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William Hazlitt, an essayist on the plain-ground: essay and criticism

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Firme na terra, nativa,
que não quer negar a terra
nem, como ave, fugi-la.
João Cabral de Melo Neto
‘A educação pela pedra’
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Abstract


This thesis analyzes the works of the English essayist and critic William Hazlitt (1778-1830) from a body of images that binds the different stages involved in the craft of the critical and literary essay to topographical accidents and the texture of the soil, as expressed in the author recurrent archetype “on the plain-ground”. My point of departure was the internal analysis of texts and close reading of certain passages where Hazlitt reflects on his own métier. The claims he makes in that essay is an art form required from him a high standard of formal elaboration that analogically approaches the literary essay and inventive criticism to other art forms. Thus, a careful examination of these formal elements was indispensable for this study. Moreover, certain historical and cultural aspects that encompass Hazlitt and his time, the so called British Romanticism, were also part of my analysis, inasmuch as the author brings them to bear in his writings, and according to what I have conceptualized as “mental attitudes” proper to the essayist. In my understanding, three are the essayist’s attitudes as intensely experienced by Hazlitt, namely, the portraitist, the friend, and the adversary. Therefore, each of the three chapters in this dissertation aims at unveiling one of these “mental attitudes”. In the first chapter, on the portraitist attitude and the first stage in the making of the essay (the insight), I have followed Hazlitt during his youthful pilgrimages from an analysis of a few emblems pertaining in “My First Acquaintance with Poets” and “On The Pleasure of Painting”, where he narrates his moment of conversion to a world of art. Furthermore, I have linked these essays to the literary portraits Hazlitt traced of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Edmund Burke, his genuine precursors, in order to understanding the paths along which he was initiated into inventive criticism. In the second chapter, on the friend “mental attitude”, we find Hazlitt by the fireside, either in the solitude of a room of his own, chewing on his thoughts, or in the company of close friends. Intimacy and conviviality are the key ingredients to this stage in the craft of the essay (reading). According to Hazlitt, the writing of essays requires a cordial invitation to readers, with whom the essayist hopes to share his task in a friendly way. In the third chapter, on writing itself, I have inquired into the role of the essayist as an agent of social changes, a “mental attitude” suitable to the adversary. The essay presents itself as a privileged place where the writer struggles with the world and disputes a cause; and the essayist as the man-about-town, whose rambles around the streets of the metropolis and conviviality with the people, particularly those belonging to lower classes, enabled Hazlitt to combine the sustained and controlled rhythms of the polite culture of the essayist with strenuously argumentative, emphatic speeches.

Key Words: William Hazlitt – British Romanticism – Literary Essay – Criticism.
Resumo


Esta tese procura analisar a obra do ensaísta e crítico inglês William Hazlitt (1778-1830) a partir de um conjunto de imagens que vinculam as diferentes etapas envolvidas durante o ato de confecção do ensaio crítico e literário aos acidentes topográficos e à textura do solo, expressos no arquétipo recorrente do autor, “ao rês-do-chão”. Pela análise interna de texto e do exercício de leitura, perseguimos as passagens em que Hazlitt reflete sobre seu próprio metié. A defesa do ensaio como forma de arte coloca-lhe a exigência de um altíssimo grau de elaboração que o aproxima, por analogia, à crítica inventiva e a outras formas de arte. Nesse sentido, o estudo desses elementos formais foi indispensável à pesquisa – também nos foi de grande valia o exame de alguns aspectos históricos e culturais, como o chamado Romantismo Inglês. Nos interessou, sobretudo, aquilo que definimos como “atitudes mentais” próprias do ensaísta, experimentadas e vividas por Hazlitt com intensidade, a saber: o retratista, o amigo e o adversário. Desse modo, cada um dos três capítulos desta tese pretende cobrir uma dessas “atitudes”. No primeiro capítulo, sobre o retratista e o estágio inicial de confecção do ensaio (a inspiração), acompanhamos o autor em suas peregrinações juvenis na leitura cerrada de algumas passagens de dois ensaios em que ele narra a sua experiência de conversão ao mundo das artes, “My First Acquaintance with Poets” e “On the Pleasure of Painting, e no modo como os retratos literários que escreveu de Jean-Jacques Rousseau e de Edmund Burke, seus legítimos precursores, apontaram a ele os caminhos para uma crítica inventiva. No segundo capítulo, sobre a atitude do amigo e a leitura, encontramos Hazlitt ora na solidão de seu quarto, mastigando os pensamentos, ora em companhia de pessoas próximas. Intimidade e convivência são os ingredientes chaves para essa etapa do trabalho. Para Hazlitt, a escrita de ensaio envolve um convite cordial ao leitor, com o qual o ensaísta espera dividir amigavelmente a sua tarefa. No terceiro capítulo, sobre a escrita, investigamos o papel do ensaísta como agente das transformações sociais, própria à atitude do adversário. O ensaio se apresenta como espaço privilegiado onde se travam lutas com ideias e se disputa uma causa; o ensaísta, por sua vez, se apresenta como o homem das ruas (man-about-town), cujas andanças pela metrópole londrina e convivência com os homens, sobretudo aqueles pertencentes às classes baixas, permitiu-lhe combinar à elegância do ensaísta os momentos combativos e ousados de prosa.

Palavras-chaves: William Hazlitt – Romantismo Inglês – Ensaio Literário – Critica
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Introduction

William Hazlitt (1778-1830), of all great English romantics, was the only one who made a living of and literary fame essentially from his essays, and this, it is worth remembering, in an era of great essayists, such as Charles Lamb, Leigh Hunt, Thomas De Quincey, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. If, in the wide ranging scope of Hazlitt’s works – twenty one volumes in the centenary edition of Percival Persland Howe (1930) –, not every single piece belongs *stricto senso* to essay writing, many of them still bears the trademark of an essayist, as is observable, for instance, in the psychological analysis of characters in *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays* (1817), in the exam of gestures and voice tone in *A View of the English Stage* (1818), in the autobiographical narrative of his unrequited love in *Liber Amoris*, or *The New Pygmalion* (1823), in descriptions of landscapes and national characters in *Notes of a Journey Through France and Italy* (1826), and, in its most personal and analytical moments, in the massive *Life of Napoleon Bonaparte* (1830). But it was mainly as a periodical essayist and as the author of the series *The Round Table* (1817), *Table-Talk* (1821), *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), and *The Plain Speaker* (1826) that Hazlitt became known to posterity, and he was given the title of “the great essayist”¹, in the words of Otto Maria Carpeaux.

Nevertheless, for a long time, throughout most of twenty-century, Hazlitt’s name was little known and his works almost acquired the quaint aura of an antiquarian piece. The reason for this, as Terry Eagleton suggests, perhaps is due precisely to a question of *genre*². As *literary criticism* was gradually converted into *literary theory*, that is to say, as it gradually changed from the activity, according to T. S. Eliot, that involves choices, comparisons, analysis, not making its “findings such a test as any one can apply”³, to become a “complex relations of a systematic kind

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² In the paper “William Hazlitt: An Empiricist Radical”, Eagleton says: “Hazlitt has had a fair amount of modern critical attention, but not enough of it has been concerned with rescuing him from the drab category of ‘minor Regency prose’ and established his where he belongs, as one of the most extraordinarily intelligent writers of his period. Perhaps the difficulty has been in part one of *genre*”. *New Blackfriars*, # 54 (London: New Blackfriars, 1973), pp. 108-17: 108.

among a number of factors”, with the meaning of literature acquiring new contours and definitions. On the whole, literature came to be defined in western culture as, on the one hand, a language that ‘foregrounds’ language itself, and, on the other, as imaginative or fictitious writing. Now, a brief reading of one of Hazlitt’s essays is enough to convince us of its ‘literariness’, either by a rhythm that strikes the reader’s ear with continuous and baffling changes, or by the sound plane of language. But fictionality, imaginary and non-historical individuals whose actions, dialogues and events make the relation to the world a matter of interpretation are not there to be found. Therefore, the growing influence of literary theories that confine literature to fictionality pushed essay writing, as well as Hazlitt’s works, to an indistinct zone, where the question – is essay literature? – makes sense.

It is thus that the critical evaluation of ‘literariness’ and inventiveness in Hazlitt’s essays was at first carried out by writers themselves. In an unpublished review of Table-Talk, Lamb argues that one of the greatest merits of Hazlitt’s essays, even greater than its argumentative virtuosity, is the style: “He is (we have no hesitation in saying) one of the ablest prose-writers of the age”. Fifteen years after Hazlitt’s death, in 1845, De Quincey wrote a portrait of the essayist where he emphasizes, among other things, the ropedancer’s equilibrium of Hazlitt’s style, which enabled him to be understood by a miscellaneous audience. In some cases, as in that of Robert Louis Stevenson, the reading of Hazlitt’s essays was an indispensable ingredient to his formative years. In “A College Magazine”, Stevenson wrote, “I have thus played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt”. Years later, when Stevenson already bore a high reputation among critics and the public, he said in reference to the authors of his generation: “though we are mighty fine fellows nowadays, we cannot

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5 Not every literary critic indeed complies in this statement. In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye says: “to ‘appreciate’ literature and get more direct contact with it, we turn to the public critic, the Lamb or Hazlitt or Arnold or Sainte-Beuve who represents the reading public as its most expert and judicious (…). The public critic tends to episodic forms like the lecture and the familiar essay, and his work is not a science, but another kind of literary art” (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 8.
write like William Hazlitt”9. Oscar Wilde was another of Stevenson’s generation who identified in Hazlitt one of the greatest masters of the English tongue, unmatched and unrivalled in his witty sentences10. We know from Wilde’s own account that the core idea to The Picture of Dorian Gray came to him from the reading of the following passage in “On the Knowledge of Character”: “A man’s whole life may be a lie to himself and others: and yet a picture painted of him by a great artist would probably stamp his true character on the canvas, and betray the secret to posterity”11. To limit my explanation to the English language, Hazlitt’s literary merits and influence were acknowledged by writers as dissimilar as Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Dickens, Virginia Woolf, and Phillip Lopate, to whom this dissertation will have opportunity to refer or remark on.

During the age of high academic theory, David Lodge’s acclaimed novel, Small World (1984) – taking the opportunity that Hazlitt’s reputation was on the verge of disappearing – created a character obsessed with the essayist, Philip Swallow, a professor at Rummidge (a fictitious name for Birmingham, based on its popular name of Brummagem). There is obviously a satirical tone to it, for the editorial, critic, and academic milieu showed an utter lack of interest in Philip’s recent published book, Hazlitt and the Amateur Reader. When Philip presents it to Morris Zapp, in the hope that he would write a critical review that would help the book and the author, Zapp, based on Stanley Fish, an American professor attuned to literary theory’s most recent developments and always with a critical cant ready on the point of his tongue, told his friend: “‘It doesn’t look like the sort of thing Metacriticism is interested in’ (…). ‘But I’ll see what I can do’. He rifled through the pages. ‘Hazlitt is a kind of an unfashionable subject, isn’t he?’ ‘Unjustly neglected, in my view’, said Philip”12. Hazlitt and the Amateur Reader is indeed a fictional book. But the frequent references to Hazlitt’s essays or even quotations of full excerpts are historical facts – facts so

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masterly interwoven with fiction that led some to assume Hazlitt was also Lodge’s invention. Laurent Folliot, a scholar who translated Hazlitt into French, tells an anecdote “one might equally find amusing or appalling”\(^\text{13}\). While he was working on the edition of a selected essays’ translated to French, *Du Goût et du Dégoût* (2007), two of his friends “expressed some degree of surprise at the name of Hazlitt. The reason for their bewilderment was that they believed ‘William Hazlitt’ to be a fictional author, invented by David Lodge for satirical purposes in his *Small World*”\(^\text{14}\).

There is yet another passage in *Small World* that is worth mentioning here. Morris accepts Philip’s request to review the book and decides to do it quickly, in order to save time. In a *British Airways* plane, on his way to yet another international conference, Morris had Philip’s book on Hazlitt out in his lap. Before starting reading it, he notices the woman sitting next to him had a copy of Althusser’s essays. It was Fulvia Morgana, an Italian Marxist cultural theorist. She also noticed Morris’ book and soon a conversation ensued. “‘What are you reading – a book of ‘Azlitt?’”, asked Fulvia. “‘It’s by a British friend of mine’, said Morris. ‘He gave it to me just yesterday. It’s not the sort of thing I usually go for’. He felt anxious to dissociate himself from Philip’s quaintly old-fashioned subject, and equally archaic approach to it”\(^\text{15}\). Fulvia, however, was still curious and desired to know more about an author she never heard before. It was when Morris opened the book in a passage he had marked in Philip’s book and read aloud an excerpt from “On the Ignorance of the Learned”:

> He is the most learned man who knows the most of what is farthest removed from common life and actual observation, that is of the least practical utility, and least liable to be brought to the test of experience, and that, having been handed down through the greatest number of intermediate stages, is the most full of uncertainty, difficulties and contradictions\(^\text{16}\).

Fulvia was surprised with all that and said: “‘Uncertainty, difficulties, contradictions. ‘Azlitt was obviously a man ahead of his time. That is a remarkable

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\(^{14}\) Idem, ibid.

\(^{15}\) David Lodge, *Small World*, p. 119.

\(^{16}\) CWH, “On the Ignorance of the Learned”, 8, p. 73. And *Small World*, p. 119.
attack on bourgeois empiricism’’. But Morris simply shouldered and said: “I think it was meant to be ironic”17

Whether Lodge knew it or not (Fulvia clearly did not), for generations, Hazlitt has been read by the best tradition of British intellectual Marxists – the only school never to have neglected him. E. P. Thompson, for instance, opened book three, “The Working-Class Presence”, of The Making of the English Working Class (1963), with a quotation of Hazlitt’s “What is the People?”, “one of the most magnificent pieces of political discourse ever penned in England”18, according to Terry Eagleton. At a certain point of Thompson’s book, he traces a compelling character of the author’s ideas and style:

Hazlitt’s was a complex and admirable sensibility. He was one of the few intellectuals who received the full shock of the experience of the French Revolution, and, while rejecting the naiveties of Enlightenment, reaffirmed the traditions of liberté and égalité. His style reveals, at every point, not only that he was measuring himself against Burke, Coleridge, and Wordsworth (and, more immediately, against Blackwood’s and the Quarterly Review), but that he was aware of the strength of some of their positions, and shared some of their responses. Even in his most engaged Radical journalism (…) he aimed his polemic, not towards the popular, but towards the polite culture of his time. His Political Essays might be published by Hone, but, when writing them, he will have thought less of Hone’s audience than of the hope that he might make Southey squirm, make the Quarterly apoplectic, or even stop Coleridge short in mid-sentence.

This is in no sense a criticism. Hazlitt had a width of reference and sense of commitment to a European conflict of historical significance which makes the plebeian Radicals appear provincial both in space and time19.

In “Disenchantment or Default?: a lay sermon” (1969), Thompson reworks on a topic dear to Hazlitt, namely, because the Revolution never crossed the Channel, it did not open in England, as it did in France, the possibility for new and varied talents to

express themselves. “It has become an understood thing”, says Hazlitt, “that no one can live by his talents or knowledge who is not ready to prostitute those talents and that knowledge to betray his species, and prey upon his fellow-man”.

A decade before Lodge’s book, Terry Eagleton, another enthusiast of Hazlitt, published a paper, “William Hazlitt: An Empiricist Radical” (1973), that answers Fulvia Morgana’s remark read above. Hazlitt’s epistemology – understood here “not only the formal theories of knowledge writers held, but the ways such theories infiltrated their styles and sensibilities (...), moulding the relations between language and the matter in hand” – had an aim to exploit “internal relations between literary style, theories of knowledge, ideological consciousness and political practice”. This epistemology, continues Eagleton, went hand in hand with Hazlitt’s commitment “to preserve the imagination as a political force”. That is the reason why Eagleton places him against, on the one hand, the Lake Poets, namely, against “right-wing implications of an aesthetic which advocates ‘subjecting the soul to external things’ and makes a fetish of fact”, and, on the other, Utopian socialists, notably Robert Owen. In Eagleton’s words: “As long as Owen confines himself to general principles and safe abstractions, Hazlitt’s argues, nothing will be done”. Thus, Hazlitt’s antithetical style reveals itself as a critical and political weapon, by means of which he expounded the natural conservative impulses of the imagination, “which seeks the greatest quantity of present excitement by inequality and disproportion”, without, however, “clip[ping] the wings of poetry [or imagination]”, and this style “expresses a dialectical mind rather than a vacillating mind”.

In a more recent publication, “Ulster Altruism: Francis Hutcheson and William Hazlitt” (2013), Eagleton inquires on the author’s philosophical grounds and debt to the Scottish Enlightenment. From a historical fact, the Celtic (or Ulster) origins of both Hutcheson and Hazlitt’s names, and from an analysis of our author’s first published book, An Essay on the Principles of Human Action (1805), Eagleton exams some key-concepts to the communitarian sense and altruism common to “the

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23 Idem, p. 110.
24 Idem, pp. 111 and 114.
Gaelic regions of the British isles”28. Among these concepts are benevolence and sentimentalism, where contrary, but confluent forces, work onto another: “The former, as it were, centripetal, involving a spontaneous diffusion or decentring of the self, the latter centrifugal and secretly self-regarding, picking over one’s finer feelings and thrilling to one’s own exquisite sensory vibrations like so much precious emotional booty”29. Running against the grain of a stiffened interpretation, so to speak, that always aims at grand historical models and a general sense, Eagleton makes an approximation – which may sound surprising to some – between Ulster altruism, the Scottish Enlightenment and British leftist thinking, or rather, Celtic leftist thinking. That is the reason why Eagleton tells the anecdote of the young Raymond Williams, “another Celtic communitarian”, “who as a teenager once cycled for many miles to visit one of Hazlitt’s haunts”30.

