley's *Posthumous Poems*', *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 42.1 (1948), 1–40.

28 In his 'Indicator' essay, 'My Books', Hunt had written of Hazlitt's 'offences against me and mine', which included misplacing borrowed books and abusing Shelley, 'one of the few men, who thought and felt as deeply as himself'; see *The Literary Examiner* 1 (5 July 1823), 4.

29 *Memoirs of William Hazlitt*, II, 304.

30 Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 369.

31 In a letter to Elizabeth Kent of 12 February 1825, Hunt makes brief mention of Hazlitt's visit, giving the impression that it had been generally agreeable to all parties. See *Leigh Hunt: A Life in Letters*, 163.

estrangement from his publisher brother John did not help reconcile him to the new staff at *The Examiner* office. Hunt was forced to look elsewhere to make ends meet. One of the most promising ventures for a man or woman of letters in England at the time was to publish a book about Byron. Despite the scandal surrounding the publication of *Don Juan* (1819–24) and the poet's collaboration with Hunt on *The Liberal*, Byron's celebrity had only increased in the months and years following his death, and a thriving market for Byroniana developed. Several editions of Thomas Medwin's *Conversations of Lord Byron* (1824) appeared alongside other memoirs, including R.C. Dallas's *Recollections of the Life of Lord Byron* (1824) and Pietro Gamba's sympathetic *Narrative of Lord Byron's Last Journey to Greece* (1825). Hunt, who had been intimate with Byron – indeed a friend – for a significantly longer period of time than any of these biographers, felt that he could offer the public a more truthful account of the noble poet. At the same time, Hunt's friendships, past and present, with other well-known poets and literary figures would allow him to expand the scope and interest of the biography. Here at last was an opportunity to give the public a candid assessment of Hazlitt. And by the end of 1826, Hunt felt he had good reason to do so. In the August issue of *The New Monthly Magazine*, Hazlitt's 'Boswell Redivivus' series appeared, and in the first number Hazlitt published statements about Byron that Hunt had apparently disclosed in private.[32] Hunt, already bitter about Hazlitt's public handling of Shelley in recent years, was furious. It was at this point that Hunt must have convinced himself to go forth with his critical sketch of Hazlitt for the Byron volume. The task, however, would not be a pleasant one, and Hunt admits that he ventured upon the memoirs published in *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* with caution and a great deal of anxiety.[33] With access to MS Eng 1668 (2), we now have a better understanding of one source of this anxiety, for the unpublished chapter, with its many pointed criticisms of Hazlitt, provides some perspective on Hunt's decision to pull the memoir just before it was set to appear in the winter of 1828.

Over a century later, with only W.C. Hazlitt's account of the Hazlitt–Hunt meeting in Maiano available to him, P.P. Howe plausibly suggested that the aborted Hazlitt chapter intended for *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* may have been that which Hazlitt read in Hunt's presence in 1825.[34] Wu offers no new evidence to confirm Howe's suggestion, but Harvard MS Eng 1668 (2) may bring us closer to an answer. In March of 1828, in 'A Farewell to Essay-Writing', Hazlitt issued remarks on a 'character' of himself written by Hunt that he says he came to read by 'accident'.[35] The statement would seem to suggest that this 'character' sketch, which Hazlitt also refers to as an 'unpublished Manuscript', was not the article that Hunt had deliberately presented in Maiano in 1825. Although we cannot be certain, the manuscript upon which MS Eng 1668 (2) is based would seem to be a better fit for the 'character' sketch that Hazlitt describes in

32 Hazlitt, *Works*, xi, 353 (see the note to page 188, line 18).

33 Hunt, *Lord Byron*, iii–viii.

34 Hazlitt, *Works*, xvii, 422.

35 Ibid, 318.

'A Farewell to Essay-Writing'. Many of the details that Hazlitt draws out of Hunt's 'Manuscript' are, in fact, found in MS Eng 1668 (2). And while the manuscript itself is not forthcoming, internal evidence in MS Eng 1668 (2) hints at a period of composition. We learn, for example, that Hunt had written at least part of the chapter sometime after the summer of 1826, for at one point he describes Hazlitt's departure for Paris in July of that year as having occurred 'last summer'.[36] He also alludes to an essay by Charles Lamb published in September of 1826 and to Hazlitt's 'Boswell Redivivus' series, which began to appear just after Hazlitt departed London for Paris.[37] What remains less clear is exactly how much Hunt retained of the contents of the original article he had shown to Hazlitt in Maiano. It seems probable, though, that the unpublished chapter was at the very least a revised version of the original sketch since Hunt claims that he had attempted to publish an earlier version (perhaps the Maiano piece) only to have it rejected for being too 'panegyrical'.[38]

MS Eng 1668 (2): Bibliographical description

The near complete proof set of Hunt's unpublished Hazlitt chapter is stored in 'Folder 2' of Harvard MS Eng 1668. The set consists of six loose quarto-sized leaves (twelve pages) originally printed on sheets made from unwatermarked wove paper. At some point, the pages suffered moisture damage, which has left the inner margins slightly discoloured; the text itself remains unaffected. The pages are numbered in the upper right consecutively from page 297 to page 308; the running chapter title, 'Mr. Hazlitt', appears centred at the top of each page. The following pages bear signature marks: 297 (2Q), 299 (2Q2), 305 (2R), 307 (2R2). The last two leaves of each signature have no signature marks per the standard printing convention used in the first edition of *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries*. The one exception in the first published edition is page 295, which has the signature mark 2P4 at the foot of the page, perhaps indicating a cancellation. Leaf 2P4 thus seems to confirm that the Hazlitt chapter would have started on page 296, making MS Eng 1668 (2) page 297 the second page of the chapter. In the first edition of *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries*, the chapter on 'Mr. Fuseli.—Mr. Bonnycastle.—Mr. Kinnaird' occupies pages 290 to 295 (recto 2P4) and would have immediately preceded the Hazlitt chapter. The chapter on Charles Lamb, occupying pages 296 (verso 2P4) to 299, would have immediately followed. Because the Hazlitt chapter would have started on the verso of the last leaf of the preceding chapter, it is perhaps not surprising that the first page of MS Eng 1668 (2) separated from the rest of the proof set at some point. Proof page 308, the last page in the set, terminates mid-sentence, so we know there was at least one additional page with text that has been lost. The contents of the last paragraph on page 308, which begins 'Notwithstanding all his distrust and disdain

36 MS Eng 1668 (2), 298.

37 Ibid, 299.

38 Ibid, 297.

[…]', however, may suggest that Hunt was moving towards a summation of his friend's character, following the lengthy section on Hazlitt's 'infirmities'. At twelve pages, moreover, MS Eng 1668 (2) resembles the other chapters published in *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries*, with the exception of the major chapters on Byron, Shelley, and Keats. Therefore, what remains of MS Eng 1668 (2) is probably the Hazlitt chapter in a near complete state.

The proof pages contain corrections in ink that were presumably made by Colburn, the book's publisher, who has twice signed the pages 'Mr. Colburn' – once in the upper right of page 297 and again in the upper right of page 305. A note in the same ink and in a similar hand appears in the upper left of page 297: 'Omit all about Mr. Hazlitt'. The proofreader's marks found throughout the chapter are also in a similar ink, and bear close resemblance to the two signatures and the note on page 297. The marks are infrequent, strictly treating typographical or formatting errors. There are no substantive changes indicated or made to the contents of the proof pages by the proofreader. Where a typographical or similar error has been corrected by the proofreader I have placed the correction in brackets. A few incidental formatting errors in the proof have been silently corrected. I have otherwise retained Hunt's original spelling and punctuation (e.g., it's for its) as it appears in the proof set. Page numbers and page breaks, which follow the proof pages, have been added in brackets. Hunt's lone footnote on Sir Philip Sidney, designated by an asterisk on proof page 299, is printed as it appears in MS Eng 1668 (2). The other footnotes, written for this essay, provide context for relevant details that inform the memoir.

MS Eng 1668 (2): Transcription

[297] great zeal, has undergone great and honourable cares, and he has mixed all these up with such a wonderful heap of petty humours, suspicions, and resentment, that try as much as you can to honour the one, and spare the others, and it seems as if he was resolved not to let you. He is a man of no personal address; and it would sometimes appear, that for this single defect he was determined to have every other that was vexatious and spiteful, and to run a muck out of a desperation of self-love.

I, for one, have honoured his talents, and borne his humours, as much as any man; and if chance had not thrown me upon sketching these Portraits,[39] in which I am bound to omit nothing characteristic, I still feel respect enough for his political virtues, and kindness enough for the flattering things he has mixed up with his attacks, to have thrown the touches that could have least pleased him into the shade. I wrote a character of him but a little while since,[40] which was rejected in a periodical

39 Hunt refers variously to the individual chapters in *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* as 'sketch[es]' (iii), 'picture[s]' (vi), 'reminiscences' (vii), 'article[s]' (vii), 'portrait[s]' (viii), and 'Contemporary Memoirs' (165).

40 This was probably the 'paper' Hunt had presented to Hazlitt in Maiano in 1825.

work[41] as being too panegyrical: yet I thought I had been pretty plain-spoken. But I have often observed, that it is not those who are conscious of being least aggrieved, that are inclined to think the most truth of a man. I believe also, I was supposed to be afraid of saying all I thought of him! "O ye gods and little golden fishes!" I have indeed been afraid, in numberless instances, of saying the whole truth of many persons, not out of fear for myself, but for them. My self-love has been too much cut up in my time, to dread any thing new on that score; and as to the rest, I am strong enough to afford to spare. But it has been my lot, (and most people will find it to have been theirs, who are capable of reflection) to have some of my weakest things taken for strong ones, and some of my very strongest for weak. I should probably have omitted a good deal of what I have [297/298] had to say of Mr. Hazlitt, both then and now, if he had not endeavoured to sow discord among my friends and acquaintances.[42] When he proceeded so far as that, I thought it time, not indeed to forget his good qualities, but to show the havoc he made both with himself and others by his ill ones.