Relations between theory of knowledge, language, and political criticism were largely examined in the three most important monographic studies on Hazlitt published in the 1970’s and 1980’s: Roy Park, *William Hazlitt and the Spirit of the Age: abstraction and critical theory* (1971); John Kinnaird, *William Hazlitt, Critic of Power* (1978); and David Bromwich, *Hazlitt, the Mind of a Critic* (1983). Preserving the many differences between them, what these studies have in common and what distinguishes them from previous works, for instance, Elizabeth Schneider’s *The Aesthetic of William Hazlitt: a Study of the Philosophical Basis of his Criticism* (1933), is their mutual aim to rebuild the scaffolding of Hazlitt’s complex conceptual edifice. Thus, his enormous work is taken as a whole. Nothing was left behind, and the authors skilfully connected the dots of his many facets. The philosopher, the artist, the theatrical critic, the social scientist, the historian, the essayist, everything finally comes together in a criticism, which, as they contended, is still relevant and disturbing nowadays. One of their goals was to dissociate Hazlitt from the unfashionable figure of the impressionist critic that university handbooks ascribed to him – apparently, no other expedient seems more efficient, however unfair, than to accuse critics of yore of impressionism. Their targets were the René Wellek’s totemic *A History of Modern Criticism, 1750-1950* (1955), and William K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks’ *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957). That there are ‘impressionistic’ elements in

29 Idem pp. 7-8.
30 Idem, p. 12.
Hazlitt’s criticism is something Hazlitt himself would not deny. For, says he in the essay “On Criticism”: “A genuine criticism should, as I take it, reflect the colours, the light and shade, the soul and body of a work.”\textsuperscript{31} Now, the true meaning of this critical stance goes well beyond a mere nickname. Even more problematic is the way these handbooks associated Hazlitt with Coleridge. The former would be nothing but a follower of the latter – some kind of incomplete Coleridge, because not backed by Kant and German idealism\textsuperscript{32}.

Of the above-mentioned studies, I would like to highlight Bromwich’s, “Hazlitt’s best critic”\textsuperscript{33}, according to Harold Bloom. Differently from Park and Kinnaird, Bromwich is less keen to update Hazlitt’s criticism in light of Marx, Nietzsche or Freud\textsuperscript{34} than to enquire into Hazlitt’s intellectual development and in connection with authors he frequently engages with: Burke, Rousseau, Coleridge, Byron, Keats, among others. In this sense, Bromwich’s book is at once a revealing portrait of a great critic and a groundbreaking study on British Romanticism, redefining British Romanticism, which meant that critics now needed to reassess many of the commonplaces ascribed to the period.

But the great swerve in Hazlitt’s studies, which is still underway, and the surprising reputation he now enjoys within British and North American academic circles would have to wait for a few decades. This is mainly due to two factors from different matrices: 1. editorial works of Hazlitt’s writings by Duncan Wu and Tom Paulin (one of Britain’s most renowned present-day poets), and, together with it, Paulin’s \textit{The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt’s Radical Style} (1998) and Wu’s “ultimate” biography \textit{William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man} (2008); 2. the rise of historical culturalism in literary studies and its breakdown “of lyric Romanticism as

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{CWH}, “On Criticism”, 8, p. 217.
the primary framework for interpreting late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century British literature. Let us begin with the former of these matrices.

Wu and Paulin’s editorial work, by means of which, scholars can now rely on safer guides to critical and historical analysis, has been a true watershed in Hazlitt’s reception; and the public in general now has access to works sold out a long time ago. Besides The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt, 9 vols. (1998), Paulin and Wu, either together or individually, have cooperated with editions such as: The Plain Speaker: the key essays (1998); a new selection of Hazlitt’s writings for Penguin, The Fight and Other Writings (2000); New Writings of William Hazlitt, 2 vols. (2007); William Hazlitt on the Elgin Marbles (2008); and All that is Worth Remembering: Selected Essays of William Hazlitt (2014). All of these were firmly grounded on Paulin’s fine stylistic interpretations, Wu’s stimulating biographical narratives, and in both commitment to Hazlitt’s ideals. In a paper for the London Review of Books, Edward Said wrote about Paulin: “Paulin cares about human enlightenment and emancipation. Underlying his essays is the steadily unfolding grand narrative of the struggle to achieve justice, freedom and knowledge.” The Day-Star of Liberty, which is the main inspiration of this dissertation, analyzes Hazlitt’s work from a recurrent image of the author, the daystar, and how it throws a light onto his Irish background, Dissenting culture, the Scottish Enlightenment, and his aesthetic and political engagements. The energy and elasticity of Hazlitt’s prose are assessed in richness of details and in the hands of a skilled essayist who, as his subject matter, turns criticism into an art form.

Similar to other nineteenth-century writers, Hazlitt’s life offers interesting facts to readers. His parents were radical intellectual dissidents who, in the 1790’s, had to emigrate to America; back in England and having heard Coleridge’s last sermon, he dropped out of his ministerial studies and discovered his vocation as a philosopher and painter; after a thwarted career as a portrait painter, he began making a living out of periodical essays, to which he owns his literary fame; he was an ardent champion of popular revolution, and this commitment made him many enemies; he fell out with fellow writers who, in his opinion, deserted the “cause of the people”; at the age of forty-four, he divorced his first wife in a unfortunate attempt to love a...

37 Recurrent expression in Hazlitt’s writings. See, for instance, “What is the People?”, CWH, 7, p. 261.
woman twenty-five year younger than him; he married again, moved to Italy and France with his new wife, who would later leave him behind: finally, he ended up his life alone and poor in a rented room in Soho, London. For these reasons, there were number biographies written on him. The best-known are: P. P. Howe’s *The Life of William Hazlitt* (1922); Ralph Martin Wardle’s *Hazlitt* (1971); and Stanley Jones’ *Hazlitt: A Life: from Winterslow to Frith Street* (1991). Therefore, why write another biography, or rather, two new biographies? In 2000, besides Wu’s, the acclaimed English philosopher and critic Anthony Clifford Grayling published *The Quarrel of the Age: The Life and Times of William Hazlitt* (2013). Firstly, because new editions and findings of new texts offered relevant materials to intellectuals attuned to quality and innovation. Secondly, because Hazlitt seems to have been one of those authors, in Grayling’s words, whose “achievements owed itself to his intellectual gifts and outstanding talents, while his tragedy owed itself to his untutored sensibility and the unkindness of his time”\(^{38}\).

But no other biography, wrote Eagleton, has more “meticulously recorded (…) every nook and cranny of Hazlitt’s career”\(^{39}\) than Wu’s, whose point of departure is that “Romanticism is where the modern age begins, and Hazlitt was its most articulate spokesman”\(^{40}\). Whether these statements are true or false is a minor issue. But hence concluding that he was the first modern man is surely a biased judgment. No more biased, nevertheless, than the alleged fact, according to Erich Auerbach, that “modern consciousness of reality began to find literary form for the first time precisely in Henry of Grenoble [Stendhal]”\(^{41}\). Leaving such disputes aside, it is worth noting that in Paris Hazlitt met Stendhal, whom he befriended while in France, and both acknowledged the influence one exerted on the other\(^{42}\).

As for the other matrix, the rise of historical culturalism in literary studies, an avant-garde of readers have endeavoured to examine literary works, on the one hand,

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\(^{42}\) For the relations between Hazlitt and Stendhal, see *The First Modern Man*, pp. 359 and 392-3. Stendhal was a diligent reader of the *Edinburgh Review*, to which Hazlitt frequently contributed. The idea of writing “Racine et Shakespeare” came to Stendhal after having read Hazlitt’s “Sir Walter Scott, Racine and Shakespeare”. See also Robert Vigneron, “Stendhal et Hazlitt”, In. *Modern Philology* 35 (1938), pp. 375-414.
as cultural artefacts, and on the other, as “living texts”\textsuperscript{43}. The pivotal guidance to these studies in the English language is Marilyn Butler’s \textit{Romantic, Rebels & Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830} (1981). In the author’s words: “In order to counter the isolationism of so many of the commonest approaches of the literary scholar, we need both an awareness of the historical process, and a feel for the community which generated art and provided its public”\textsuperscript{44}. Somehow or other, Hazlitt became a key-figure to understanding the period. There is a warrant to it, for his critical essays reveal a piercing consciousness of the historical process and one of his favourite themes is precisely the public, its making, opinions and tendencies.

Since then, works on British Romanticism and its historical background (the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, urbanization, industrialization, the growth of imperialism, parliamentary reform movements, etc.), in which at least a chapter is dedicated to our author, have been flowing regularly. But there is nothing homogeneous in these studies. While Uttara Natarajan’s \textit{Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense: Criticism, Morals, and the Metaphysics of Power} (1998), for instance, studies how his power principle counters the pleasure principle of the Utilitarians in its connection with his philosophy of discourse, his account of imaginative structure, his theory of genius, and his moral theory; Marcus Tomalin’s \textit{Romantic and Linguistic Theory: William Hazlitt, Language and Literature} (2009) explores the complex relationship between linguistic theory and literature in Hazlitt’s \textit{A New and Improved Grammar of the English Tongue} (1809), as well as other writings; and Gregory Dart’s \textit{Metropolitan Art and Literature, 1810-1840: Cockney Adventures} (2012), as regards Hazlitt, studies the profound urban changes that made early nineteenth-century London into the first modern metropolis, and the Cockney free lance essayist, as the true ancestor to modernity. Dart has also edited two selections of Hazlitt’s texts: \textit{Metropolitan Writings} (2005) and \textit{Liber Amoris and related writings} (2008).

The list of monographic studies, book chapters, and papers in specialized journals related to Hazlitt is now so wide-reaching that if I dwelt on each and every one of them it would indeed make this reassessment tiresome. For the sake of brevity, I shall comment on two freshly-baked books: Stephen Burley’s \textit{Hazlitt the Dissenter}:

\textsuperscript{44}Idem, ibid.
Religion, Philosophy, and Politics, 1766-1816 (2014), and Kevin Gilmartin’s William Hazlitt, Political Essayist (2015). Burley’s book is the first full-length account of Hazlitt’s early life as a Dissenter, outlining his ministerial studies at New College, Hackney, and how radical dissenting culture shaped the ideas and style of the future essayist. Following on from a previous study on the radical parliamentary reform movement, the subject of Print Politics: The Press and Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth-Century England (1996), in the new book, William Hazlitt, Political Essayist, Gilmartin locates the style, form, and rhetorical strategies of Hazlitt’s essays within radical journalism. Counteracting Thompson’s claim that “Hazlitt’s style, with its sustained and controlled rhythms, and its antithetical movement, belongs to the polite culture of the essayist”45, Gilmartin argues that his “flexible critical methods that exploited paradox and contradiction, and subjected the left as well as the right to corrosive scrutiny”46, were committed, in their own way, to the radical reform movement.

Either as philosopher, literary critic, political essayist or wry observer of society, Hazlitt’s studies had never been so highly regarded. Thus, Morris Zapp’s sentence that “Hazlitt is a kind of unfashionable subject” has never sounded so quaintly old-fashioned. In this sea of publication, perhaps Philip Swallow’s Hazlitt and the Amateur Reader would have been better acclaimed if it had actually been published.

All this thriving academic production was encouraged by the foundation of The Hazlitt Society, in 2003, and, five years later, the creation of The Hazlitt Review, a University of London journal. Literary societies are fairly common in the UK, but there is a special flavour to this one in particular, for its founder was no one else than Michael Foot. To refresh the minds of readers, Foot was an important radical British left-wing intellectual and Labour Party Member of Parliament from 1980 to 1983, he launched a manifesto strongly socialist in tone in 1983, but in the same year, heavily lost the General Elections to the Conservative Party under Margaret Thatcher. The future of Britain and of the Western World would have been altogether different – and, to my understanding, better –, if the hazlittian Michael Foot had won.

46 Kevin Gilmartin, William Hazlitt, Political Essayist, p. 15.
It remains to say a few words on Hazlitt’s presence in Brazil. This dissertation is the first ever written on the author in Brazil. As is common to any pioneering work, I should dwell on such questions: “what is Hazlitt’s relevance to Brazilian audiences?” Or still, “why study Hazlitt in Brazil?”

I have quoted above Otto Maria Carpeaux’s opening sentence to a short profile he wrote of Hazlitt in History of Western Literature (1959-66). Carpeaux’s rare sensibility, which combines skills academic specialization wishes to set aside, never deceived himself, as occurred with another critic of his generation, the Italian Mario Praz, of the place Hazlitt deservedly occupies in literature: that of being one of the greatest essayists. However, there are a few slippages in his profile that should be remarked on. First, Hazlitt was never an advocate of individualism or Helvetius’ disciple; quite the contrary, his philosophy is a slap in the face of theories that ground human action in individualism and self-love. Second, opposition is the only possible affinity between Hazlitt and Jeremy Bentham. Throughout his whole life, Hazlitt was at the front against those who believed instrumental reason could drive humanity to concrete truths or build up a fairer society. Third, Hazlitt’s Bonapartism bears no parallel to Carlyle’s cult of heroism. If, for Carlyle, Napoleon, “our last Great Man”, was an able man, endowed with “divine right over” others; for Hazlitt, the statesman led the cause of the revolution “in spite of himself”. Even if Napoleon wished to, he could not “divest himself of the character” of “the child and champion of the French Revolution”.

On different occasions, and with different aims, Hazlitt has been read by two emblematic intellectuals in Brazilian modernism: the novelist and essayist Lucia Miguel Pereira; and one of Brazilians greatest poets and composers, Vinícius de Moraes.

Lucia Miguel Pereira prefaced the volume Ensaístas Ingleses (1952), translated by J. Sarmento de Beires and Jorge Costa Neves, which included the first

two translations of Hazlitt’s essays in Brazilian Portuguese: “On the Ignorance of the Learned”, and “On Nicknames”. The main inspiration of this volume was another and larger selection of essays, *Ensayistas Ingleses* (1948), prefaced by Adolfo Bioy Casares. While Casares stressed the versatility of Hazlitt’s talents (painter, philosopher, historian, and essayist), Miguel Pereira recalls, above all, his quality of a critic who promotes historical understanding: “his critical essays, which embraces practically every writer from the age of Elizabeth to his own, largely fostered an understanding of Shakespeare, as well as of the romantic movement in England”\(^\text{52}\). And both Bioy Casares and Miguel Pereira were sensitive to the passionate zeal and inspiring energy of his essays. “Hazlitt thought a lot, wrote a lot and fought a lot”\(^\text{53}\), says Casares. In addition, in Miguel Pereira’s words: “a man of spontaneous temper, his writings reflect his passions, sympathies and antipathies”\(^\text{54}\).

In another key, but also close to the heart, the Hazlitt of Vinicius de Moraes is the chronicler who in epidemic times keeps up the dignity of never yielding to a defeatist attitude. In *O Exercício da Crônica* (1953), Moraes offsets the opinion that the chronicle is a typically Brazilian literary genre, or that is better acclimatized here than elsewhere\(^\text{55}\). Instead he contends that chronicle is a deviation from the British essay. The passage deserves to be read in its entirety:

> The best chroniclers in the world, who wrote in eighteenth-century England – the so-called *essayists* –, practiced the *essay*, which the modern chronicle would evolve from, with the handcrafted zeal of a good carpenter or watchmaker. Freed from the exclusively moral notion of the primitive *essay*, the eighteenth century English writers gave to chronicles their first lessons of liberty, causality, and lyricism, without any loss of formal value and objectivity. Addison, Steele, Goldsmith, and, above all, Hazlitt and Lamb – these two, the best – did for chronicle what a skilful master carpenter would do for a chair, make it a light but solid object, on which both thin and fat people could sit\(^\text{56}\).

\(^\text{56}\) Vinicius de Moraes, “O Exercício da Crônica”, In. *Para uma Menina com uma Flor* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2009), p. 53. I wish to register here my sincere gratitude to Paulo Roberto Pires for have called my attention to this passage.
In fact, Hazlitt was one of the best of chroniclers; he handled a prose style that combines masterly crafted sentences with an everyday popular language; he was a critic conscious of the historical process; he was a non-conformist intellectual and perhaps the only one of his generation who declared himself, above all, a revolutionary, or “revolutionist”, the term he uses\(^57\). With a fortunate combination of styles and ideas so much valued to an infantry of leftist university professors among us, perhaps we should invert the question: after all, why has Hazlitt never been the subject of analysis in Brazil? We should, however, be careful in not creating a false problem. To tell the truth, British Romanticism and literary essays have barely been subjects of analysis in Brazil. There is, of course, the barrier of language. Some fundamental texts in these areas of studies have never been translated into Brazilian Portuguese. But barriers have begun to fall apart. *Revista Serrote*, which this dissertation has largely benefited from, issued a number of seminal texts in the history of essay writing, mainly in the English language. *Serrote* # 9, for instance, published “On the Pleasure of Hating”, translated into Portuguese by Alexandre Barbosa de Souza; and, in # 22, “On the Periodical Essayists”, translated by myself.

In this thesis, I analyse a body of images that binds the different stages involved in the craft of the critical and literary essay to topographical accidents and the texture of the soil, as expressed in the author’s recurrent archetype on the plain-ground. Therefore, Hazlitt’s works interests me mostly for their criticism and essayism: a criticism that does not assume an air of superiority, or slip into pedantic formulas, and that shortens the distances between writers and readers, as understood by Lucia Miguel Pereira; and an essayism that does not aspire to a higher art form, or even to a work of Art (in capital letters), but as an artefact, handcrafted by a skilful carpenter or watchmaker, as Vinicius de Moraes says.

In the first chapter, on the first stage in the making of the essay (the insight), I have followed Hazlitt through his youthful pilgrimages from an analysis of a few emblems pertaining in “My First Acquaintance with Poets” and “On The Pleasure of

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\(^{57}\) Hazlitt wrote his profession of political faith precisely in his last published work, *Life of Napoleon*. In the chapter “The Establishment of the Empire”, says Hazlitt: “I have nowhere in any thing I may have written declared myself to be a Republican; nor should I think it worth while to be a martyr and a confessor to any form or mode of government. But what I have staked health and wealth, name and fame upon, and am ready to do so again and to the last gasp, is this, that there is a power in the people to change its government and its governors. That is, I am a Revolutionist” *CWH*, 14, p. 236. For a discussion on this passage, see, “Revolutionist”, In Gilmartin’s *William Hazlitt, Political Essayist*, pp. 186-200.
Painting”, where he narrates his moment of conversion to a world of art. In both essays the constant presence of twilight images and their influence on the author and a changing world, made me inquiry into their multiple meanings. Furthermore, I have linked these essays to the literary portraits Hazlitt traced of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Edmund Burke, his genuine precursors, in order to understand the paths along which he was initiated into inventive criticism. In the second chapter, we find Hazlitt by the fireside, either in the solitude of a room of his own, chewing on his thoughts, or in the company of close friends. Intimacy and conviviality are the key ingredients to this stage in the craft of the essay (reading), thanks to the fact that he found the art of talking on paper – in short, the familiar or conversational style. According to Hazlitt, the writing of essays requires a cordial invitation to readers, with whom the essayist hopes to share his task in a convivial way. In the third chapter, on writing itself, I have enquired into the role of the essayist as an agent of social changes. The essay presents itself as a privileged place where the writer struggles with the world and disputes a cause; and the essayist as the man-about-town, whose rambles around the streets of the metropolis and conviviality with the people, particularly those belonging to lower classes, enabled Hazlitt to combine the sustained and controlled rhythms of the polite culture of the essayist with strenuously argumentative, emphatic speeches. Lastly, I will conclude with a fanciful itinerary, so to speak, on the essay as genre and on the essayist persona from two contrary but not conflicting forces: one eccentric, that aims at escaping its earthily influences; another concentric, that does not deny the plain-ground.