Mr. Hazlitt departed this metropolis in the course of last summer,[43] and would willingly, perhaps, consider himself dead to all friends and blows together, but such as he can give them. This is a "mortal bad" humour, which he must not be suffered to indulge. He bequeathed, before he went, certain lively articles to a magazine,[44] the claws of which articles were pared as soon as their mischief was found out.[45] It seems, he announced his intention, privately, of "cutting up his friends all round;" a pretty legal circuit! If this were sheer morbidity and sick humour, I would say nothing of it; but a great deal of affectation is mixed with it, not without a very ill opinion, it should seem, of the feelings and understandings of those who may choose to bear it; for with all his knowledge, Mr. Hazlitt, like his friend Bonaparte,[46] is apt to split upon too ill an opinion of human nature. He is also more ignorant of the world at large than would be supposed possible for so admirable an observer in the particular; and he would in vain thrust his rusticity in this respect down our throats, purely because he resents the not having got rid of it. Mr. Hazlitt is thought by more than one person to be bitten with a desire of imitating Rousseau.[47] It is a pity, because he has enough in him to dispense with imitating anybody; and what is worse, mocking is catching. If he is foolish

41 Perhaps Colburn's *New Monthly Magazine* to which Hunt had been contributing.

42 Hunt has in mind Hazlitt's attacks on Shelley.

43 In July 1826, Hazlitt, William Jr., and Isabella Bridgwater left London for Paris.

44 Hazlitt's 'Boswell Redivivus' series in *The New Monthly Magazine*.

45 Hunt wrote to Thomas Campbell, the editor of *The New Monthly Magazine*, soon after the first number of 'Boswell Redivivus' appeared, and Campbell quickly apologized for his editorial 'oversight' and 'Hazlitt's calumny'; see *The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt*, I, 252.

46 Hazlitt was a staunch Bonapartist. His sympathetic four-volume biography appeared in stages between 1828 and 1830.

47 Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris; Or the New Pygmalion* (1823), in which reviews in *The Globe* and *The Examiner* found echoes of Rousseau; see Stanley Jones, *Hazlitt: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 338.

enough to imitate the morbidities of Rousseau, the disease may become real. If he can be saved from cutting his fingers any farther with his own edge-tools, it is a humanity; and one's fireside and companionship must be saved at all events. [298/299] Furthermore, if he uses for a tool one of his own friends, making a sort of idol and crab-stick saint of him, wherewith to knock other people on the head, it may be humane to save the tool; especially as Mr. Hazlitt would make no more scruple, than the Catholics of old, to abuse and crack his idol's skull, when he had done with him, whatever worship he may pay him at present.

Mr. Hazlitt reminds one of an admirable and truly original article, written by our common friend Elia, in the "New Monthly Magazine," on the "Pleasures of Sulkiness."[48] It is difficult to believe that he did not sit for the portrait in it. If you do not notice him on eve[n] the most trifling occasion, it is "furies, death, and rage." He might, indeed, have noticed you, and you may not have seen him, but that is another matter. To be absent from you half a year, is on his side no offence; or rather, (in order to gratify every part of his self-love,) you are to feel it a great deal, and to try and win him out of it, but by no means to resent it as an injustice. This would be paying yourself too great a compliment. But stay away from him for as long a period, no matter what the cause of your absence, and nothing under a massacre of yourself and friends will suffice him. You must have an eye for him wherever he is, or lose it; you must drink tea with him, under pain of an article in the magazines.

Now this sort of cat-scratch love is a little tiresome; and Mr. Hazlitt, after having cut up and plastered his friends all round, and been spared by them over and over again, might as well be told in public, since he has been told of it in vain privately,[49] that he is not aware, perhaps, how much folly he is exhibiting, and mischief he is doing, by this sort of indulgence in his humours. It is all very well, as long as his cuts end with a little smarting to one's feelings, and relieve him with a notion of [299/300] righting himself. His friends do not reckon him malignant in proportion to the pains he takes to appear so. They can even (so good-natured are they!) fancy that he includes in his morbid endeavours at self-relief, something of a wish to do their own infirmities a service. But there is an end of these excuses, when it is found that nothing can appease him, and that he would throw discord and enmity among societies in which he has always been made welcome. At all events, if he thinks public advice and exhibition salutary to others, let him see for once what good it will do himself.

Mr. Hazlitt says, that the whole ground, principle, essence, and aim of his nature, is the love of truth. As a proof of it, he one day informed me, that he had long had an old score to wipe off with a political time-server;[50] but that the latter

48 Charles Lamb's (Elia's) 'That a Sulky Temper is a Misfortune' was the last article in his 'Popular Fallacies' series; see *The New Monthly Magazine* 17 (September 1826), 245–7.

49 In Hunt's letters to Hazlitt of 20 and 23 April 1821.

50 Perhaps a reference to Sir James Mackintosh. Hazlitt's portrait of Mackintosh in *The Spirit of the Age* is a mixture of criticism and praise. 'A man of impeccable liberal credentials', according to Wu, and the author of the 'pro-Revolutionary' *Vindiciae Gallicae* (1791), Mackintosh nevertheless transformed himself into one of Hazlitt's detested political turncoats (Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 74). Mackintosh later procured a

having met with an Essay of his, which required a strong metaphysical faculty to understand, and behaving himself impartially enough to speak well of it, he felt himself bound in his zeal for the interests of philosophy to qualify his criticism so far, and do justice to a greater love of truth than he thought to have found in him: in other words, to convert his intended curse into a blessing. A personal offence is not so easily forgiven. Great or small, a piece of mimicry, a word of disparagement, a fancied neglect, it must be hoarded up for a day of retribution. What is very edifying, he feels particularly inclined to resent it when the offender has been praising him. "Oh, ho!" says this cunning thinker; "he panegyrics me, does he? Then have at him." He thinks the other feels his weight, and that now is the time for pressing it upon him. In this respect, it is better to be Mr. Hazlitt's enemy than his friend; for there is a grace in giving unlooked-for praise to the one; whereas it is pure weakness, he thinks, to be taken in by such problematical things as friendship. The public, who are not in the secret of the offence, are inclined to [300/301] wonder at the impartiality of the portraits; and so the praise given to his enemy reverts doubly to himself, while every hit tells with equal force against the luckless acquaintance. A panegyric, indeed, from his hand startles one; for he talks much of "the malice of a friend;["] and for fear of not being thought to possess the acuteness and self-knowledge of the cleverest rogue that may chance to hear him, takes a delight in venting old grudges, pulling down with one hand what he builds with the other, and giving his hearers to understand that he thinks no more of his good word than becomes him.

Whenever I have met with this "ingenious" person, (for be the humour he is in what it may, I like to give him a handsome epithet, and such as I know he approves,) I always beheld in him a man who had suffered much anxiety in behalf of mankind at large. Sometimes I thought of other disappointments he had met with. At all times, I saw in him one who would make amends for his spleen by interesting you with his talents; whom I believed to be a despiser of money; and knew to be above the servilit[i]es and common-places that keep the world hopeless. It must be owned, indeed, that he knows nothing of "the low" and "the common people." A pauper is to him not of necessity a rascal. A poor creature on the town may not, he thinks, deserve to be a bit worse off than her seducer. The human heart beats as audibly in his ear behind drugget as embroidery. Nor does he dislike it fluttering with the new ball-dress, or even the birth-day one. He does not make a loathsome or frightful thing of it; does not call it, with Dr. Young,

> That hideous sight, a naked human heart;

[f]irst displacing it with the indifference of a surgeon, and then putting on his airs at the spectacle, like a fine lady. He leaves it as he finds it, [301/302] invested with

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copy of Hazlitt's *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805) and praised it in an entry on Joseph Butler in the seventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Hazlitt mentions the anecdote in *The Spirit of the Age* with obvious pride, and it was doubtless a factor in his decision to turn a 'curse' against Mackintosh into a 'blessing', as Hunt says.

the proper flesh and blood; and would only temper the elements outside to it, not the genuine and vital mixture of passions within. Add to this, that Mr. Ha[z]litt is a critic of the past, equally sound and enthusiastic (with the exception of a grudge against Sir Philip Sidney*;)[51] that he has a fine scent for a metaphysical discovery; a taste, yielding to none of his talents, in pictures; and a style of writing, in which the sentences tell, one after the other, like his vollies at rackets; and I am intimate with but two men alive, whose intellect it is more interesting to come in contact with.[52]

Such being my feelings when I encountered the sight of my friend Will, my first impulse, notwithstanding occasional heats between us, was always to stretch forth my hand to him, in order to meet his. But

* He has called Sir Philip Sidney "an intellectual coxcomb."[53] Coxcomb is a favourite word with him, and luckily includes "worshipful society." He characterizes the Arcadia as a heap of impertinences and spoilt beauties, in which the author is always thrusting himself forward to play "the Cicerone of Nature," and explain her *to* us. To me, his delight appears mainly to consist in enjoying her with us; which makes all the difference between coxcombry and good company. But the display expected of Sir Philip on all occasions, and the particular circumstance under which the Arcadia was written, may undoubtedly have led him into a greater show of talk, than in justice to his real feelings (eminently social and enjoying) was desirable. He undertook the work to please his sister, the Countess of Pembroke, to whom it was given in portions, as he composed it. He walked through Nature, as it were, with his arm round her waist, and may have felt himself called upon to "teach his lovely scholar all he knew." I, for one, am willing to hear him; and so have been thousands. The style is faulty; the book formidably long; the popular taste for it superseded: and yet I never met with a person, Mr. Hazlitt excepted, who did not express the greatest pleasure at being made acquainted with it. The difficulty of the first strangeness over, all goes well, even the author's "impertinence."

But Sir Philip was a gallant person, a good dresser, and a favourite with the ladies; things, somehow or other, which Mr. Hazlitt cannot tolerate, unless the possessor chooses to deprecate his wrath by taking out a sort of license under his protection.