Therefore, each chapter dwells on one of the author’s “mental attitude” – to take up from Lucia Miguel Pereira’s expression58. To my understanding, there are three mental attitudes intensely experienced by Hazlitt, namely, the portraitist, the friend, and the adversary. From an arrangement of typologies of the essay suggested by two important critical texts that conceptually discussed the genre, Alexandre Eulálio’s O Ensaio Literário no Brasil, and Max Bense’s On the Essay and its Prose, I will speak of: 1) “the descriptive and narrative essay, interpretative of artistic

58 Lucia Miguel Pereira, “Sobre os Ensaístas Ingleses”. In the authoress’ words: “Of the traits of the main authors collected in this book, which are described perfunctorily, diversity comes readily to mind; that each one of them may be called essayists, in its strict or broader senses, tests the essay’s mobility and complexity. It is rather a mental attitude than a literary genre. A mental attitude that ultimately represents a desire to understand everything and to capture reality in all its facets, whether spiritual or material reality”, p. 17.
intention”\textsuperscript{59} (such is the portraitist’s attitude); 2) the subjective essay, “known in English as the \textit{familiar essay}\textsuperscript{60}, whose clarity differs from conceptual definitions (such is the friend’s attitude); and, finally, 3) the polemic essay, “which does not make experiments on the subject to critically enlighten it, but to assault and beat its subject”\textsuperscript{61} (such is the adversary’s attitude).

As we have seen, Hazlitt is one of essayism’s beacons. Given the centrality the genre acquired in British literature, this study also aims to throw light onto this crucial period of its history, Romanticism. I have adopted as true the following words of Gilberto Freyre, himself a handy essayist and a diligent reader of English literature:

No one can speak of English literature under any criteria – psychological, sociological or aesthetic – without taking into consideration the importance the both artistically and intellectually wrought, rather than spontaneous, essay. More than in any other modern literature, England stands out for its essayists, each and every one a master of a \textit{humour}, a grace of expression, an unpretentious way of discussing and even philosophizing, a sensibility to human things from their nothingness to adventures that may be hidden in daily life, of a writer who is also a philosopher, qualities so diverse from one another, seem to come together in English writers. It is true Montaigne was French, and quite a few Spanish have been, in their way, admirable essayists. But in English literature essayists have been succeeding one another in an apostolic progression under this literary form of expression: a form, perpetually changing over times and in various ways, that has remained essentially and vernacularly English. The flexible essay, perhaps more so than poetry, the drama or novel, has allowed the English to express themselves in it according to their different personalities: this flexibility is essential to a country of highly individual and personal writers, each and every one a king, or a queen; and it is incapable of establishing a uniform school of literary expression or supporting the institutionalization of concepts of what supposedly stands for good, correct, or elegant English language; good, correct, or elegant prose or poetic styles. Each and every essayist, more than each and every novelist or playwright, has been, within this literary form of expression, a maker of his or her manner of writing essays\textsuperscript{62}.

\textsuperscript{60}Idem, ibid.
Chapter 1

The Puddles of the Road: pilgrimages of the artist as a young man

“On and on and on and on he strode, far out (...), crying to greet the advent of a new life that had cried to him”.

James Joyce, ‘A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man’

1. The Portraitist

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). 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 struggle 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. In particular, Woolf touches the string of the craft of Hazlitt’s essay writing, when she describes it as practiced by one who “will suddenly glow red-hot or white-hot if something reminds him of the past”. 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. 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 specialization fostered by the rigidity of literary scholarship, thus regretting the fading of criticism as an art form:

The best critics, Dryden, Lamb, Hazlitt, were actually 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.

Woolf’s observation 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.

During his youth, Hazlitt showed signs of a promising career as a painter. Back in the days of the Peace of Amiens, a brief armistice in the French Revolutionary Wars, Hazlitt the young apprentice “marched delighted” in the newly opened Louvre galleries to study and look “face to face” at masterpieces heretofore barely known to him, “as in a glass darkly.” When back in England, he followed his older brother and painter John Hazlitt to places where, Hazlitt recollects, “the young artist makes a pilgrimage”, visiting private collections or in service of commissioned portraits. Day after day, with patient toil and careful finishing, Hazlitt spared no pains to trace the individual yellow parchment colour of his first sitter: “an old woman with the upper part of the face shaded by her bonnet.” If some of the artist’s finest portraits are now found at Maidstone Museum, in his hometown in Kent, this, like others less fortunate, he “cut [...] to ribbons in a rage or turned it against the wall in despair.” But Hazlitt would still create some outstanding paintings (the portrait of his friend and essayist Charles Lamb, with titianesque guise and a “forbearing half

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6 Conflicts between France and England, or the French Revolutionary Wars, broke out in 1793 and lasted until Bonaparte’s defeat at Waterloo, 1815. The armistice went from March 1802 to May 1803. As Hazlitt’s biographer, Duncan Wu, observed: “there were illuminations across London and the English flocked across the Channel, eager to sample the delights of the Continent, of which they had been deprived for over a decade”. *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man*, p. 79.
7 *CWH*, “On the Pleasure of Painting”, 8, p. 15.
10 Idem, p. 8.
smile on his face”\textsuperscript{12}, deserves to be mentioned, although he lacked something – “perhaps it was invention”, conjectured Virginia Woolf.\textsuperscript{13} It would not be long, however, until Hazlitt found in inventive criticism a more congenial means to giving life to his models – 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.

My expression inventive criticism is based on Hazlitt’s own phrase, in “The Letter-Bell”, for his writing: “inventive prose”\textsuperscript{14}. If Hazlitt’s mind is one whose happiness rested – as his later essays bear witness – on his earliest recollections, on what he wished things to had been before he found himself disappointed in his public and private hopes\textsuperscript{15}, not surprisingly, his language is the more plastic and sonorous precisely when he “unlock[s] the casket of memory” – when he is turned into a “child again”\textsuperscript{16}.

Not long before he started his career as a travelling painter with his brother, two almost simultaneous events awakened him to the art of the mixing of elements. In 1798, he heard Samuel Coleridge’s sermon in the Unitarian congregation of Shrewsbury, in Shropshire; “for myself”, wrote Hazlitt many years later, “I could not have been more delighted if I had heard the music of the spheres”.\textsuperscript{17} In the same year, Edmund Burke’s Reflection on the Revolution in France and Jean-Jacque Rousseau’s Confessions fell in his hands and he “devoured them tooth-and-nail”\textsuperscript{18}. If, from Coleridge, he learned to express his admirations of books, pictures, sculptures and plays with music and painting in mind, or, in his own words, “in motley imagery or quaint allusion”\textsuperscript{19}, Burke and Rousseau – in the way in which their countenances, when placed side by side, tensioned imagination and sensibility, paradox and

\textsuperscript{12} Wu, Plate 9.
\textsuperscript{13} Duncan Wu, William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man, plate 9; Virginia Woolf, The Second Common Reader, 189.
\textsuperscript{14} CWH, “The Letter-Bell”, 17, p. 380.
\textsuperscript{15} For Hazlitt unfulfilled public and private hopes, the first, of the triumph of liberty, the second, of a happy marriage, see “On the Pleasure of Hating”, CWH, 12, pp. 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” (pp. 161-84) and “The End of Private Hopes”, (pp. 319-42).
\textsuperscript{16} CWH, “Why Distant Objects Please”, 8, p. 257.
\textsuperscript{17} CWH, “My First Acquaintance with Poets”, 17, p. 108.
\textsuperscript{18} The expression is a recurrent one in Hazlitt’s writings, and it is used in reference to the anthropophagic act of reading, namely, according to him, the idea that a work is only fully understood if absorbed not in the mouth, but in the stomach. For the excerpt, see CWH, “On Reading Old Books”, 12, p. 224.
\textsuperscript{19} CWH, “My First Acquaintance with Poets”, 17, p. 107 (my emphasis).
commonplace – indicated the tasks involved in the making of critical and literary essays.

This is what can be noticed from focusing on the autobiographical sections of two essays: “On the Pleasure of Painting” and “My First Acquaintance with Poets”, where Hazlitt relates his youthful pilgrimages 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”\(^\text{20}\). An overview of Dissenting culture and its relation to his writings, through an analysis of particular images in these two essays, is important to understand the radical political content that permeates key emblems such as *evening star* and *dew drops*, and, more specifically, to understanding the paths by which Hazlitt was initiated into a world of literature and arts. To start with, I will foreground his early Dissenting education in connection with his use of the imagery of gleaming and twilight as “emblem[s] of the *good cause*”\(^\text{21}\), and elaborate on the vocal and musical implications that are so often 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. Finally, I will link the reading of both these essays with the literary portraits of his most legitimate precursors: Rousseau and Burke.

2. The Evening Star

It was late afternoon; the sun shed its last light over the distant hills of Wales, glistening the silvery slopes of a winter day; the rich notes of the robin redbreast peeped from afar, while the blue sky which “gradually turned into indistinguishable hues of purple and gold” “hung its broad marble pavement over all”\(^\text{22}\). Another day had been done, another portrait accomplished, and this time with no haste or obligation. There was a pleasant disposition in the *model*, the artist’s father, to sit as long as it took, besides having a certain feeling of satisfaction to the one who “multiplied his likeness”\(^\text{23}\). The benevolent dissenting minister bore in his hand a book, a volume of Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics*, with spectacles on, patiently reading, and his left side backlit by sunlight traversing the chapel’s windows.

Hazlitt’s family, after two frustrated attempts to fix residence – first in the minister’s country of origin, Ireland, County Cork; secondly, in the two most


\(^{21}\) *CWH*, “My First Acquaintance with Poets”, 17, p. 108.

\(^{22}\) *CWH*, “On the Pleasure of Painting”, 8, p. 8.

\(^{23}\) Idem, p. 12.
important cities of the lately founded United States of America, Philadelphia and Boston – was forced to settle down in the small and distant town of Wem, Shropshire,24 where radical ideas of social equality could not be echoed beyond Llangollen Vale. Antimonarchists and advocates of the “cause of the people”25, particularly non-conformist pastors of Irish origins like Rev. William Hazlitt, went through times of hardship in the late eighteenth century. The monarch George III, with a group “in full cry after him”, the Church-and-King mob, “and mounted on a great war-horse” drove “all competitors out of the field”26. Homes, libraries, workshops and places where radical thinkers held meetings were burned down, as E. P. Thompson describes in *The Romantics: England in a Revolutionary Age*. Again, according to Thompson, decrees such as the Two Acts, November 1795, prohibited public political lectures (then an important means of popular mobilization); the 1798 Irish revolt, which is equally owed to Jacobin protestant leaders from the north as well as the Catholic peasantry from the south, was crushed27. Finally, the 1800 Union Act decided on a divided Ireland, incorporating it into the United Kingdom, and thwarted the hopes of men like Rev. William Hazlitt who devoted their lives to fighting for civil and religious liberty28.

But in the winter of 1805, after Hazlitt had finished the portrait of his father29, 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

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25 A common expression in Hazlitt, see, for instance, *CWH*, “What is the People?”, 7, p. 216.
27 According to Wu, the tragic denouement of the Irish revolt of that year, where ‘in a matter of weeks over 30,000 people were slaughtered’, is captured in Hazlitt’s opening sentences to ‘My Acquaintance with Poets’ and is one way of interpreting why he said the figures that compose the year 1798 “are to me like “the dreaded name of Demogorgon”” (xvii, 106). See Wu, *Modern Man*, 19; and Tom Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt’s Radical Style* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), pp. 133-5.
29 Although Hazlitt says he finished the portrait of his father on “the same day that the news of the Battle of Austerlitz came” (*CWH*, 8, p. 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, p. 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.
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 thoughts and feelings than I shall ever have again. Oh for the revolution of the great Platonic years, that those times might come back over again! I could sleep out the three hundred and sixty-five thousand intervening years very contentedly.30

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 it31, shed its light on the path of Hazlitt the young writer. Later, in the essay “On the Connection Between Toad-Eaters and Tyrants”, which I will have more opportunity to discuss in the third chapter of this thesis, he resorted to the same image for the definition of a true Jacobin, as one “who had seen the evening star set over a poor man’s cottage, and connected with the hope of human happiness”32. Indeed, the frequent recurrence of this and similar dawn and twilight images in Hazlitt’s text – the day-star and rising sun, among others – to describe a sentiment and political engagement, puts him in close connection with Dissenting culture that brought together some of the most eminent English writers and radical thinkers33. 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 other studies of Hazlitt and British Romanticism, most notably Stephen Burley’s ample research on the topic, particularly his recently published book Hazlitt the Dissenter: Religion, Philosophy, and Politics (2014), offer some guidelines to the understanding the importance of Dissenting culture and language for Hazlitt. For its

33 As Marilyn Butler reminds us, “like Priestly, Paine, Godwin and Blake, he [Hazlitt] came from the classic stock of the English Left, the Dissenters”, Romantic, Rebels & Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830, p. 169.
richness of details and interest in “the gestures which symbolize and focus whole ages of struggle”34, I resorted on occasions to Christopher Hill’s significant book The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution (1972). Although Hill only mentions en passant the origins of Unitarism in England, in treating of its relations with the Socinian John Bidle, the many affinities this radical Puritan group shares with countless others treated in Hill’s book throws a light onto my analysis. To start with, it should be noted that certain aspects of faith and moral conduct that were frequently associated with Puritanism – the doctrine of predestination, isolation from the world, inner and individual solitude –, differ from the beliefs and social practices among the most significant dissenting groups. At this moment of my thesis, I have also resorted to Max Weber’s seminal work The Protestant Ethics and the ‘Spirit’ of Capitalism. However, the excessively clear outlines this study throws onto Puritan groups and Weber’s sole interest in a “Protestant ethics”, understood as the ideology of the propertied classes, makes my reading run against the grain of some of his conclusions.

It is also important to stress that, in the words of Paulin, “Hazlitt’s puritanism is cultural”35, as it were for most writers at the time. As a young man, after giving up his studies on theology to follow his brother as a traveling painter, Hazlitt thwarted the hopes of his father, who wished he would also become a pastor. As the years went by, art would once and for all replaced religion in the writer’s life36. But, as a pupil at New College, Hackney, he became fully acquainted with a range of most radical Dissenting 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”37. There, Hazlitt attended Joseph Priestley’s history lectures, as well as gatherings 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 herself38. John Thelwall, too,

35 Tom Paulin’s “General Introduction” to The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt, vols 1, p. xiii.
36 As David Bromwich has it, “for Hazlitt the loss of belief in God did unquestionably coincide with an awakened receptivity to art”, Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic, p. 6.
38 In “My First Acquaintance with Poets”, Hazlitt is pleased to find Coleridge an admirer of “Mrs Wollstonecraft’s powers of conversation”, but is rather stunned by the poet’s low opinion of Godwin.
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 lava (...). The lightning of national indignation flashed from his eyes”\(^{39}\).

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”\(^{40}\). 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 Pharisees, and declared itself at variance with principalities and powers, for it sympathised 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!\(^{41}\)

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. *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, as sates Weber\(^{42}\), at least not within the radical religious groups that proliferated in Britain.

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\(^{39}\) *CWH*, “On the Difference between Writing and Speaking”, 12, p. 264 (my emphases).

\(^{40}\) *CWH*, “Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth: general view of the subject”, 6, p. 183.

\(^{41}\) Idem, p. 185 (my emphasis).


The sociologist unfamiliarity with radical English Dissenting groups is what explain his opinion of
during revolutionary times. Christopher Hill, for instance, has comprehensively examined the seventeenth-century English Revolution in this light. Such groups dreamt rather of a world of social justice which they knew it would be impossible to attain without a strong “collectivist spirit”\(^43\), in Hill’s expression. 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 sympathy “not with the oppressor, but the oppressed!”\(^44\) 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”\(^45\). 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”\(^46\). In this context, the light from heavenly bodies is the consubstantiation of a utopian idea of social and political changes which is, in 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 archetypical image of the hopes of mankind.

But there is another important detail in Hazlitt’s portrait of his father that should be highlighted: the book the Reverend bore in his hand, a volume of Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics*, “my father would as lieve it had been any other book”\(^47\). The allusion to Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, already points out to a secular religiousness, strongly inspired in the world of arts. Shaftesbury, besides had been a paladin to radical liberals, bequeathed concepts and

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\(^{43}\) 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”, *The World Turned Upside Down*, p. 154.

\(^{44}\) *CWH*, “On Court-Influence”, 7, p. 242.

\(^{45}\) *CWH*, “On the Tendency of Sects”, 4, p. 51.

\(^{46}\) Duncan Wu, *William Hazlitt, the first modern man*, p. 67.

\(^{47}\) *CWH*, “On the Pleasure of Painting”, 8, p. 12.
central themes that would later define aesthetics as an autonomous area of thinking. Indeed, Shaftesbury’s presence in Hazlitt’s writings are large, a topic that far exceeds the scope of my purpose here.  

To elucidate further what I have said so far, I shall move to the core of my analysis – Hazlitt’s narrative of his first encounter with Coleridge, his pilgrimage from Wen 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 between non-conformists across Britain, “by which”, says Hazlitt, “the flame of civil and religious liberty” was “kept alive”. 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 wings in the Unitarian controversy”, and which were particularly fruitful for his poetic composition and collaboration with Wordsworth. Most of Lyrical Ballads as well as other poems, such as The Rhyme of Ancient Mariner and Christabel date from this period.  