[302/303] here begin his infirmities. Mr. Hazlitt, as I said before, cannot shake hands. It is doing him a mischief to propose it. His hand is a *noli me tangere*. He stands hanging it like a disabled limb; the operator finds that he has brought upon himself a burden of salutation; the hand is desperately taken, and with hurrying

51 Shelley's grandfather could claim a connection to the famed Sidney family through a second marriage, and Shelley 'had a respect for that distinction' (Hunt, *Lord Byron*, 178). It is, therefore, not surprising that Hunt makes much of Hazlitt's apparent slight against Sir Philip Sidney. Hunt had already criticized Hazlitt for 'losing' a borrowed copy of the poet's works; see *The Literary Examiner* 1 (5 July 1823), 4.

52 Charles Lamb was probably one of the two other living friends of great 'intellect'. The other may have been Coleridge. See Hunt, *Lord Byron*, 303: 'if the world is to remain always as it is, give me to all eternity new talk of Coleridge, and new essays of Charles Lamb. They will reconcile it beyond all others; and that is much'.

53 In *Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth* (1821); see Hazlitt, *Works*, vi, 320.

tenderness restored. The self-congratulation at escape is mutual. He says, that if he cannot shake hands, he can stand by a friend or a cause as stoutly as any one.[54] He can cut his friend's enemies, that is certain, and his friend along with them. By [one] cause he has stood admirably, through evil report and good report, to his immortal honour.[55] I should never be afraid of him on that score, unless he found himself destitute of all power, or invested with too much; neither of which circumstances are likely to happen. He is too able for the one; too destitute of address and physical courage for the other. I speak only of times that bring leading intellects into action. There is scarcely any height of authority as a critic, into which it is not possible to conceive him forcing himself, in spite of his humours, and in the teeth of what is established. But his distrust is, and ever will be, the ruin of him in one sense, unless he finds somebody to *love* him out of it; which, whatever difficulties he may put in the way of his own desire for it, is more easy for another to try, than for himself to encourage. He has four besetting faults, all connected with one another: a total want of address; a distrust of mankind, in the gross and the particular; a disposition to revenge, which he thinks it wise to indulge and to avow; and a minute philosophy, an over subtle exercise of his metaphysics on all occasions, which incites him to be critical and peevish with the most innocent actions of those he converses with. He sees human nature best at a distance, and is as ready to help and defend it then, as he is to feel it press on his self-love in the particular. Certainly, [303/304] of all men, he is the last that should bring a charge of vanity, of an over-weening consciousness of his importance. It is not emptiness. He is full enough. But a consciousness of himself pervades and colours all that he contains. He wishes every body to recognize his fullness, but in such a manner as to hold him guiltless of the desire. He demands the utmost self-knowledge in others, united with the highest opinion of himself as a consequence; and yet it is a curious trait in his character, and an apparent inconsistency, that he has a tendency to speak least of those who show him consideration[,] and highest of those who are in the habit of treating him cavalierly. Perhaps he thinks they partake of his taste, and secretly do him justice: and it is to be observed, that these objects of his eulogy do not happen to be above the want of it. With all his love of truth and hatred of tyrants, he has an admiration of power in every shape but one that renders his own exercise of it suspicious. He speaks, I am aware, of an i[n]verted kind of vanity, of a man's being too conscious of his want of address, &c.:[56] in other words, of a vanity which is none, or only proceeds upon grounds which others are to deny and protest against. But this is a more real vanity than the other, if it shows itself more captious and unforgiving. It's melancholy does not exonerate it. It "walks in a vain shadow," burthened with it's demands. It is only vanity hungry, instead of vanity fed; and is but the less likely to forget itself. Hence its implacability

54 See 'On the Knowledge of Character' in *Table-Talk* – Hazlitt, *Works*, viii, 306.

55 Hunt may be thinking of Hazlitt's commitment to reform and more generally of his 'love of truth and hatred of tyrants'; see MS Eng 1668 (2), 304.

56 See Hazlitt's essay 'On Egotism' in *The Plain Speaker* – Hazlitt, *Works*, xii, 157–68. Hunt issued strong remarks on Hazlitt's essay in his review of *The Plain Speaker* in *The Companion* (12 March 1828), 125–8.

to offence. Hence its jealousy of the self-satisfaction of others, and its tendency to construe every species of satisfaction into that most desired one. Hence even the most erroneous conclusions as to the whole colour of other people's lives. If Mr. Hazlitt sees you gay and volatile with your friends for an evening, he concludes that you are so on all other evenings, and that nothing makes you happy all your life but the acknow-[304/305]ledgment of your merits. To be successful, is with him the same thing as to be in love with the success. To be full of animal spirits, and what the French call *abandon*, is to be wrapped up in your pretensions. It never enters his head, that self-satisfaction may take its turn with the reverse; that one's animal spirits may be restored by the sight of one's friends, for love's sake as well as for vanity's; and that the man, who can become giddy with sociality on the Wednesday, has perhaps been melancholy all the rest of the week; nay, may have lain awake the night before, thinking of Spain, or of Poland, or the inhabitants of the polar star. A man must take care how he betrays his sympathies on those remote points before him. He has not imagination for some, nor belief in any modesty of expectation on others. He knows no medium between triumph and despair, between every pretension and none. He will gravely accuse you of supposing, tha[t] an article (being your own) in a newspaper, shall play the devil with the Emperor of Russia. Seeing you accustomed, in your graver moments, to express yourself with an air of decision, perhaps a superfluous one, amounting to the "mild dogmatism" that somebody speaks of, and that may charitably be attributed to the habit of having settled opinions and fighting for them, he does not give it the benefit of that gentler interpretation; but supposes it owing to the most overweening confidence, and a disproportionate measure of your pretensions with your powers. Concluding you a coxcomb, because you give full play to your social spirits, he assumes, as a necessary consequence, that you must be a favourite with women: or thinking you a favourite with women, he reads the same conclusion the other way, and fancies you must be a coxcomb. He gives into this idle commonplace, because he holds himself to be no favourite; and yet the first time he paid his attentions to a woman that deserved them, he [305/306] was accepted.[57] Before this, he used to abuse them all, wholesale and retail, attributing the coarsest or most frivolous motives to every thing they did, and not mending the matter by proclaiming a romantic passion for an object whom he denounced unworthy of it. Mr. Hazlitt made a striking business of that affair, à la Rousseau;[58] but it was difficult not to perceive that much of his feeling was affected and forced. At all events, when he gave out that he had revenged himself on the girl for not behaving herself better, and loving a mal-content of forty as she ought to have done, the predominance of the irritable and egotistical over the real feeling was undeniable. Her position was her excuse. The difference of years, the astounding worship she received, and the formidable moods exhibited at intervals, were farther excuses.

57 Probably a reference to Sarah Stoddart, Hazlitt's first wife. Hazlitt met Stoddart through the Lambs in 1811; they married in 1812 and divorced in 1822. Hunt first met Hazlitt's second wife, Isabella Bridgwater, in Maiano; see *Leigh Hunt: A Life in Letters*, 163.

58 Hazlitt's 'affair' with Sarah Walker, the daughter of his landlady, was the subject of *Liber Amoris*.

Had he loved her truly, he never would have revenged himself. The sweetness of that recollection embalms the least precious object, let the rake or the scorned fury say what they will. Mr. Hazlitt says he desires to be loved for himself only, all claim or merit being studiously put out of the question. His very demerit must be to him, what merit is to others. That is to say, he must be loved for a nonentity or a contradiction. Yet he went to the opposite extreme, when he undertook to make love to another. His rhetoric overdid it, but the instinct was right. Love is full of attributed merits, even in the bloom of the senses, and the ready kindling of youth. When our riches enable us to dispense with the ideal, we delight to bestow it—when it is necessary to us, we seek it as a supply and a vindication. A romantic passion, the least founded, may settle into an attachment for the most respectable. Plain goodness and habit will secure it; and renders merit, so far, of little importance. But no attachment, romantic or homely, if it be really loving, commences without the impli-[306/307]cation of merit and superiority. To dispense with intellectual and moral qualities, is to suppose an infinite perfection of person. To dispense with beauty and personal merit, is to suppose moral or intellectual. In short, this question would not be worth a thought, if we did not see how the acutest men can deceive themselves; what inconsistencies can be overlooked and impossibilities be demanded, by the blindness and childishness of self-love.

Mr. Hazlitt has two spirits in him, often contradicting one another in public, and always subjecting him to the strangest hesitations and alternations of manner in private. Morally bold, intellectually powerful, he is at the same time physically pusillanimous. If he had ground to stand upon, he could move the heart of a nation; and yet he is afraid to come in contact with an individual. With a face not unworthy of his mind, though crossed with fretfulness and disdain, he either sinks into a lax expression of hopelessness, or knitting his brows, and rolling about his eyes, encourages himself to do justice to the real strength of his mind by an affected grimness of demeanour. On ordinary or brief occasions, and where he has no fear of contradiction, he pronounces a judgment in a manner from which there is to be no appeal. At other times, his conversation, till he gets heated, is as timid, fluttering, and wanting in words, as his style of writing is the reverse. He explains a question by shadowy hints and gesticulations; brings down his arm to bear upon it, instead of a sentence, as if going to paint instead of write; and helps himself to a little representative vigour with "d—mes" and "by G—ds." In the midst of this energy, let any body contradict him with a bold air, or rise up and plant a well-dressed leg on the carpet, like a beau umpire in a play, and he falls to shatters before this higher power. (He denies this, I know; but I have witnessed it.) [307/308] Yet see him next day in a five's[59] court, where he puts on the beggarliest-looking habiliments, and stands in the most helpless attitude, and all of the sudden you shall behold this imbecile phenomenon start up with his racket like a Sampson, and make the walls ring again with the cannonading of his balls. Drunk with this success, and

59 According to Wu, 'Hazlitt was said to be a "furious" player of the game' (*William Hazlitt*, 258).

unable to forego it for [a]n instant, your next astonishment is to see him rage and become frantic at a miss; literally so, and all but rolling on the ground. There is great affectation in this; of a will purposely indulged and overwrought. If he cannot make the sensation with the hit, he will make it by dint of execrating the miss. His pre-eminence must not be lost, if he can help it, at any price; and here the address is of muscle, and not of manners. Now Sir John Suckling was fond of "a lucky hit at bowls;"[60] but who would maintain that there was more coxcombry and self-importance in his taking a miss with good-humour, than in this unyielding exaction of success? A man must pay infinite court to himself, must stand himself in stead of a whole circle of flatterers, to behave thus like a spoiled king, and not be able to dispense with a single compliment of fortune. To be sufficient to oneself is a less self-importance, than to measure ourselves with accident and possibility, and demand that they should act up to that height of pretension.