It was late Saturday afternoon when Coleridge, “in a short black-coat which hardly seemed to have been made for him”, was welcomed by Rowe. While watching the newcomers coming down from the coach, Rowe was certain and disappointed that none of them could possibly be the poet. All doubts were dissipated when “the round-faced man in black” greeted him with a smile and began to talk. Thence “he talked on forever”, said Hazlitt, “and you wished him to talk on forever”. During the three

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48 In A Linguagem das Formas: natureza e arte em Shaftesbury, Pedro Paulo Garrido Pimenta suggests an affinity between both writers, particularly on the concept of originality in works of art (São Paulo: Alameda, 2007), p. 111. For a more detailed discussion on Shaftesbury and, in general, on the presence of eighteenth-century British moral philosophy in Hazlitt’s writings, see Tom Paulin “Celebrating Hutcheson”, In. The Day-Star of Liberty, pp. 64-90; and Terry Eagleton, “Ulster Altruism: Frances Hutcheson and William Hazlitt”, pp. 5-12.


50 CWH, “Mr. Coleridge”, 11, p. 30.


weeks when “the poet preacher”53 remained in town, he “fluttered the proud Salopians like eagle in a dove-coat”54, expressed Hazlitt in allusion to Shakespeare’s Coriolanus55. Finally, after Thomas Wedgwood made him an irrefutable offer of £150 a year to devote himself entirely to the study of poetry and philosophy, Coleridge left the obscure western English vale “to inhabit the Hill of Parnassus”. 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”56.

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 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.

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 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 Coleridge57.

The author’s comparison of himself to a worm, in the alliterated sentence “worm by the way-side”; the use of triple adjectives, which occur twice in the same

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53 CWH, “My First Acquaintance with Poets”, 17, p. 112.
54 Idem, p. 107.
55 In Tom Paulin’s superb analysis of My First Acquaintance with Poets, he reminds the reader that the same quotation from Coriolanus was used elsewhere by Hazlitt and applied to Burke. Thus, contends Paulin, Hazlitt is here establishing “an associative bridge” between both men, Burke and Coleridge, signalling that the latter, as did the first, would later in life became a turn-coat, in Hazlitt’s expression (CWH, 19, 277), picking a quarrel with the wrong side, namely, against the rising liberties of the world. See Tom Paulin, The Day Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt’s Radical Style, “Coleridge the Aeronaut”, 199-200.
57 Idem, p. 107 (my emphases).
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 the 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 /au/ in light and /ei/ 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 at the first moment, on that state “in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain”58, as the like-minded John Keats expressed; that is to say, according to my interpretation of Hazlitt’s art of essay writing, when the essayist on a plain-ground is not yet conformed. From here onwards, a companion would guide the saunterer when setting out his journey by untrodden paths: “the voice of Fancy”59.


59 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 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 the Holy Land from the hands of Infidels” (Henry David Thoreau, *Collected Essays and Poems* (New York: The Library of America, 2001), p. 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 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”, CWH, 17, p. 116.

It has now been settled. Coleridge should part the following morning to Nether Stowey, Somerset – a place where Hazlitt once described as surrounded by poetical names, like Vale Rock, whose “precipices overhanging the sea, with rocky caverns beneath, into which the waves dash”\(^{60}\), may have provided the landscape scenery for Kubla Khan. There the poet would encounter his friend and latest patron, Thomas Wedgwood. William and Dorothy Wordsworth also longed for his arrival, and there they lived together “through the most important year of their artistic lives”\(^{61}\). Many are the stories surrounding the poets’ presence in the region. The most famous of them, narrated by Coleridge himself, and which became known to Brazilian audiences through the craftsman’s hands of Manuel Bandeira, in Itinerário de Pasárgada\(^{62}\), relates to the making of Coleridge’s poem Kubla Khan. “The Poet”, says Bandeira, “had taken a dose of opium and fell asleep on the chair precisely when he read in Purchas’s Pilgrimage this sentence: ‘Here, Kubla Khan, ordered to build a palace and sumptuous garden. Thus, ten thousand acres of fierce lands were walled’”\(^{63}\). After waking up, says Coleridge, “with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast”\(^{64}\).

The preceding night before Coleridge’s departure, during the visit to Hazlitt’s father, the poet was clearly impressed by the nineteen-year-old’s striking observations. Thus, the following morning, he called for ink and paper and left a card with his new address – “precious document” – urging Hazlitt to pay him a visit in the spring. Hazlitt stammered out his sentiments of gratitude and accompanied the poet “six miles on the road”. 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

\(^{60}\) CWH, “My First Acquaintance with Poets”, 17, p. 120.

\(^{61}\) Duncan Wu, William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man, 10.

\(^{62}\) After retelling Coleridge’s narrating, Bandeira speaks about his own dreamwork fabric, the sonnet “O Lutador”: “This is the origin of the sonnet: once I heard my cousins, Maria do Carmo de Cristo Rei, a Carmelita nun, narrating a journey she had made with some Peruvian sisters, on their way back from a pilgrimage to Avila, where they saw relics belonged to Carmelo’s reformer. Naturally they spoke with unction about the great saint’s transverberated heart. The word transverberated struck me deeply. I spent the rest of the day thinking of it, but with no idea to a poem. The following morning, I woke up with the full sonnet in my head, with title and everything. Believe it or not”. Manuel Bandeira, Poesia Completa e Prosa (Rio de Janeiro: José Aguilar Editora, 1967), pp. 126-127.

\(^{63}\) Idem, p. 126.

“an odd movement”\textsuperscript{65}. After their walk, Coleridge described Hazlitt in a letter to Thomas Wedgwood thus:

Brow-hanging, shoe-contemplative, strange (…); yet (…) oftentimes when he 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\textsuperscript{66}.

Coleridge’s observation on the way Hazlitt sounded, in this half-length portrait, coalesces perfectly with the general tone of impressions that Hazlitt preserved of him ever after: Coleridge’s imagination was musical. Hazlitt’s own portrait of the poet in \textit{The Spirit of the Age} is accordingly imbued with musical images: the “string of his own early promise of fame rather jars than otherwise”; “bookish studies” mingled with “music of thought and of humanity”; “shattered chords vibrate of themselves, making melancholic music to the ear of memory”\textsuperscript{67}; 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 sentence \textit{viva voce}\textsuperscript{68}. In \textit{The Spirit of the Age}, he writes, alluding to \textit{The Tempest}, that Coleridge’s voice “is like the echo of the congregated roar of the ‘dark rearward abyss’”. Likewise, “the \textit{Ancient Mariner} (…) gives a distant idea of the lofty or changeful tone of Coleridge’s voice”\textsuperscript{69}. To Hazlitt, Coleridge’s mellifluous voice spoke music of thoughts without which his own words would never have caught the light of former years. Once more we 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.

A ten-mile slog divides Wem and Shrewsbury. Hazlitt rose early in the morning, before dawn, and walked through the mud and along wet road all by

\begin{footnotes}
\item[\textsuperscript{65}] \textit{CWH}, “My First Acquaintance with Poets”, 17, pp. 112, 113.
\item[\textsuperscript{66}] Quoted in Wu, \textit{First Modern Man}, p. 94. This early impression of Hazlitt which Coleridge retained is widely known. Virginia Woolf’s essay \textit{William Hazlitt} expatiates on it: “Soon, so thin is the veil of the essay as Hazlitt wore it, his very looks 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 hand with the fin of a fish; occasionally he darts a malignant glance from his corner” (Second Common Reader, p. 173).
\item[\textsuperscript{67}] \textit{CWH}, “Mr. Coleridge”, 11, pp. 29, 31, 34.
\item[\textsuperscript{68}] A common expression in Hazlitt. See, for instance, “On the Prose-Style of Poets”, \textit{CWH}, XII, p. 6.
\item[\textsuperscript{69}] \textit{CWH}, “Mr. Coleridge”, 11, pp. 34-5.
\end{footnotes}
himself. It was a freezing wintry day and the walk was a “raw, comfortless one”70. As he approached the temple he could hear the piping organ playing Psalm 100, giving thanks to those who entered through its gates. He silently took place in one of the box-pews and with throbbing heart saw the celebrated person going “up into the mountain to pray”71. At times of war, when the outcry against anti-monarchists and radicals (groups to which Dissenters regularly belonged) was strong, Coleridge’s sermon could not be more expeditious. It “was upon peace and war; upon church and state – not their alliance, but their separation”.72 We can guess the content of the sermon and Coleridge’s reservations about Britain’s military campaign in France from the poem France: An Ode, composed early that year73. His excursion through such a thorny topic “added grace to the Unitarian cause” and bore all the fragrance of poetry: “his voice ‘rose like a stream of rich distilled perfumes’”74. The sermon’s conclusion on the fatal consequences of war was strikingly drawn by contrasting a simple shepherd boy, “sitting under the hawthorn, piping to his flocks”75, with the same country-lad, now forced to army, fallen drunk at an alehouse, with drums under his arms. Hazlitt’s impression of the sermon can be read below:

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 good76.

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

71 Idem, ibidem. The passage makes reference to the Bible, Book of John, 6:3.
72 Idem, ibidem.
75 Idem, ibidem.
the forty-year journey through the desert, the children of Israel were only able to survive because of the distilled drops of dew which 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 to one 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’

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 earth is stayed from her fruit”

Equally, in Blake’s poem, *To the Evening Star*, mentioned previously, the poet writes: “The fleece of our flocks are cover’d with/ Thy sacred dew: protect them with thine influence.” 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 nations, will be “as a dew from the Lord (...) that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for sons of men”

Hazlitt, as we have seen, had been prepared by his father from an early age to be a Unitarian Minister. He had studied theology at New College, Hackney, and had thus acquired a thorough knowledge of the Bible. He must, therefore, have been well acquainted with the multiple meanings of dew when 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

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78 Haggai, 1.10.
79 *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, p. 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).
80 Micah, 5.7.
81 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 studies, discussed, and learned by heart until they became second nature to him, interwoven in the fabric of his mind”, p. 42.
Painting”\(^{82}\), 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 beards of the thistle, had something genial and refreshing in them\(^{83}\).

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, 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 /ɒ/ and /a/ of *wan* and *dank* respectively – seems to mimic the half clouded landscape 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”\(^{84}\). The sacred dew, however, produces silent music when it falls: “that prayer might have floated in solemn silence through the universe”\(^{85}\). It requires a certain open-mindedness to listen to it. Suddenly, loud and clear, it struck the ears in the consonant alliteration: *dank drops of dew*. The voiced dental /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 rhythms less wont to dreaminess and reveries.

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84 Idem, p. 115.
85 Idem, p. 108.
Before moving ahead, it is crucial to observe that everything depends on the original impression I have been pursuing here. Its place is secured in memory, which oftentimes the critic returns to, voluntarily or involuntarily. Hazlitt could not find a better language to express the driving force of memory than French:

\[
\text{Il y a des impressions que ni le temps ni le circonstances peuvent effacer.}
\]

\[
\text{Dusse-je vivre des siècles entiers, le doux temps de ma jeunesse ne peut renaître pour moi, ni s’efface jamais dans ma mémoire}^{86}.
\]

It is possible to justify the choice of the French language by his political engagement with the state of things in France, after the revolution broke out. However, there are other reasons for the use in French. The excerpt echoes some passages from Rousseau’s *Confessions* and *New Heloise*. In both books, all the narrative is weaved with threads of recollected experiences, in Rousseau’s words, “[I was] forced to arrange them haphazardly, and as they occur to me”\(^87\). I have said above that Coleridge’s visit to Shrewsbury (1798) coincides with Hazlitt’s first readings of Rousseau. On his way to Nether Stowey, a two hundred mile journey, which he pilgrimaged to for a week and a half, Hazlitt carried in his luggage two French novels widely read in those days: *New Heloise* and Bernadin de Saint-Pierre’s *Paul et Virginie*. In the company of the French authors, Hazlitt firstly signalled the strong dissonances that later would characterize his conviviality with his old mentor, which this thesis will have some opportunities to explore. Coleridge’s voice, says Hazlitt, sounds more like “high German”\(^88\), and the poet accused the French of the corruption of imagination in the modern world. Contrary to other English writers at the time, Hazlitt’s romanticism was spiced with the sensuality of French language and literature. After a long day’s walk, and now comfortably at an inn, he would draw the books from his luggage, order a bottle of sherry, and spend the rest of the evening in their company\(^89\).

\(^{86}\) Idem, ibidem.


\(^{89}\) CWH, “My First Acquaintance with Poets”, 17, p. 115-16. There are a few passages in Hazlitt’s writings where he narrates moments of reading in the company of good wine and good food. Sometimes, as in “My First Acquaintance With Poets”, the author gives a detailed account of what he ordered to drink and eat; at other moments, the book itself is served as a form of repast. In “On Reading Old Books”, says he, “Many a dainty repast have I made of the *New Eloise*”, CWH, 12, p. 224.
In those days, Hazlitt was already an avid reader of novels. But if “this species of composition”, says Hazlitt, allows us to “see the very web and texture of society as it really exists”\(^90\), his readings of *New Heloise* made him comprehend something more hidden: the first impression of things, or in his own expression, the “glassy essence”\(^91\). This happens, continues Hazlitt, because in the effort to narrate acts of pure memory, Rousseau’s style produced in him the same feeling of early *drops of dew*, before the sun melted them. Or, says Hazlitt in another essay, “sweet is the dew of [Rousseau’s] memory”\(^92\). Once more we come to the unerring transience of *twilight existences*. Shortly, the sun’s heat will dissolve the drops of dew, turning them into bubbles that melt *into thin air*\(^93\). Similarly, memory or the original impression, which metaphorically stands for the twilight of thought, would float in an ideal existence if they were not crystalized into images.

Now, in the Hazlitt passage quoted above, where he compares Coleridge’s words with drops of dew, they assumed the form of crystals that hung half-melted on the beards of the thistle. As the important Rousseau scholar, Jean Starobinski, has observed, Rousseau aspired to an immediate form of communication and found in “the transparency of crystals”\(^94\), a recurring image in Rousseau’s writings, the best way to express this anxiety. If an absolute transparency could not be obstructed, dissolved into bubbles, the whole being would be paralyzed, making all kinds of communication impossible. Here it is when the language of profound sentiments and vivid sensations comes to its rescue; a language, according to Starobinski, devoid at the most of “writing conventions”\(^95\) and silently communicated\(^96\), like the dew’s silent music.

All these questions and images reappear in Hazlitt’s “Character of Rousseau” and in many other passages from his writings where the essayist dwells on the company of the Geneva philosopher. I come now to a brief analysis of this portrait,

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\(^90\) *CWH*, “On the English Novelists”, 6, p. 106.

\(^91\) *CWH*, “On Novelty and Familiarity”, 12, p. 304. The expression “glassy essence” is borrowed from Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*, II, ii. 120. In this essay, Hazlitt goes further saying that he could only understand its meaning after reading Rousseau’s *New Heloise*.

\(^92\) *CWH*, “On the Character of Rousseau”, 4, p. 91.

\(^93\) A recurrent expression in Hazlitt, as in the following excerpt from “On Novelty and Familiarity”: “Such is the stuff of which our lives are made – bubbles that reflect the glorious features of the universe, and that glance a passing shadow, a feeble gleam, on those around them!” *CWH*, XII, p. 301.


\(^95\) Idem, p. 178.

inasmuch as it also elucidates Hazlitt’s conversion to a world of art and, more specifically, this moment I have been pursuing here, namely, that which immediately precedes the act of writing critical and literary essays.

Rousseau’s reception in England at the time was profoundly influenced by German philosophy. Some of Rousseau’s philosophical appropriations, for instance, that which identified in his thoughts the birth of a romantic imagination – “a kind of incomplete Novalis”97, in the ironic words of Bento Prado Jr. – were then digested towards a larger audience by the isolated effort of a single writer, Mme. De Staël. Hazlitt opens his “Character of Rousseau” with a quotation from the Mme. De Staël Lettres sur les Ouvrages et le Charactère de Jean-Jaques Rousseau:

Madame de Staël, in her Letters on the Writings and Character of Rousseau, gives it as her opinion, ‘that the imagination was the first faculty of his mind, and that this faculty even absorbed all others’. And she further adds, ‘Rousseau had great strength of reason on abstract questions, or with respect to objects, which have no reality but in the mind’. Both these opinions are radically wrong. Neither imagination nor reason can properly be said to have been the original predominant faculties of his mind. The strength both of imagination and reason, which he possessed, was borrowed from the excess of another faculty; and the weakness and poverty of reason and imagination, which are to be found in his works, may be traced to the same source, namely, that these faculties in him were artificial, secondary, and dependant, operating by a power not theirs, but lent to them. The only quality which he possessed in an eminent degree, which alone raised him above ordinary men, and which gave to his writings and opinions an influence greater, perhaps, than has been exerted by any individual in modern times, was extreme sensibility, or an acute and even morbid feeling of all that related to his own impressions, to the objects and events of his life.98

By choosing sentiment, as opposed to imagination, for the main trait of his character of Rousseau, with which he painted a portrait of the philosopher distinct from those of his contemporaries, Hazlitt gloats over paradox: that apparently inoffensive “electrical experiment”, as he defined in “On Paradox and Common-Place”, which “refuses to combine its evanescent, inflammable essence with any thing solid or any thing lasting”99. But the use of this figure of speech goes beyond its

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figurative sense. The readings of Rousseau’s *Confessions*, though “it contains the fewest set paradoxes”\(^{100}\), taught Hazlitt that, in the art of prose writing, the efficiency of this figure only comes when enlivened by the glow of passion. The uppermost application and effort of the mind is not enough to make “my feelings (...) rise to the same pitch of fervour as my ideas” – a necessary movement, says Rousseau, “to put them down on paper”\(^{101}\). A new and vivid conception of an object is alone capable of naturally and spontaneously suggesting, like lightning striking, the place where sentiments and thoughts, once brought to the surface, be fixed into words. Few other writers like Rousseau seemed to have delighted in this vague zone of fermentation of ideas; hence his relentless solitary walks, in which the colourfulness of words would spring up in his mind, in on-going ecstasy. Moreover, few other writers suffered from anxiety and frustration for not finding, after hours of weariness, a single word that echoed their profound sentiments.

All the creative literary process in Rousseau, says Hazlitt, and “the power which he exercised over the opinions of all Europe, by which he created numberless disciplines, and overturned established systems, [he owed] to the tyranny which his feelings, in the first instance, exercised over himself”\(^{102}\). In other words, a yearning to transpose all obstacles to communication, bringing sentiments up to the surface, and making his soul “transparent to the reader”\(^{103}\) would, eventually, offset communication itself. The formula is indeed paradoxical and deserves further attention.