Notwithstanding all his distrust and disdain, and his great pity for simpletons, Mr. Hazlitt has a corner left for simplicity of his own: at least I used to think so. And I thought [it] did him good. I fancied it helped to keep his enthusiasm alive; and to save his great talents from degenerating into want of principle. To know every thing for bad, which is the knowledge of some, is, at least, not his knowledge. He is beyond that. He might justly rank with the calmer and nobler intellects, who are able to keep middling ones in heart, and to dispense with the common [308].

Coda: Hazlitt's 'A Farewell to Essay-Writing'

Hazlitt claims that he came to read a 'page' of Hunt's unpublished memoir by 'accident'. However, the scope of Hazlitt's response suggests that he had probably perused more than just one of the memoir's pages. In fact, it seems probable that he had read a large portion of the unpublished chapter. How he came to it, either in manuscript or in another format, remains open to conjecture. Certainly, a few possibilities present themselves. By 1828, Hazlitt had an established professional relationship with Hunt's publisher, Henry Colburn, and it seems reasonable to think that Colburn, who signed the proof pages, may have placed a version of the chapter into Hazlitt's hands.[61] Another possibility is that Hunt gave Hazlitt the manuscript from which the proof was made; or Hunt may have simply instructed Colburn to present the chapter to Hazlitt on his behalf. From what we know of Hunt's friendship with Hazlitt before, during, and after the period *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* was making its way through the press, the two men were ostensibly on good terms, and Hunt probably would not have objected to

60 Suckling was a life-long interest and a personal favourite of Hunt's. Hunt modelled his early satire 'The Feast of the Poets' upon Suckling's 'A Session of the Poets'. Hazlitt remarked of Hunt: 'He is the only poet or literary man we ever knew who puts us in mind of Sir John Suckling or Killigrew or Carew; or who united rare intellectual acquirements with outward grace and natural gentility' (*Works*, xi, 177).

61 In addition to publishing with Colburn throughout the 1820s, Hazlitt had been a regular contributor to Colburn's *New Monthly Magazine*.

Hazlitt seeing his remarks before they appeared.[62] The precedent, of course, had already been established in Maiano in 1825. At any rate, Hazlitt at some point read a substantial portion, if not the whole, of Hunt's unpublished memoir. Hazlitt's reaction to it appeared in *The London Weekly Review* for 29 March 1828 in an article he prematurely titled 'A Farewell to Essay-Writing', from which the following remarks have been taken.[63]

> I am rather disappointed, both on my own account and his, that Mr. Hunt has missed the opportunity of explaining the character of a friend, as clearly as he might have done. He is puzzled to reconcile the shyness of my pretensions with the inveteracy and sturdiness of my principles. I should have thought they were nearly the same thing. Both from disposition and habit, I can *assume* nothing in word, look, or manner. I cannot steal a march upon public opinion in any way. My standing upright, speaking loud, entering a room gracefully, proves nothing; therefore I neglect these ordinary means of recommending myself to the good graces and admiration of strangers, (and, as it appears, even of philosophers and friends). Why? Because I have other resources, or, at least, am absorbed in other studies and pursuits. Suppose this absorption to be extreme, and even morbid, that I have brooded over an idea till it has become a kind of substance in my brain, that I have reasons for a thing which I have found out with much labour and pains, and to which I can scarcely do justice without the utmost violence of exertion (and that only to a few persons,)—is this a reason for my playing off my out-of-the-way notions in all companies, wearing a prim and self-complacent air, as if I were 'the admired of all observers'? or is it not rather an argument, (together with a want of animal spirits,) why I should retire into myself, and perhaps acquire a nervous and uneasy look, from a consciousness of the disproportion between the interest and conviction I feel on certain subjects, and my ability to communicate what weighs upon my own mind to others? If my ideas, which I do not avouch, but suppose, lie below the surface, why am I to be always attempting to dazzle superficial people with them, or smiling, delighted, at my own want of success?
>
> What I have here stated is only the excess of the common and well-known English and scholastic character. I am neither a buffoon, a fop, nor a Frenchman, which Mr. Hunt would have me to be.[64] He finds it odd that I am a close reasoner and a loose dresser. I have been (among other follies) a hard liver as well as a hard thinker; and the consequences of that will not allow me to dress as I please. People in real life are not like players on a stage, who put on a certain look or *costume*, merely for effect. I am aware, indeed,

62 See, for instance, Hunt's letter to Hazlitt of 20 June 1826 in *Leigh Hunt: A Life in Letters*, 181–3.

63 Hazlitt, *Works*, xvii, 317–18.

64 This detail is not found in MS Eng 1668 (2), but see Hunt's review of *The Plain Speaker* in *The Companion* (12 March 1828), 127.