Now and then, Rousseau reminds his readers that he wrote his *Confessions* with an aim to show himself in full person: “[it] requires that nothing about me should remain hidden or obscure”\(^{104}\). However, for the philosopher of “local diaspora of the humanities”\(^{105}\), according to the telling expression of Bento Prado Jr., what can be more inaccessible to others than feelings? Nevertheless, Rousseau claims to have written “the memoirs of my own life (...), so that for once at least a man might be seen from the inside and exactly as he was”\(^{106}\). The task Rousseau has before him is the more arduous because, ultimately, his goal is to narrate the history of his soul not

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\(^{100}\) *CWH*, “On the Character of Rousseau”, 4, p. 90.

\(^{101}\) Rousseau, *Confessions*, p. 342.

\(^{102}\) *CWH*, “On the Character of Rousseau”, 4, p. 89.

\(^{103}\) Rousseau, *Confessions*, p. 170.

\(^{104}\) Idem, p. 58.

\(^{105}\) Prado Jr., p. 231.

\(^{106}\) Rousseau, *Confessions*, p p 505.
according to facts, but to “the chain of feelings”\textsuperscript{107}, and because he knows “it is for the reader to assemble all these elements and to determine the being that they constitute; the result must be his own work”\textsuperscript{108}. If, for the reader, the finished painting is a work of the imagination, and every interpretation aspires to some form of universality; for the writer, nothing is done without the most local and most personal sentiments: inveterate habits of a mind. In an exemplary passage, Starobinski, who seems to be unacquainted with his most illustrious precursor, says something strikingly similar to Hazlitt’s readings of Rousseau I have been expounding here: “Rousseau takes hold of the pen with the sole reason to remit his readers to the sentiment that ideally precedes the moment of writing or that is detached from the written text”\textsuperscript{109}. Or, in Hazlitt’s words, “passion lends force and reality to language, and makes words supply the place of imagination\textsuperscript{110}. It is only the language of sentiments and one woven with vibrating prose, written in local colours, that allows contraries to live together without suppressing them. Paradox is the language of profound feelings.

After Coleridge and Rousseau, Hazlitt was also struck by another voice during his youthful pilgrimages, that of Burke. However, in this case, it was not under the interior of temples or dimmed lighted woods that he heard it; but in the city, and in broad daylight. Burke’s voice has the vigour of lightening, which bursting on the plain-ground dig up diamonds – transparent but solid.

4. ‘Un Beau Jour’.

“I set out in life with the French Revolution”\textsuperscript{111}, wrote Hazlitt. When the Revolution broke out, in 1789, the young Hazlitt, then only eleven years old, had just returned from America with his family. In those years, he closely followed the persecution his parents and friends suffered. “In this circumstances”, says Wu, “it was impossible for the young William not to become politicized, as everyone of his

\textsuperscript{107} Idem, p. 270.
\textsuperscript{108} Idem, p. 170.
\textsuperscript{109} Jean Starobinski, \textit{La Transparence et L’Obstacle}, p. 171
\textsuperscript{110} \textit{CWH}, “On the Character of Rousseau”, 4, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{111} \textit{CWH}, “On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth”, 17, p. 196.
When he was told of Joseph Priestley’s imprisonment, the twelve-year-old boy sent a letter to the *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, his first publication, where he denounces the horrors of church-and-king mobs. In a passage of astonishing early maturity, says him: “of all persecutions, that of calumny is the most intolerable”\(^1\). In the end, as we have seen, Hazlitt’s family and other more fortunate members of Dissenting communities were forced to find refuge in remote villages throughout Britain, such as Wem, dispersed across Britain. Some years later, the young Hazlitt was sent to Hackney College, London, where his ideas, which were beginning to spring up, were cultivated.

An important aspect of Dissenting thought and culture can be summed up in a single concept: *disinterestedness*. Because, at this time, Hazlitt was dealing with this concept, and because it is an important one to understanding his first entrance into a world of art, as well as his ambiguous relation to Burke’s writings\(^2\), it is worth dwelling on it according to his first and only published philosophical work.

In its general outline, *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, published in 1805, begins with the hypothesis that every voluntary action aims at a future event that only exists in the imagination and as an abstract idea. Because memory or conscious impressions of an individual are always related to his or hers past or present existence, there is no consistent reason, argues the author, for human actions to rely on self-interest. Only the imagination is capable of pointing towards the future, by means of which, says Hazlitt, it “must carry me out of myself into the feelings of others”\(^3\). The principle here in action is obviously *sympathy*, a word dear to the best British moral philosophical tradition, of names such as Shaftesbury, Hume and Smith, that were ready on his tongue\(^4\). Hazlitt also defines sympathy as a “*state of projection*”\(^5\). Human beings can only act if they *project* themselves onto future actions or onto another being; that is to say, only when they disengage from their immediate and individual existence. The argument is naturally extended to the

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112 Wu, 2008, p. 49.
116 For a thorough discussion of Hazlitt’s *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* in connection with eighteenth-century British moral philosophy, see Burley’s *Hazlitt the Dissenter*, Chapter 3 “A ‘new system of metaphysics’”, pp. 91-123.
problem of what constitutes personal identity. Seeing a multiplicity of dissimilar things that make up an individual – “I am not the same thing, but many different things”\(^\text{118}\) –, Hazlitt argues that all personal identity depends on something external to an individual mind, namely, on others. In his words: “mankind [must be considered] in this two-fold relation, as they are to themselves, or [to] the thoughts of others”\(^\text{119}\). Contrary to the egotistical hypothesis, where Hazlitt refers to authors such as Hobbes, Mandeville, Hartley and Helvetius, whose theories he analysis in depth to rebut them\(^\text{120}\), the concept of disinterestedness allowed him to explain, as David Bromwich observed, why man may “have an interest in what he does not feel”\(^\text{121}\).

Certainly, every question propounded in this work deserves page after page of careful examination; but it is not my intention here to systematically analyse Hazlitt’s ideas and arguments but merely outline this work and mention Bromwich’s suggestion: the disinterested mind is capable of projecting onto another mind even without sharing its opinions and sentiments.

However, shortly afterwards, Hazlitt would come across the following problem, which coincides with one of the main lines of his criticism and poetics: how can we shape intangible thoughts and sentiments lying beyond our own existence? In other words, to rephrase the above formula, how can we paint motley imagery to express our admiration to others? For this purpose, Hazlitt needed a breach, however partial, with the philosophical and religious tradition he inherited from his father. The denial of “the skeleton-style of mathematical demonstration”\(^\text{122}\), as he defined his own philosophical enterprise or, indeed, as he understood philosophical writing as a whole, together with his reproach of the hardness and severity common to every sect or to every headstrong devotee to a cause, in which Dissenting groups partook\(^\text{123}\), would open the paths for Hazlitt to absorb a new model, whose character equally differed from the philosopher and the partisan; that is to say, the artist, or more specifically, the painter.

\(^{118}\) Idem, p. 35.
\(^{119}\) Idem, p. 38 (my emphases).
\(^{120}\) Otto Maria Carpeaux’s misunderstanding could not have been greater when he says, in the volume “Romantismo”, from História da Literatura Ocidental, that Hazlitt was a disciple of Helvetius and an advocate of individualism, pp. 2012-3.
\(^{121}\) David Bromwich, Hazlitt: the mind of a critic, p. 47.
\(^{122}\) CWH, “My First Acquaintance with Poets”, 17, p. 114.
\(^{123}\) See the essay “On the Tendency of Sects”, CWH, 4, pp. 47-51.
Brush, pallet, oil and paint already are instruments which are plastic enough to require from those who handle them a flexibility of thought and an immersion in a sensory world. The painter, says Hazlitt, is by profession ready to be carried out of him or herself, meddling with things; onto the canvas, a myriad of forms, even of those less tangible, are revealed to the eyes. In Rembrandt’s landscapes, for instance, says the critic, “there [is] an earthiness in the feeling of the air”\textsuperscript{124}; indeed, he continues elsewhere, “everything in his pictures has a tangible character”\textsuperscript{125}. In this sense, a painter with \textit{gusto}\textsuperscript{126} is a critic, a “painter is a true scholar”. “Every stroke \textit{tells}” and the painter \textit{traces} nature with “a \textit{disinterested} spirit of inquiry”\textsuperscript{127}. Hazlitt found in painting a kind of creative activity that thence onwards would shape his own \textit{métier} as a writer, a practice halfway through purely mechanical craftsmanship and intellectual inquiry, at once body and mind: as it happens to the painter, also the essayist’s “hand and eye are equally employed”\textsuperscript{128}.

I move now to a closer examination of a passage in “On the Pleasure of Painting” where Hazlitt narrates his first arrival in the Louvre; one of the places, wrote him, where “the young artist makes a pilgrimage to”\textsuperscript{129}:

The first day I got there, I was kept for some time in the French Exhibition-room, and thought I should not be able to get a sight of the Old Masters. I just caught a peep at them through the door (vile hindrance!) like looking out of purgatory into paradise – from Poussin’s noble mellow-looking landscapes to where Rubens hung out his gaudy banner, and down the glimmering vista to the rich jewels of Titian and the Italian school. At last, by much importunity, I was admitted, and lost not an instant in making use of my new privilege. It was an \textit{un beau jour} to me\textsuperscript{130}.

It is possible to have an idea of the Louvre’s galleries in those days, launched in 1800, from Duncan Wu’s descriptions, where the scholar speaks about the valuable works already gathered by the museum, how they were displayed, the numerous visitors, and the different aims that attracted a sea of people to walk about its

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{124}{\textit{CWH}, “On the Pleasure of Painting”, 8, p. 8.}
\footnotetext{125}{\textit{CWH}, “On Gusto”, 4, p. 78.}
\footnotetext{126}{An important critical word for Hazlitt. See The Round Table essay “On Gusto”, \textit{CWH}, 4, pp. 77-80.}
\footnotetext{127}{\textit{CWH}, “On the Pleasure of Painting”, 8, pp.10, 11.}
\footnotetext{128}{Idem, p. 5.}
\footnotetext{129}{Idem, p. 14.}
\footnotetext{130}{Idem, p. 15.}
\end{footnotes}
rooms. A remarkable contrast with today’s visitors to museums, the “jumbled tourist,” can be noticed from the fact that, in those days, many of its visitors, as our author bears example to, brought brushes, paints and canvas under their arms. In short, they were there with a conscious purpose, the completing of a crucial stage in their formative years, namely, the copying of masterpieces. The brief account in this excerpt, however, as well as others Hazlitt’s descriptions on the same episode, already are sufficiently rich in details about visitor to Louvre in the early nineteenth century and of its impact on the artist as a young man. I will look now in more details at this and other passages.

Hazlitt’s stopping in the French Exhibition-room, with doors half-opened between galleries as hindrances, confirms Wu’s remarks: the Louvre in those days received a “number numberless” of people; as Hazlitt expressed in the lines of Milton. The excerpt also seems to suggest that the gathering of people in the first room was deliberately done with an educational or political purpose. Visitors were there kept so they would first be acquainted with leading painters from the newly opened French Academy of Fine Arts, led by no one else than Jacques-Louis David. Hazlitt had little interest in it (“I am irreclaimably of the old school of painting”) and did not hesitate to catch a peep of what could be seen through doors. The pleasure of looking at his old masters, however blocked and at a distance, was infinitely greater; it was like a vision of paradise from purgatory. During his visits to the Louvre, the painter Jean François Léonor Merimée, who guided the young artist in Paris, asked his opinions on French contemporary landscape painting; Hazlitt’s account rather displeased him: “It is too clear”! “Mais, c’est impossible!”, answered Merimée. The young critic then explained himself:

That the parts of the several objects were made out with too nearly equal distinctness all over the picture; that the leaves of the trees in shadow were as distinct as those in light, the branches of the trees at a distance as plain as those

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131 Wu, The First Modern Man, pp. 79-81.
136 For the reconstruction of the dialogue between Hazlitt and Merimée, see Wu, The First Modern Man, pp. 81-2.
near. The perspective arouses only from the diminution of objects, and there was no interposition of air.\textsuperscript{137}.

Merimée stopped, gave a suspicious look and said not convinced by the arguments. “The French”, concluded Hazlitt, “are shockingly afraid of being mystified.”\textsuperscript{138}

In neoclassical painting, as Rodrigo Naves explored in his essay Debret, neoclassicismo e escravidão, every outline should be equally marked and well defined; gestures as well as lines are fully shaped; familiar ties or ties of friendship are put down in favour of ethical designs, and every figure in the painting calls upon a vigorous engagement in public life; exemplary and virtuous acts from the Greek-Roman past were historically reset and acquired an ethical dimension. Moreover, continues Naves, all these formal elements capture the rhythms of a France in full Revolutionary course, in which “the many spiritual dimensions – ethic, aesthetic and epistemology”\textsuperscript{139} – flowed in the direction of building up a society marked by complex structures and fully defined institutions.

Now, I have been insisting on my reading of Hazlitt’s enthusiastic adherence to the French Revolution, which would be later shaped in a heroic portrait he drew of Bonaparte – it must be remembered that Hazlitt’s last published work was a four volume biography, Life of Napoleon. However, Hazlitt’s critique of the excess of clarity in neoclassical painting, and his observation, in the episode above, of modern French art’s continuous effort to drive from the mind whatever obscured or mystified thoughts, suggest an specific kind of political engagement; in Thompson’s words, “by sustaining his aspiration of a kind of whimsy fortified by rancour”\textsuperscript{140}. Hazlitt’s political engagement resembles the glimmering vista of the rich treasures from the past. Once more I should insist on the radical content of twilight imageries, for they suggest that the making of a more equal society is not accomplished solely with fully conscious acts and gestures or with fully defined institutions, but also with dreams, doubts and nostalgia. To remove them would correspond to a simple reversal of roles: to make tyrants slaves; and slaves tyrants; an endless maintenance of the state of things.

\textsuperscript{137} CWH, “Madame Pasta and Mademoiselle Mars”, 12, p. 332-3.
\textsuperscript{138} Idem, ibidem.
\textsuperscript{140} E. P. Thompson, The Romantics, p. 86.
A critical view of a society founded on values which are utterly rational, free from prejudice, superstitions and ungovernable feelings\textsuperscript{141}, brings Hazlitt closer to his major rival, Edmund Burke. The concluding line from the passage above, on Hazlitt’s first pilgrimage to the Louvre, according to the valuable observations of Paulin\textsuperscript{142}, puts Burke on the spot. The words in French, \textit{un beau jour}, is an allusion to \textit{Reflections on the Revolution in France}. Among many virulent attacks on the Jacobin “invasion” of Versailles, says Burke:

\begin{quote}
Miserable king! miserable Assembly! How must that assembly be silently scandalized with those of their members, who could call a day which seemed to blot the sun out of Heaven, ‘un beau jour’\textsuperscript{143}.
\end{quote}

The passage in Hazlitt’s text that immediately precedes the expression in French strengthens the allusion to Burke: “[I] lost not an instant in making use of my new \textit{privilege}\textsuperscript{144}. But Hazlitt’s allusions, because \textit{quaint}, turn Burke inside out. What kind of privilege one can hold when it is shared with a \textit{number numberless} of ordinary people?

Burke deserves, however, more of our attention. If Hazlitt oppose to and refutes the main arguments of \textit{Reflections on the Revolution in France}, the young author, at the suggestion of Coleridge (during the conversations they exchanged at the Reverend William Hazlitt’s house), found in this and other political writings of Burke the missing key to his own path as an artist: an imagination profoundly conscious of the tough and even barren tasks involved in the creative process. Indeed, arguments and abstract propositions are here of little interest. “According to Mr. Coleridge, common rhetorician argues by metaphors; Burke reasoned \textit{in them}\textsuperscript{145}. I come now, at last, to a reading of Hazlitt’s portrait of Burke from its sharp contrast with Rousseau’s countenance.

If an extreme sensibility to everything relating to his impressions is the trait that best defines the character of Rousseau, “the power which governed Burke’s mind

\textsuperscript{141} See my article, “Anarquia e Conformação das Coisas: algumas observações sobre revolução, história e linguagem em Edmund Burke”, doispontos, Ilustração e História. Vol.8, n 1. (Curitiba e São Carlos, 2011), pp. 11-22.
\textsuperscript{144} \textit{CWH}, “On the Pleasure of Painting”, 8, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{145} \textit{CWH}, “Memorabilia of Mr. Coleridge”, 20, p. 216.
was his Imagination"\textsuperscript{146}; if Rousseau seized an exclusive vision of objects and examined it in every different angle, Burke “was completely carried away by his subject”\textsuperscript{147}, the French Revolution. When \textit{Reflections on the Revolution in France} came to light, in November 1790, the heroic portrait of Burke, the former spokesman of radical Whigs, had long lost its vigour and brightness. During the 1780’s, obsessed as he was with the India cause, Burke had become an isolated figure in Parliament\textsuperscript{148}. In this context, the French Revolution fit him like a glove, not only because, thence, his political career would reach a level of prestigious royal rewards, as Karl Marx has it\textsuperscript{149}, but also because it led him, in the words of Hazlitt, to “pouring out his mind [with true eloquence] on paper”\textsuperscript{150}. The result was an unparalleled book in any language. Under the form of a single letter addressed to a French correspondent, Charles-Jean-François Depont, \textit{Reflections} differs from anything Burke had written before or anything expected from a pamphlet or a political manifesto. Its structure is confused, presented “without any kind of division into chapters, parts or topics”\textsuperscript{151}; its language is fraught with dramatic allusions, “masterly transition[s], brilliant metaphor[s]”\textsuperscript{152}; and his most progressive political tendencies collapse into an unreflective and insolent conservatism. “Mr. Burke”, says Hazlitt, “the opponent of the American war, and Mr. Burke, the opponent of the French Revolution, are not the same person, but opposite persons – not opposite persons only, but deadly enemies”\textsuperscript{153}.

Hazlitt felt challenged when, taking hold of the disinterested instruments such as pallet and brushes, laid an eye on Burke; for, contrary to every other model, there was nothing cordial in his countenance. By this time, some dozens of models had

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  \item \textsuperscript{146} \textit{CWH}, “Character of Mr. Burke, 1807”, 7, p. 303.
  \item \textsuperscript{147} Ibidem, p. 309.
  \item \textsuperscript{148} See my article, “Anarquia e Conformação das Coisas”, p. 12.
  \item \textsuperscript{149} In Karl Marx’s words: “This sycophant who, in the pay of the English oligarchy, played the romantic laudator temporis acti against the French Revolution, just as, in the pay of the North American Colonies, at the beginning of the American troubles, he had played the Liberal against the English oligarchy, was an out and out vulgar bourgeois (…)”. No wonder that, true to the laws of God and of Nature, he always sold himself in the best market”. Marx, however, does not deny Burke’s literary talent: “In face of the infamous cowardice and character that reigns today, and believes most devoutly in ‘the laws of commerce’, it is our bounden duty again and again to brand the Burkes, who only differ from their successors in one thing – talent”. \textit{Collected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, volume} \textit{35, Capital, Vol. I} (New York: International Publishers, 1966), p. 748.
  \item \textsuperscript{150} \textit{CWH}, “On Reading Old Books”, 12, p. 228.
  \item \textsuperscript{151} Modesto Florenzano, “As Reflexões sobre a Revolução em França de Edmund Burke, uma revisão historiográfica”, Tese (Doutorado), São Paulo, 1993, p. 156.
  \item \textsuperscript{152} \textit{CWH}, “On Reading Old Books”, 12, p. 228.
  \item \textsuperscript{153} \textit{CWH}, “Character of Mr. Burke, 1817”, 7, p. 226.
\end{itemize}
already sat for Hazlitt and in most cases, “it was easy to reduce them within certain limits, to fix their spirit, and condense their variety (…). But who can bind Proteus, or confine the roving flights of genius?” Furthermore, for someone with a historical past and the political convictions of Hazlitt, Burke challenged him for another reason. Thus, he asks himself, how “I could do justice, or more than justice, to an enemy, without betraying a cause”? A possible solution may be found in the concept of disinterestedness I spoke about above; a concept, as Terry Eagleton reminds us, “is [to Hazlitt] a form of engagement with others, not a lordly detachment from them”. “The test of a vulgar democratical mind” consists in knowing if one is capable of acknowledging or even admiring an adversary. “This is the first observation I ever made to Coleridge”, says Hazlitt. It is now clear why the nineteen-year-old Hazlitt immediately struck Coleridge.

Another possible answer to these questions, which directly interests me here, may be found in the creative imagination the apprentice, Hazlitt, learned from Burke. In my readings of Hazlitt’s “Character of Rousseau”, I defined sentiment as that vague region of the fermentation of ideas that precedes communication and yearns to overcome it. Imagination, at least that kind of imagination engrafted on Burke’s counter-revolutionary writings, strives to communicate convictions (in bold gestures), and produce a solid, rude and unshakeable truth. The hardness of blows and the steadfastness and irregularity of images are due to the multiplicity of materials gathered by Burke, taken from, as it were, “things of different classes”. As such, they have a power “to rivet our old impressions more deeply”. To restrict my analysis to a single example, there is that noted simile, in Letter to a Noble Lord, between the compact structure of the British Church and State with the mounds, dam and plains of the Bedford level, “which is here embodied in one”, says Hazlitt, “answering for its identity”. This kind of creative imagination, which “savours of the texture of what [it] describes”, and that claims an affinity with the craft and arts of fire, do not step back a single inch from commonplaces; better still, it is this

154 CWH, “Character of Mr. Burke, 1807”, 7, p. 301.
155 Idem, ibid.
158 CWH, “Character of Mr. Burke, 1807”, 7, p. 312.
159 Idem, p. 303.
161 Idem, ibid.
imagination that shapes into images convictions and prejudices shared by a community. I will speak more on this topic in the third chapter of this thesis. For now, the following passage is a telling one of Burke’s workings of the imagination:

That which by its natural impenetrability, and in spite of every effort, remains dark and difficult, which is impervious to every ray, on which imagination can shed no lustre, which can be clothed with no beauty, is not a subject for the orator or poet. At the same time it cannot be expected that abstract truths or profound observations should ever be placed in the same strong and dazzling points of view as natural objects and mere matters of fact. It is enough if they receive a reflex and borrowed lustre, like that which cheers the first dawn of morning, where the effect of surprise and novelty gilds every object, and the joy of beholding another world gradually emerging out of the gloom of night (...) fills the mind with a sober rapture (...) [Burke] did not produce a splendid effect by setting fire to the light vapours that float in the region of fancy, as the chemists make fine colours with phosphorous, but by the eagerness of his blows struck fire from the flint, and melted the hardest substances in the furnace of his imagination.162

Burke relied on the imagination to express a deeper and truer face of society than if he had merely transcribed the facts concerning the French Revolution. However, says Hazlitt, “whichever side the truth lies, it is impossible to make a fair decision without having the opposite side of the question clearly and fully stated to us”; which does not nullify the truthfulness and importance of Burke’s reasoning and imagery, for, says Hazlitt, “it is said, I know, that truth is one; but to this I cannot subscribe, for it appears to me that truth is many”163. In this sense, it is possible to interpret Hazlitt’s radical thoughts and the nervy texture of his prose-style as an attempt to offset and emulate his greatest enemy. Embodiments engendered by a strong and vivid imagination can only be countered with another equally vigorous. But the interpretation I have been pursuing here, about this early stage that precedes creation itself and about the changing powers pertaining twilight images – which Hazlitt inherited from Dissenting culture, from Coleridge’s youthful poetry, from landscape paintings of Claude Lorraine or Poussin, and from the vibrant prose of

162 CWH, “Character of Mr. Burke, 1807”, 7, p. 303-4, and 310.
163 Idem, p. 308.
Rousseau, according to Hazlitt’s interpretation—indicate a path opposite to Burke’s. This is what seems to suggest the excerpt above on the reflex lustre and light vapours, which welcome the first dawn of morning with a new breath. Before Hazlitt heard Coleridge’s sermon in Shrewsbury, the strength of Rousseau’s style “brought the feeling of irreconcilable enmity to rank and privilege”\textsuperscript{164}. Yet, before Rousseau, radical Christianity, from readings of the Gospel, glimpsed a world turned upside-down.

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 in this chapter is to shed light onto the poetical and inspiring language that runs through his later essays precisely at those moments when he looks back to his first entrance into life, when nature itself, as he said, was clad in the spirit of youth and hope. At these revealing moments, Hazlitt recreates 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”\textsuperscript{165}, 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”\textsuperscript{166}. Along with plain speaking—the extempore quality of his conversation (a topic of the next chapter) and the combative polemical vigour of his prose (a topic of the third chapter)—the archetypal images discussed here—the evening star and dew drops—were wrought from an extensive tradition of Christianity, and more specifically, Dissenting written culture. This style of composition does not create clear and well-defined images of liberty or social justice; but, by violently dragging readers to a fermenting state of mind, opens doors to the unknown, to a world of endless possibilities—for, as Hazlitt observed, the essayist on a plain-ground “has a journey to go, sometimes through dirty roads, and at others through untrodden and difficult ways”\textsuperscript{167}.

\textsuperscript{164} CWH, “On the Character of Rousseau”, 4, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{165} David Bromwich, The Mind of a Critic, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{166} CWH, “Lectures on the Dramatic Literature at the Age of Elizabeth”, 6, p. 183.
\textsuperscript{167} CWH, “On the Prose-Style of Poets”, 12, p. 9.
Chapter 2

*By the Fireside*: solitude and good-company

“There can be a high window, from where I can see the sky and the sea; but there should also be a quiet place, where I can be alone, thinking about my things”.

Ruben Braga, ‘The House’

1. The Friend

What is a friend? Essayists have been poising this question since the genre was first created. To an extent, it is at the very origin of this species of literary composition. In “An Observation Concerning Cicero”, Montaigne claims he would have easily adopted the epistolary genre had he had a friend to whom he could trust his whimsies to². He indeed had one, Étienne de La Boétie, but, alas! he was dead, and a friend is not someone we expect to perish. La Boétie suffered from a “painful and melancholic”³ death. Montaigne jotted down their last interviews and recounted it, in plain and descriptive prose, in a letter sent to his father. For some scholars, the letter records far more than the last days of La Boétie, but the essay’s actual embryo, as understood in its modern sense. There can be found not only the reflections that inspired “Of Friendship”, where Montaigne expatiates on the concept in its purest and most perfect form, as if, so to speak, two souls mingle and merge together⁴, but also one of the *Essays’, or essayism in general, main mottoes, namely, “the inconsistencies of human things”⁵. As well as life, essays cannot last⁶.

Neither can friendships, as Hazlitt demonstrates through his arguments, and above all through his life. According to Lopate, no other essayist of friendships “wrote about its problematic aspects before with Hazlitt’s unsentimental honesty”⁷.

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No other, perhaps, felt in the flesh the inability to combine “the steadiness with warmth of attachment”: “I have quarrelled with almost all my old friends, (they might say this is owing to my bad temper, but, they have also quarrelled with one another)”\textsuperscript{8}. The bluntness of these words, written during a specific troublesome time of his emotional life, betray the constitutional misanthropy of his mind, as Thomas De Quincey has described it in a literary portrait he wrote of Hazlitt. The passage below is illustrative:

A friend of his (probably Lamb) (…) told me, in illustration of the dark sinister gloom which sate for ever upon Hazlitt’s countenance and gestures, that involuntarily when Hazlitt put his hand within his waistcoat (as a mere unconscious trick of habit), he himself felt a sudden recoil of fear, as from one who was searching for a hidden dagger. Like ‘a Moor of Malabar’, as described in the \textit{Faerie Queene}, at intervals Hazlitt threw up his angry eyes and dark locks, as if wishing to affront the sun, or to search the air for hostility. And the same friend, on another occasion, described the sort of feudal fidelity to his belligerent duties which in company seemed to animate Hazlitt\textsuperscript{9}.

Hazlitt’s natural timidity and acquired irascibility were even more striking in the company of women. As Henry Crabb Robinson wrote in \textit{Reminiscences}: “He had a horror of the society of ladies, especially of smart and handsome and modest young women”\textsuperscript{10}. Nevertheless, either in London or in Paris (where he lived in 1826), Hazlitt attended one of the most stimulating social gatherings of his time\textsuperscript{11}, and his conversations, by which friendship is nourished\textsuperscript{12}, were often highly valued. As Lamb once said: “judging him by his conversation which I enjoyed so long, and relished so deep; or by his books (…), I should belie my own conscience, if I said less, than that I think Hazlitt to be, in his natural and healthy state, one of the finest spirits breathing”\textsuperscript{13}. John Hamilton Reynolds, one of Keats’ dearest friends, and also a profound admirer of Hazlitt, wrote about the essayist in a letter to Mary Leigh, 28

\textsuperscript{8} \textit{CWH}, “On the Pleasure of Hating”, 12, pp. 130-1.
\textsuperscript{9} Thomas De Quincey, \textit{De Quincey as Critic}, pp. 370-1. For a discussion on this portrait, and on the principle that animated Hazlitt in social gatherings, my analysis has largely benefited from Jon Mee’s, “Hazlitt, Hunt, and Cockney Conversability”, In. \textit{Conversable Worlds}, pp. 239-277: 239-40.
\textsuperscript{11} During the time Hazlitt spent in Paris, he attended the social circle of Stendhal. See Duncan Wu, \textit{The First Modern Man}, pp. 359-40.
\textsuperscript{12} Montaigne, “Of Friendship”, \textit{Selected Essays}, p. 60.
\textsuperscript{13} Charles Lamb, \textit{Selected Prose}, pp. 252-3.
April 1817: “He is indeed a great company (…), full of what Dr. Johnson terms ‘good talk’”\(^\text{14}\). On this occasion, sitting by the fire, Reynolds and his guests talked the whole night long on some favourite passages “of our best Bards”. Hazlitt passed “from grand and commanding arguments to the gaieties and graces with wit and humour”\(^\text{15}\).

Always with the eyes wide open and a tongue ready for compliments, Hazlitt journey through literature was enchanting as he roamed through authors without an air of superiority, not blindly following systems, labels and formulas. A book was to him as a good friend, with whom we disagree, sometimes mock, but care about. In short, Hazlitt treated an author or a book with intimacy. Whenever at ease, something that only occurred to him in the leisurely hours of reading or in good company, he would spontaneously and freely share (either with a book or with a friend) the fineness and liveliness of his discoveries with freedom of thoughts and intellectual honesty. As a matter of fact, he adopted this principle, the mental behaviour of the friend essayist, as a creed for his literary criticism, described in his final lectures on English literature, *Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth* (1819):

If I did not write these Lectures to please myself, I am at least sure I should please nobody else. In fact, I conceive that what I have undertaken to do in this and former cases, is merely to read over a set of authors with the audience, as I would do with a friend, to point out a favourite passage, to explain an objection: or if a remark or a theory occurs, to state it in illustration of the subject, but neither to tire him nor puzzle myself with pedantic rules and pragmatic formulas of criticism that can do no good to any body (…). I do not come armed from top to toe with colons and semicolons, with glossaries and indexes, to adjust the spelling or reform the metre, or to prove by everlasting contradiction and querulous impatience, that former commentators did not know the meaning of their author, any more than I do, who am angry at them, only because I am out of humour with myself – as if the genius of poetry lay buried under the rubbish of press\(^\text{16}\).

If there is more to Hazlitt’s criticism than the pleasurable reading of passages in the company of friends, for, as John Kinnaird reminds us, these lectures follow a safe and steady itinerary in the history of English Literature – from Chaucer to his


\(^{15}\) Idem, p. 198.

fellow writers –, and the tenet that arts are not progressive$^{17}$, it is also true that Hazlitt
does not distribute good or bad points, and neither does he “take his standard of
excellence ‘according to an exact scale’ of Aristotle, or fall out with a work that was
good for any thing, because ‘not one of the angles at the four corners was a right
one’”$^{18}$, as Hazlitt wrote about Montaigne’s criticism. The main goal of Hazlitt’s
criticism is to give life to the authors he studies, be his fellow-worker and accomplice,
and without diminishing an inch from their mystery and grandeur.

For these reasons, Hazlitt’s lectures at Surrey Institution divided the public’s
opinions. At that time and a few blocks away, at the London Philosophical Society,
Coleridge was ministering Lectures on the Principles of Judgment, Culture, and
European Literature and the most regular frequenters of “the period’s thriving culture
of public lectures”$^{19}$ would rush from one place to another, in the ten-minute interval
between them. Among those, the young Keats: “I hear Hazlitt’s lectures regularly”$^{20}$. 
A good deal has been written on the role Hazlitt’s criticism played in Keats formative
years, especially in the development of his concept of “negative capability”, namely,
the idea that a poet is the most unpoetical of all beings, because in order to give life to
objects described, the poet needs to transcend those traits of identity that constitute a
unique self or character$^{21}$. If Keats took Hazlitt for his mentor, Hazlitt, in regards to
Keats, never put down the mental attitude of the essayist as a friend, for he never lost
that internal disposition to reinterpret subjects, and an openness to experiences. “His
last [lecture]”, wrote Keats, “was on Grey, Collins, Young, etc. and he gave a very
fine piece of discriminating criticism on Swift, Voltaire, and Rabelais. I was very
disappointed at his treatment of Chatterton”$^{22}$. In those days, Keats attended dinner

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$^{17}$ John Kinnaird, William Hazlitt: Critic of Power, pp. 265-98. We shall discuss Hazlitt’s notion that
arts are not progressive in the next chapter.
Shandy, Book III.
$^{19}$ For London’s culture of public lectures and of its importance to the formative years of John Keats,
see Sarah M. Zimmerman “The Thrush in the Theater: Keats and Hazlitt at the Surrey Institution”, In.
$^{21}$ For Keats’ “negative capability” as well as its deployment in another of Keats’ concept, “the
chameleon poet”, see John Keats: “To George and Tom Keats 21, 27 (?) December 1817”, and “To
Richard Woodhouse 27 October 1818”, In. Selected Letters, pp. 59-61, 194-6. The bibliography on
Hazlitt’s influence on Keats’ “negative capability” is exceedingly large. For two antagonistic views on
the topic, see Kenneth Muir, “Keats and Hazlitt”, In. John Keats: A Reassessment (Liverpool:
Liverpool University Press, 1969), pp. 139-158, and Uttara Natarajan, “Hazlitt, Keats, and
$^{22}$ Keats, Selected Letters, p. 95.
parties in the company of Hazlitt and fellow friends, like Benjamin Haydon and Leigh Hunt, and it is likely he reproached Hazlitt in person, for Hazlitt opened the following lecture with these words: “I am sorry that what I said in the conclusion of the last Lecture respecting Chatterton, should have given dissatisfaction to some persons, with whom I would willingly agree on all such matters”23.

Though the convivial contact between Hazlitt and Keats was short-lived, for Keats “bore the mysterious hallmark of those who were selected to die young”24, and though in friendships there is no place to settle accounts, as its sentimental exchanges are free of charge, the poet borrowed from the essayist his “depth of taste”, his “fiery laconism”25, the middle style, and an awareness that writing on the self can only play its part in literature when turned into “a thing of beauty”26; and the essayist borrowed from the poet some sense of youthfulness in the face of his upcoming old age and inevitable praises: “the reading of Mr Keats’ *Eve of Saint Agnes* lately made me regret that I was not young again”27. So that one became to the other, in David Bromwich’s words, “another self”28.

In this chapter, I will speak of how friendship, or this mutual identity between mutual selves, is a fundamental ingredient in essay writing. This is revealed in the two-way sympathy the essayist hopes to achieve with the reading public. In the pithy words of Márcio Suzuki: “an essay intends to be a written conversation, where readers and authors are brought into relation with ‘intimacy’”29. Now, as we learn from Marie Hamilton Law’s studies, intimacy is one of the most distinct traits of essay writing widely practiced in England during Hazlitt’s time, the *familiar essay*30. Just before the Victorian era, whenever Englishmen and women compared themselves to other nations, they frequently bragged of their hospitality, generosity, of their manners which did not follow rules and systems, and, in short, of how they did not suppress the possibility of a familiar conviviality even in the public sphere, namely, in

24 The sentence is borrowed from Carlos Drummond de Andrade, my translation, so are a good deal of the reflections on friendship I expounded here. See “Recordação de Alberto Campos”, In. *Confissões de Minas* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2001), pp. 47-50: 47.
the periodical press. It was thus Hunt defined the English character in “A Day by the Fire”; “this piece has a great claim to inaugurate the Romantic familiar essay as a genre”\(^{31}\). Following up from a discussion on the word *snug*, which, according to Hunt, is exclusively English, says he:

> Would Homer, the observer of characters, the panegyrist of freedom, the painter of storms, of landscapes, and of domestic tenderness, – aye, and the lover of snug houseroom and good dinner, – would he have complained of our humours, of our liberty, of our shifting skies, of our ever-green fields, our conjugal happiness, our fire-sides, and our hospitality?\(^{32}\)

Proper to an essay form that realizes itself on the plain-ground, we find the expression “by the fire-side” copiously employed in Hazlitt’s writings\(^{33}\). In this chapter, it functions as the background, or the *tableau*, to that kind of intimacy that shortens the distances between writers and readers, since the writer reveals him or herself as also a reader. For a clear understanding of the topic, I will also foreground some of the eighteenth-century’s key elements to familiar essay writing, so dear to our author, and mostly found in Richard Steele and Joseph Addison’s periodical essays and in the friendship, unparalleled in the history of literature, between the biographer, James Boswell, and the subject, Samuel Johnson.