> that the gay and airy pen of the author does not seriously probe the errors or misfortunes of his friends—he only glances at their seeming peculiarities, so as to make them odd and ridiculous; for which forbearance few of them will thank him. Why does he assert that I was vain of my hair when it was black, and am equally vain of it now it is grey, when this is true in neither case? This transposition of motives makes me almost doubt whether Lord Byron was thinking so much of the rings on his fingers as his biographer was. These sort of criticisms should be left to women. I am made to wear a little hat, stuck on the top of my head the wrong way. Nay, I commonly wear a large slouching hat over my eyebrows; and if ever I had another, I must have twisted it about in any shape to get rid of the annoyance. This probably tickled Mr. Hunt's fancy, and retains possession of it, to the exclusion of the obvious truism, that I naturally wear 'a melancholy hat.'
>
> I am charged with using strange gestures and contortions of features in argument, in order to 'look energetic.' One would rather suppose that the heat of the argument produced the extravagance of the gestures, as I am said to be calm at other times. It is like saying that a man in a passion clenches his teeth, not because he is, but in order to seem, angry. Why should everything be construed into air and affectation? With Hamlet, I may say, 'I know not *seems*.'
>
> Again, my old friend and pleasant 'Companion'[65] remarks it, as an anomaly in my character, that I crawl about the Fives-Court like a cripple till I get the racket in my hand, when I start up as if I was possessed with a devil. I have then a motive for exertion; I lie by for difficulties and extreme cases. *Aut Cæsar aut nullus*. I have no notion of doing nothing with an air of importance, nor should I ever take a liking to the game of battledoor and shuttlecock. I have only seen by accident a page of the unpublished Manuscript relating to the present subject, which I dare say is, on the whole, friendly and just, and which has been suppressed as being too favourable, considering certain prejudices against me.

Hazlitt's biographers have long been aware of 'A Farewell to Essay-Writing' and the significance it holds as a key document in the story of the Hazlitt–Hunt friendship. However, without access to MS Eng 1668 (2), these biographers have only been able to draw conclusions about the friendship in its final phase from published writings of a more congenial nature.[66] Hazlitt, to be sure, made many encouraging statements about Hunt publicly and privately in his final years.[67] And Hunt, likewise, characteristically left agreeable and approving remarks about Hazlitt

65 Hazlitt glances wryly at Hunt's *Companion*.

66 The major critical biographies that discuss the Hazlitt–Hunt friendship see its final phase as one governed by a spirit of reconciliation. See P.P. Howe, *The Life of William Hazlitt* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1947), 384; Herschel Baker, *William Hazlitt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 234-6; and Wu, *William Hazlitt*, 408.

67 See, for example, Hazlitt's review of Hunt's *Companion* in *The London Weekly Review* for 22 March 1828 and his *Table-Talk* essay 'On the Prose-Style of Poets' (Hazlitt, *Works*, xii, 16–17).

before and certainly after his death. His review of *Table-Talk* in *The Companion*, for example, eschews the bitter personal attacks found in the unpublished memoir, whilst his tribute to Hazlitt in *The Tatler* reveals the depth of sympathetic feeling Hunt retained for his friend.[68] Yet Hunt's 'Mr. Hazlitt' chapter and Hazlitt's 'A Farewell to Essay-Writing', together, show that the two friends maintained deep and unresolved disagreements at a very late stage. Some of the accusations made in both texts, in fact, demonstrate just how petty the arguments between the two men had become. Hunt's criticisms of Hazlitt's manner and dress are examples that might be drawn out of MS Eng 1668 (2) as evidence of frivolous judgment. At the same time, Hazlitt's comment in 'A Farewell to Essay-Writing' that some of Hunt's observations are the 'sort of criticisms [that] should be left to women' reveals just how far Hazlitt had descended in his manner of argumentation with his former 'Round Table' collaborator.

There are moments, however, in Hunt's memoir of Hazlitt that clearly suggest an attempt to move beyond personality and the gossipy 'sort of criticisms' to which Hazlitt objects. We recall that Hunt had sent a powerful message to Hazlitt in 1821, arguing that his friend's public attacks on Shelley were 'no advancement to the cause of liberal opinion'. And at the outset of his memoir of Hazlitt, Hunt offers a similar statement of purpose: 'I should probably have omitted a good deal of what I have had to say of Mr. Hazlitt [...] if he had not endeavoured to sow discord among my friends and acquaintances'. As Hunt saw it, Hazlitt's public abuse of 'friends and acquaintances' like Shelley, who was passionately assisting in the struggle for liberal reform, worked directly against the cause for which Hunt had served a two-year prison sentence in Surrey Gaol. Whether or not Hunt's memoir of Hazlitt was intended to convey a deeper political message must remain an open question because of the incomplete state in which the memoir survives. Nevertheless, the material that has survived in MS Eng 1668 (2) is suggestive and may provide a new lens through which to view Hunt as a memoirist, a historian of liberal reform, and, at times, a 'disagreeable' critic of his contemporaries.

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68 See *The Tatler* 14 (20 September 1830), 53; and 21 (28 September 1830), 81–2.

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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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