2. Melting Down Hours into Minutes: a digression

I never was in a better place or humour than I am at present for writing on this subject. I have a partridge getting ready for my supper, my fire is blazing on the hearth, the air is mild for the season of the year, I have but a slight fit of indigestion to-day (the only thing that makes me abhor myself), I have three

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\(^{33}\) Quite often we find this expression in Hazlitt’s work either in connection with leisurely solitary thinking and reading or with good company. In many cases, Hazlitt employs it when speaking of his friend Leigh Hunt, given the notoriousness of “A Day by the Fire”. See, for instance, this passage from “On Novelty and Familiarity”: “I hope, if this should prove a hard winter, he [Hunt] will again wrap himself up in flannel and *lamb’s-wool*, take to his fire-side, and read the English Novelists once more fairly through”, *CWH*, 12, p. 300. On Hunt, Lamb also said: “he is one of the most cordial-minded men I ever knew, and matchless as afire-side companion”, *Selected Prose*, p. 251.
These opening words to the essay “On Living to One’s Self”, were composed in the winter of 1821 in Winterslow, a hamlet on Salisbury’s plains. There was a hut where Hazlitt, split between a life in the city and periodical visits to the country, found “a back shop wholly [his] own”\textsuperscript{35}. The small property belonged to the family of his first wife, Sarah Stoddart, to whom he was married from 1808 to 1822. Sarah and William met each other at the house of Charles and Mary Lamb, who then gave regular dinner parties – every Wednesday – to friends: well-known writers and artists of the age. Although she was never devoted to literature, Sarah was a well-read woman, and had engaging conversation. She lived surrounded by writers, was intimate with Lamb and Coleridge and was the sister of one of the most influential editors in Britain at the time, John Stoddart, a former Jacobin militant and responsible to improve the popularity of \textit{The Times}\textsuperscript{36}, which has not diminished since. However, despite their many affinities, William and Sarah rarely got along well. The marriage was a flop. “‘There never was’, William Carew proceeded, ‘a worse assorted pair’, crippled as they were by ‘a sheer want of cordial sympathy from the first outset’”\textsuperscript{37}. During every fray, and quarrels became more and more frequent after John Stoddart veered to the conservative side\textsuperscript{38}, or when, from an editorial agreement to another, the family sunk up into debt, which only increased grievances, Hazlitt would leave for Winterslow, his “willing exile”\textsuperscript{39}. There he lived a life of his own, \textit{au-dessus de la mêlée}\textsuperscript{40}.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{CWH}, “On Living to one’s-self”, 8, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{35} Montaigne, \textit{Selected Essays}, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{36} For the perfect partnership between John Walter II, proprietor of \textit{The Times}, and John Stoddart, officially hired in 1814, and for a confirmation that “Stoddart’s influence on \textit{The Times} steadily increased”, see \textit{The History of \textit{The Times}: “The Thunderer in the Making”, 1785-1841} (London: The Office of \textit{The Times}, 1935), pp. 157-64: 157.
\textsuperscript{37} Quoted from Stanley Jones, \textit{Hazlitt A Life: from Winterslow to Frith Street}, p. 97.
\textsuperscript{38} In Duncan Wu’s words: “Stoddart was a republican who shaved his head and wore a red cap to declare his Jacobin sympathies; now [1812], ambition drove him to the opposite extreme (…). And as the war progressed, Stoddart became increasingly violent in his criticism, regarding Hazlitt as stupid beyond belief for his continuous attachment to the hopes of the Revolution”, \textit{The First Modern Man}, p. 160.
\textsuperscript{39} \textit{CWH}, “Weather Genius is Conscious of its Power?”, 12, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{40} The expression in French is from Stanley Jones (1916-1999), British journalist famous for his anti-monarchist invectives and from whose work, \textit{Hazlitt: A Life from Winterslow to Frith Street}, I have benefited for the biographical information in this paragraph, “Withdrawal from London”, pp. 1-35: 26. According to Philip Hobsbawm, “It was said of Jones that, if you asked him, for example, where Hazlitt was at 6pm on 2 May 1812, he would be able instantly to reply that the author was at Charles
The mild wilderness of lawns, green woods and gravel paths “that crown the clear lone brow”\(^1\) of the landscape surrounding Winterslow spurred Hazlitt’s taste for reveries and lonely walks, which I wrote about in the preceding chapter: “I can enjoy society in a room; but out of doors, nature is a company enough for me. I am never less alone than when alone”\(^2\). How many were those moments, as Virginia Woolf describes, when he went for a ramble in the woods of Tuderly, “that breathe their music in [his] ears”\(^3\) “Give me a clear blue sky over my head”, says Hazlitt, “and the green turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me, and a three hours’ march to dinner – and then to thinking!”\(^4\)

But no where else did Hazlitt indulge in greater pleasures, no where else did he have more a life of his own than in his quite and comfortable room in Winterslow hut: either when silently by the fireside he would pour over a book, or when looking out of the window\(^5\), “melting down hours to minutes”\(^6\), or melting down the personal to an universal existence. He or she who has a life of one’s own, says the author, contrary to what the expression could suggest, is given to external things, forgetting of his or her personal existence. Thus living in a state of fermentation, anonymity runs in their blood; hate or bitterness has not been yet wrapped round by nerves and instincts. In Hazlitt’s words, in this state they are turned into silent spectators:

He reads the clouds, he looks at stars, he watches the return of the seasons, the failings leaves of autumn, the perfumed breath of spring, starts with delight at the note of a thrush in a copse near him, sits by the fire, listens to the moaning of the wind, pours upon a book, or discourse the freezing hours away, or melts down hours to pleasing thoughts. All the while he is taken up with other things, forgetting himself\(^7\).

\(^5\) The expressions “look from the window”, “look out of the window”, etc., can be found on several occasions in Hazlitt’s writings, for example, in “On Living to One’s Self”: “As I look from the window at the wide bare heath before me, and through the misty moon-light air see the woods that wave over the top of Winterslow…”, CWH, 8, p. 90; or in “Whether Genius is Conscious of its Powers?”: “I look out of my window and see that a shower has just fallen: the fields look green after it, and a rosy cloud hangs over the brow of the hill”, CWH, 12, p. 123.
\(^6\) CWH, “On Living to One’s Self”, 8, p. 91.
\(^7\) CWH, “On Living to One’s Self”, 8, p. 91.
As Tom Paulin observes, few other expressions occur more often in Hazlitt than *to melt down*\(^{48}\). He borrowed it from two of his favourite authors, Milton and Burke, for whom it also functions as an emblem of the creative process. In order for a writer to free him or herself and engender a work in its completeness, the work that is in him or her must be incandescent. The heat of furnace or the heat of the stomach is the opening of proceedings. This stage in the creative process requires patience and slowness. It is a reflexive, paused itinerary, and in continuous dialogue with a heat that is interior, not on “the spur of the occasion”\(^{49}\). “Mulling is the way of it”\(^{50}\), says Cynthia Ozick. The word *melt* implies the fusion of solid substances so as to produce a tasty and homogeneous mixture. The vocabulary is pierced with expressions of a sensual connotation, as well as in the sense of voluptuousness. It is said that a savoury meal melts in the mouth; of a lover, that he or she has a melted heart. The word *melt* can also relate to sexual intercourse, to orgasm or even semen in itself. Thus, the act of procreating occurs by *melting*, a dissipation of one’s self. The adverb *down* that follows it reinforces the earthiness of the gesture. It reminds us that one who *melts down* is not dissolved like bubbles into air, but germinates in solid matter. In a nutshell, creative writing – at least in the stage I am pursuing here – requires pleasure, surrender and a dissipation of personal identity.

“From reading, too, we learn to write”\(^{51}\), says Hazlitt. Because it is imitative, in Aristotle’s sense, the learning process is pleasurable\(^{52}\). “The greatest pleasure in life is reading, while we are young”. Later in life, however, Hazlitt found out that writing requires a more vigorous impulse, “like the stimulus of intoxication”\(^{53}\), about which I will take at breadth in the next chapter. At that time, he had already become a full time critic and the demands of adulthood left him no choice: it was mandatory to write, and *at once*. Through Lamb, who brought Hazlitt in contact with the Morning.

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\(^{49}\) A common expression in Hazlitt’s writings. See, for example, “On Shakespeare and Milton”: “They [Shakespeare’s words] are struck out at a heat, on the spur of the occasion, and have all the truth and vividness which arise from an actual impression of the objects”, *CWH*, 5, p. 54.


\(^{51}\) *CWH*, “On the Conversation of Authors”, 12, p. 28.

\(^{52}\) For Aristotle: “Imitation comes naturally to human beings from childhood (and in this they differ from other animals, i.e. in having a strong propensity to imitation and in learning their earliest lessons through imitation); so does the universal pleasure of imitation”. Aristotle, *Poetics*, translated by Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 6.

\(^{53}\) *CWH*, “Whether Genius is Conscious of it’s Powers?”, 12, pp. 126, 125.
Chronicle’s editor, James Perry, he was first admitted into the periodical press: firstly, as a parliamentary reporter, writing one of the most remarkable political sketches of his time; later, for five consecutive years, he wrote daily and weekly theatrical reviews for three other periodicals: The Champion, The Examiner and The Times. Success in terms of an increase in readership gained the trust of James Perry, who gave him “carte blanche”\(^{54}\). It was a time when, after hours chewing on his thoughts and meditating on the next day’s criticism that thoughts and feelings “melted down into words”\(^{55}\). Hazlitt was just one step away from “master[ing] of the art of talking on paper”\(^{56}\), as John Gross described it, and which is the essayist’s trademark (table-talk, according to our author, is another name for essay). From a unique perspective, Hazlitt began writing essays both strictly personal and concerned with general human subjects; essays that brought into the art of writing every license from spoken language (not exclusively taken from polite society, but also from ordinary English people), and that “came home to the business and bosoms of men”\(^{57}\). That time, as Hazlitt recalled, “I was in a kind of honey-moon of authorship”\(^{58}\).

3. The Honey-Moon of Authorship: reading and reading public

There is indeed a pinch of irony in Hazlitt’s expression, “honey-moon of authorship”, and in two senses. First, because it coincides with a time when Hazlitt’s marriage to Sarah Stoddart was going from bad to worse; secondly, because it clashes with the dissolution of authorship which I expounded on above. Hazlitt seemed to be more concerned to mend another matrimonial tie, so to speak, that, according to him, had been worn out in Britain for quite a while; namely, between writers and readers. The title of Hazlitt’s first published collection of essays, The Round Table (written in collaboration with his friend Leigh Hunt), the miscellaneous topics there dwelt with, the ideal of clarity, and a humanistic sense of education bring this work close to early periodical essays: Richard Steel and Joseph Addison’s The Tatler and The Spectator.

This is what Hazlitt himself claims in *The Round Table’s “Advertisement”: “The following work [was written] in the manner of the early periodical Essayists, The Spectator and The Tatler”*. This filiation is endorsed in the essay No. XXX, “On Pedantry”, where the expression *the honey-moon of authorship* is again employed:

The immediate transition from the pedantic to the popular style in literature was a change that must have been very delightful at the time. Our illustrious predecessors, the Tatler and the Spectator, were very happily off in this respect. They wore the public favour in the newest gloss, before it had become tarnished and common – before familiarity had bred contempt. It was *the honey-moon of authorship*. Their Essays were among the first instance in this country of learning sacrificing to the graces, and of mutual understanding and good-humoured equality between the writer and the reader. This new style of composition, to use the phraseology of Mr. Burke, ‘mitigated authors into companions, and compelled wisdom to submit to the soft collar of social esteem’. The original papers of the *Tatler*, printed on a half sheet of common foolscap, were regularly served up at breakfast-time with the silver tea-kettle and thin slices of bread and butter; and what the ingenious Mr. Bickerstaff wrote over night in his easy chair, he might flatter himself would be read the next morning with elegant applause by the fair, the witty, the learned, and the great, in all parts of this kingdom, in which civilization had made any considerable advances.

The new duo of essayists, Hazlitt and Hunt, was committed and hopeful they would be once again “sitting here about our Round Table” with both writers and readers.

A lot has lately been written in literary studies on the importance of the periodical press to create a space of dialogue, or in Hazlitt’s words, *of mutual understanding and good humoured equality between the writer and the reader*, previously non-existent, and of its crucial role in the making of a reading public. I shall make a short excursion on the topic, taking care, as Hazlitt does, not to plunge

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the literary matter (the *popular or familiar style*) common to some of these studies, into the prolific ground of cultural history.

From the late seventeenth century, an increasing number of thriving daily and weekly newspapers appeared in Britain. If many were the obstacles which prevented Britain from claiming the title of “a nation of readers”\(^6^3\), according to the author of *Rasselas*’ panglossian sentence – access to reading, as Ian Watt recalls, was hampered by numerous socioeconomic factors: the non-existence of a formal educational system, the high price of books, lack of privacy and little time for leisure activities among members of the lower classes, among others\(^6^4\) –, no other country at that time had experienced a similar growth of a reading public. Moreover, to a great extent, no other country *had* a reading public, understood here not simply as aggregates of readers, but as “complicated social and textual formations; [that] have interpretative tendencies and ideological contours”\(^6^5\), in the well-known formula of Jon Klancher. In France during the *Ancien Régime*, censorship had an iron grip: “before publication came a skilful exercise in censorship, applied through a policy of selective privilege that involved the prepublication inspection of manuscripts for contents (…). After publication, control was further applied by the police”\(^6^6\) – censorship, it should be said in passing, had also become a reality in England during the Napoleonic Wars; radical intellectuals such as Leigh Hunt, William Cobbett, John Thelwall were hunted down, prosecuted or imprisoned for what they wrote for the press, a topic which I will develop in the next chapter\(^6^7\). The numerous small states that made up the Germanic territories prevented a single press from having a circulation\(^6^8\). Both in France and

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\(^6^8\) On this topic, wrote Habermas: “In Germany at that time there was no ‘town’ to replace the court’s publicity of representation with the institutions of a public sphere in civil society. But similar elements existed, beginning with the learned *Tischgesellschaften* (table societies), the old Sprachgesellschaften (literary societies) of the seventeenth-century. Naturally they were fewer and less active than coffee
Germany, most funding for periodicals and publishers still came from aristocrats, who enforced standards of taste and writing averse to popular forms. "The mass of every people must be barbarous where there is no printing, and consequently knowledge is not generally diffused"; in Johnson’s worthy words.

By the early eighteen hundreds, Britain was experiencing a substantial increase in literacy and the purchasing power of readers. Two fundamental ingredients were the improvement of circulating libraries and the massification of the periodical press – news, essays, novels, tales, among others (the papers “printed on a half sheet of common foolscape”, from Hazlitt’s excerpt above). Either one or the other ingredients, according to Coleridge’s ironic expression, “are diet at the two public ordinaries of Literature, the circulating libraries and the periodical press”. As for circulating libraries, if, on the one hand, as Sandra Vasconcelos observes – resuming a crucial coleridgean or, to an extent, a hazlittean topic – they placed at the disposal of readers not only novels and essays of an indisputable importance to the literary canon, but also a considerable number of works of “low qualities or dubious value”; on the other, they allowed for the democratization of reading. Or better still, as Lamb suggests in “Detached thoughts on books and reading", circulating libraries created a species of repository for reading as a public experience:

How they [books from circulating libraries] speak of the thousand thumbs, that have turned over their pages with delight! – of the lone sempstress, whom they

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69 For an ampler historical discussion on the topic, see Marilyn Butler “Culture’s medium: the role of the review”. In, Stuart Curran, The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 120-147.
70 James Boswell, Life of Johnson, p. 477.
71 In the words of Lucy Newlyn: “Literacy further increased in the first two decades of the nineteenth century when, as a result of technological changes (…), cheaper books became possible, allowing more people to read than ever before. The consequent shift from a literature written for an elite audience to one written for the public at large promoted a rapidly expanding publishing industry”, Reading, Writing, and Romanticism, p. 7.
75 For a comment on Lamb’s essay, see Richard De Ritter, “‘In Their Newest Gloss’: Hazlitt on reading, gender, and the problems of print culture”, p. 32.
may have cheered (milliner, or hard-working mantua-maker) after her long day’s needle-toil, turning far into midnight, when she has snatched an hour, ill-spared from sleep, to steep her cares, as in some Lethean cup, in spelling out their enchanting contents!\textsuperscript{76}

Finally, next to material conditions, colloquial language and a sheer interest in everyday events were additional factors in encouraging the habit of reading. In this respect, similarities between novels and essays outweigh differences. Hazlitt’s account of the early periodical essayist, “from his various walks, and turns through life, brings home little curious specimens of the humours, opinions and manners of his contemporaries”\textsuperscript{77}, applies equally to early novelists.

A topic closely connected with the expansion of reading audiences, which Vasconcelos’ excerpt quoted above alludes to, puts forward the question as to whether the rise of commercial literature runs the risk of trivializing the act of reading. According to Raymond Williams, far from being a new issue, it is one that has been through a long and slow revolution\textsuperscript{78}. To illustrate his argument, Williams reworks a passage from Coleridge\textsuperscript{79} that interests me particularly here (for Hazlitt had also dwelt on it), where the poet, now statesman, denounces anodyne effects of cheap literature, a diet of minds whose only purpose is to escape from the emptiness inside. Hazlitt and Hunt were not only aware of this symptom (most likely they spent nights discussing it with Coleridge), as their purpose to restore a mutual understanding and good-humoured equality between the writer and the reader was a response to it. The duo of essayists’ alternative to bringing back “the daily bread”\textsuperscript{80} to every Englishmen’s breakfast table differs from Coleridge’s in the form and idea they claimed of reading public and the act of reading itself. Indeed, the paths they took were opposite from one another. If Coleridge, as Klancher demonstrates, endeavoured to making a new class of readers – named by the poet as clerisy or clerc, a nominee of intellectual life\textsuperscript{81} –, Hazlitt and Hunt looked back to Johnson’s ideal of the common reader, namely,

\textsuperscript{79} For Coleridge’s argument, “Reading as this kind of easy drug is the permanent condition of a great bulk of ephemeral writing”, Williams, The Long Revolution (London: Broadview press, 2001), p. 193.
\textsuperscript{80} Expression that has often been used in reference to the periodical essay. See, for instance, Alexandre Eulálio, “O Ensaió Literário no Brasil”, Revista Serrote #14, p. 8.
one “uncorrupted by literary prejudices (…) and the dogmatism of learning”\textsuperscript{82}, as well as to a way of renewing the primary motivation to reading: curiosity and sympathy. I shall return to this topic later. Now, for a better understanding of Hazlitt’s commitment to the reading public let me expatiate on the early periodical essayists, \textit{The Tatler} and \textit{The Spectator}, in light of Hazlitt’s essay, “On Periodical Essayists”.

Since the first issue of \textit{THE SPECTATOR} came fresh out of the oven on 1st March 1711 – with its title in upper case, a citation from Horace’s \textit{Ars Poetica} and the subheading “To be continued every Day” – the sun has never risen in Great Britain without any single paper being sipped together with tea straight from the pot and slim slices of bread and butter. Since then, “English essayists have been apostolically succeeding one another in this form of literary expression”\textsuperscript{83}, as Gilberto Freyre mentioned. Hazlitt and Hunt, besides being key figures in renewing the artistically and intellectually wrought literary essay, knew its history like few others, as Hazlitt’s essay “On the Periodical Essayists” bears examples to, which leaves us with the following question: why in the first decades of the nineteenth century did they endeavour to write in the manner of the early periodical essayists? Firstly, for no other reason than because they came first; that is to say, Hazlitt and Hunt wished to revive the effect of novelty, “the first ebullitions of hope and fear”\textsuperscript{84} which must have resulted from an inaugural gesture of \textit{learning sacrificing to the graces} of readers.

Different from Montaigne and English essayists from the previous century, for whom, as Auerbach reminds us, there was no audience\textsuperscript{85}, \textit{The Tatler} and \textit{The Spectator} had adequate resources to transform “the essay into a civilizing force, an engine against coarseness and pedantry”\textsuperscript{86}. “The essay designed for the press”, in the words of Lucia Miguel Pereira, “came out in London for the first time, and (if I am not mistaken) in the world”\textsuperscript{87}. In looking back to “the dawn of experience”\textsuperscript{88} of periodical essayism,

\textsuperscript{86} John Gross, \textit{The Oxford Book of Essays}, p. xx.
\textsuperscript{87} Lucia Miguel Pereira, “Sobre os Ensaístas Ingleses”, Revista Serrote\# 22, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{88} \textit{CWH}, “On Novelty and Familiarity”, 12, p. 303.
the duo intended both to rekindle “the first glow of passion”\textsuperscript{89}, without which any sacrifice to the other would be possible, and to cast a light onto the paths \textit{where civilization had made any considerable advances}. Secondly, because the humorous disguises and ideal characters with which Steele and Addison clothed their names and cheered up the famous \textit{Club} (Isaac Bickerstaff, Roger de Coverley, Will Honeycomb, Will Wimble and Andrew Freeport), allowed them a greater licentiousness and full implementation of their particular humours and opinions. In other words, the essay, free as it was, became \textit{freer}. Lastly, because the early essayists fashioned a prosaic style custom-built to the understanding of readers, frequently exchanging roles with them, by means of the publication of letters from correspondences. For this last reason, no other periodical indulged in greater pleasure from the reading public.

From the five hundred and fifty essays that make up \textit{The Spectator}, for instance, over half of them (around three hundred) feature letters from correspondence. Some essays were entirely written by them; cases where editorial work was the only duty of Mr Spectator, or “the part of moderator”\textsuperscript{90}, in Addison’s expression. “Either a paper in essay form could had been drawn from a letter from a correspondent or a personal letter would come out from the hands of Mr Spectator himself”\textsuperscript{91}, wrote Maria Lúcia Pallares-Burke, whose work \textit{The Spectator: o Teatro das Luzes} remains the most extensive study on the topic published in Brazil, in which she explores in depth the ideology and strategies by means of which Addison and Steele actively engaged the reading public, “prompting a sentiment of co-authorship”\textsuperscript{92}. By repeated exercises or demonstrations of humility, Steele and Addison presented themselves as intimate friends and confidents. They would strike out conversations with readers as gentle and mild as May mornings. By means of rhetorical devices taken mostly from Roman authors, who were regularly quoted, they would put readers at ease, reminding them that the craft of essay is something trivial\textsuperscript{93}.

\textsuperscript{89} Idem, p. 302.
\textsuperscript{92} Idem, pp. 130-1.
\textsuperscript{93} For \textit{The Spectator} as a model of conversability, says Jon Mee: “Throughout the eighteenth century and beyond, writers and readers of all kinds looked back to Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele’s \textit{Spectator} (1711-14) as the key text of the paradigm of conversability (…). A literature of the ordinary
It is true that part of this mild weather was chilled due to Addison’s excesses of finesse and his stern temper. Eventually, he gave himself the schoolmaster task of reforming manners and educating society, with “indications of characters and strokes of humour” giving way to “regular dissertations”\(^94\). Steele, of course, took part in this project; but the means that he had at his disposal were utterly different. As Lamb noticed, “Addison had stepped in with his wit, his criticism, his morality”; Steele stepped in with his humour\(^95\). For this reason, Hazlitt, as well as his friend Lamb, is said to have dwelt more on Steele’s simpler things, his “records of manners and characters”\(^96\), than on Addison’s morality. Again, for the same reason, Isaac Bickerstaff’s name is quoted in the passage from *The Round Table* we read above.

After all, who is Mr Bickerstaff?

The same question was made by readers of *Predictions for the Year 1708*, written by Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq. The first prediction was light, nothing but a trifle, but it warned the public of the dangers of reading almanacs. It related to John Partrige the Almanac-Maker, saying he would pass away on the night of 29\(^{th}\) of March, “of a raging fever” in case he did not “settle his affairs in time”. When the ominous day arrived, Partrige, who certainly did not pay attention to such a lowdown joke, was awestruck at seeing street-hawkers “selling an anonymous verse broadside”, *An Elegy on Mr Partrige, the Almanac-Maker, who Died on the 29\(^{th}\) of this Instant March, 1708*. On the following day, the day before April Fool’s Day, the author of the jest issued “A Letter to a Person in Honour” with its title: *The Accomplishment of the First of Mr. Bickerstaff’s Predictions*. It was, of course, a joke. The following year, a print in “a half-sheet with wood-cut, *A Famous Prediction of Merlin, the British Wizard; written above a Thousand Years ago, and relating to the present Year*” was published. The style of writing, “the ten rhyming couplets in black-letter”\(^97\), and the ironic allusion to Partrige (one of his almanacs were called *Merlinus Liberatus*) made Bickerstaff’s name once more be heard on the grapevine. Suspicion of a hoax was

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\(^{95}\) See Charles Lamb’s “Review of the First Volume of Hazlitt’s *Table-Talk, 1821*”, In. *Selected Prose*, p. 228. Again on the topic, says Lucia Miguel Pereira: “Steele seemed to have been more inventive and vigorous, Addison was more elegant and correct; the creative impulse came from the first, the finishing touches were given by the latter’s firm strokes”, “Sobre os Ensaístas Ingleses”, In. *Revista Serrote #22*, p. 11.


confirmed on April Fool’s Day, twelve days before *The Tatler’s* first issue was publicized, when Mr Bickerstaff revealed his identity. It was no one other than one of the greatest satirical writers of all times, Jonathan Swift, the good friend of Steele and Addison. The jest that amused everyone but Partrige was not innocent. It was a conspiracy, an editorial strategy to deter the public’s attention from almanacs, which abounded with astrological predictions. It thus opened the way for the journalistic novelty: the essay designed for the press. Swift wrote a few essays for *The Tatler*, but it was Steele who gave the final finish to a character, in Hazlitt’s words, who is “himself a gentleman and a scholar, a humourist, and a man of the world; with a great deal of nice naïveté about him”98.

*The Round Table’s* authors did not take on similar disguises. For they knew, as well as Lamb did, that, in his words, “the breed of the Bickerstaffs, as it begun, so alas! it expired with him”99. Moreover, says Hunt in the “Introduction” to *The Round Table*, at the time of Steele and Swift, because “taverns and coffee-houses made the persons of the wits familiar to every body”, who would give much attention or gravity to one “who had been a little too inarticulate over-night”?100 People would certainly relate the name to the character. Bickerstaff, however, gave an important lesson to *The Round Table’s* authors: “The perfection of letters”, wrote Hazlitt, “is when the highest ambition of the writer is to please his readers, and the greatest pride of the reader is to understand his author”101.

For some time, the British periodical press succeeded in “mutual agreement between newspapers and the public”102, between writers and readers. Things started undoing it “when the town becomes a club of writers”. Nowadays, continues Hazlitt, “each man stands with his manuscript in his hand waiting for his turn of applause”103. Many voices speak out loud and at once, but none of them are heard. The public experience of reading lost another of its senses, it was no longer an impression of openness, of enrichment, but it transformed into “an obturation of the mind before something that aims at penetrating it”, according to the Spanish philosopher Julian

Marías, who also dwelt on the same topic some centuries later\textsuperscript{104}. It was if pedantry found its way into modern literature by the back door, but leaving aside its antiqueness: dogmas and religious mysteries. There is indeed some form of pedantry in us, argues Hazlitt, whenever we succeed in conveying interest in our most trivial occupations; and the less the other is familiar with what we speak of or write about the better. In other words, modern pedantry affects an idiosyncratic air, whilst it makes use of a language fraught with professional cant. The modern pedant writes for those who partake of the same creed, not to “a lay community”\textsuperscript{105}. This is the cornerstone to the decay of reading and modern journalism, to on the one hand “the retraining of forms of expression within academia, and [on the other] the gradual reduction, to a minimum level, of intellectual ambitions among non-specialized periodicals”\textsuperscript{106}, in the words of Paulo Roberto Pires; and not, as Coleridge puts it, a simple expansion of the reading public, this “strange \textit{a phrase}”\textsuperscript{107}. Conscious that “an author aims exclusively at those who are willing and aspire to understanding him”\textsuperscript{108}, says Bento Prado Jr. – or, in the words of Hazlitt, “you can only speak to be understood, but this you cannot be, except by those who are in the secret”\textsuperscript{109} –, and rejecting Coleridge’s “systematic antipathy to the Reading Public”\textsuperscript{110}, Hazlitt is always stimulating his readers imaginations, either with courtesies or inebriating them with his corrosive ironies.

In effect, the new pair of essayists, Hazlitt and Hunt, bet heavily on a true respect for the readers’ understanding: in a word, the familiar or conversational style. “Writing, when properly managed, (…) is but a different name for conversation”\textsuperscript{111}, wrote Laurence Sterne, himself a supreme stylist. Conversation flags, loses its vigour or falls into lectures whenever someone, for excess of stubbornness or brilliance, holds it for too long. A respect to others involves humility and openness; the pleasure

\textsuperscript{104} Julian Marías, \textit{Tratado sobre a Convivência} (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, São Paulo, 2003), p. 15. Again on the topic, says Marías, “In this age when the production of written texts is immense, in all its forms, when it is impossible to encompass not only the content of what is published in a given topic, but the mere titles of publication, the capacity to distinguish is a life-saver, it is perhaps the only possible way to survive in an overflowing current that besets us in all directions”, p. 15.


\textsuperscript{106} Paulo Roberto Pires, “Viagem à Roda de uma Dedicatória”, In. Revista Serrote #12, p. 189.

\textsuperscript{107} CWH, “Mr. Coleridge’s Statesman’s Manual”, 7, p. 124.


\textsuperscript{109} CWH, “On the Conversation of Authors”, 12, p. 35.

\textsuperscript{110} CWH, “Mr. Coleridge’s Statesman’s Manual”, 7, p. 126.

of finding out something one could not count with. “The art of conversation”, Hazlitt reminds us, “is the art of hearing as well as of being heard”\textsuperscript{112}.

4. Rhythmic and Arrhythmic: an anecdote at Lamb’s

Everyone was chatting, drinking, eating, gambling, and laughing at ease. It was another Wednesday-night, another gathering, which now had became usual, at Charles and Mary Lamb’s home in Mitre Court, London. A number of friends were invited; great people; old companions. It is true that among acquaintances that had been seeing each other for over ten or fifteen years, there were some newcomers. Some brought drinks, snuff or tobacco with them; others brought simply their livers, nostrils or lungs. One brought a haunch of mutton, another only his mouth. Charles and Mary took care that every visitor who crossed the threshold would find the motto “wit and good fellowship”\textsuperscript{113} stamped on the hosts’ faces. They took care also that drinks, meals (roast pork was to be served\textsuperscript{114}), tobacco, gambling and engaging conversations would not be missing. It was compelling to enter into conversation with Charles, a man of an exquisite conviviality and sensibility, especially when he was drinking. A top-notch drinker\textsuperscript{115}, after being stimulated by its kick, he was cheered up by a mild excitement: communicative but never overflowing. From beginning to end, he never lost his rhythm. Between one and another anecdote, Charles described a delicious passage from John Donne or Philip Sidney (his favour authors), “try[ing] them on his palate as epicures taste olives”\textsuperscript{116}, or some well-known personality, and “his observations had a smack in them, like a roughness on the tongue”\textsuperscript{117}. Urban to his marrow (he lived his whole life in London), Charles’ conversations could be smart, quaint or grave. In the other corner of the room, Samuel Coleridge was holding the attention of Captain Burney, brother of the novelist Frances Burney (who

\textsuperscript{112} CWH, “On the Conversation of Authors”, 12, p. 39.
\textsuperscript{113} Idem, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{114} According to the well-known essay of Lamb: “There is no flavour comparable, I will contend, to that of the crisp, tawny, well-watched, not over-roasted, crackling, as it is well called (…) O call it not fat”, “A Dissertation upon Roast Pig”, In. Selected Prose, p. 167.
\textsuperscript{115} In Lamb’s words: “I believe that there are constitutions, robust head and iron insides, whom scarce any excesses can hurt, whom brandy (…) taken in ever so plentiful measure, can do no worse injury to than just to muddle their faculties, perhaps never very pellucid. On them this discourse is wasted (…). It is to a very different description of persons I speak. It is to the weak, the nervous; to those who feel the want of some artificial aid to raise their spirits in society to what is no more than ordinary pitch of all around them without it. This is the secret of our drinking”, “Confessions of a Drunkard”, In. Selected Prose, p. 155.
\textsuperscript{116} CWH, “On the Conversation of Authors”, 12, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{117} Idem, ibid.
sometimes showed up at these meetings), and one of Charles’ old school friends, James White, the author of *Falstaff’s Letters*. After a drink or two, instead of becoming euphoric, Samuel was overflowing, spoke *sans interruptions*, and was arrhythmic. The topic then discussed was Kant’s categories of the transcendental philosophy. When Thomas Holcroft, an old-school Jacobin, who had until then collected himself in non-communicative silence, questioned him on a point discussed, Samuel “[rode] the high German Horse”\(^{118}\), saying:

> My dear Holcroft (…), you really put me in mind of a sweet pretty German girl, about fifteen, that I met with in the Hartz forest in Germany – and who one day, as I was reading the Limits of the Knowable and Unknowable, the profoundest of all his works, with great attention, came behind my chair, and leaning over, said, ‘What, you read Kant? Why, I that am German born, don’t understand him!’\(^{119}\)

Thomas, who oftentimes became violent when drinking, rose from his chair and said in arrhythmic tone: “Mr Coleridge, you are the most eloquent man I ever met with, and the most troublesome with your eloquence!”\(^{120}\) At the next table, Edward Phillips (Ned for the few) and Sarah Battle\(^{121}\) headed a group of whist players; it “was silent for a moment”\(^{122}\). Ned placed the cards on the table and exchanged glances with Thomas, as if asking him to calm down. Without saying a word, Thomas grabbed his hat and went down stairs. “On coming to the landing-place in Mitre-court”, Hazlitt, who had been working till late and only now arrived at the gathering, saw Thomas, who stopped him saying: “Mr Coleridge [is] a very clever man, with a great command of language, but [I fear] he did not always affix very precise ideas to the words he used”\(^{123}\). After coming upstairs and Charles explaining to William what had happened with some witty remark, “we had our laugh out”. Samuel and others, now in the company of William, “went on with the argument on the nature of Reason, the

\(^{118}\) Idem, p. 37.
\(^{119}\) Idem, ibid.
\(^{120}\) Idem, ibid.
\(^{121}\) A character from Lamb’s well-known essay “Mrs Battle’s Opinions on Whist”. In “On Familiar Style”, says Hazlitt: “I must confess that what I like best of his [Lamb’s] papers under the signature of Elia (still I do not presume, amidst such excellences, to decide what is most excellent) is the account of *Mrs Battle’s Opinions on Whist*, which is also the most free from obsolete allusions and turns of expression”, *CWH*, 8, p. 245.
\(^{122}\) *CWH*, “On the Conversation of Authors”, 12, p. 37.
\(^{123}\) Idem, pp. 37-38.
Imagination, and the Will. There they remained till the wee small hours. It was the first time “the literary interest overcame the general”.

This anecdote I narrated with my own words is one of Hazlitt’s most famous and most admired among his readers; it is one amidst others we can find in The Plain Speaker’s essay “On the Conversation of Authors”. “I wish”, says Hazlitt, “I could find a publisher for it: it would make a supplement to the Biographia Literaria in a volume and a half octavo”. The characters involved, details as to personalities, gestures and dialogues are all in there. But its kick came from elsewhere, from a Gilberto Freyre’s essay in Alhos & Bugalhos (not reissued for a long time, it should be said in passing) “A Propósito de Cachaças e de Batidas: inclusive de sua repercussão em escritores e artistas que tanto pode ser rítmica como arrítmica”. Without claiming “stern sociological considerations”, Freyre inquires into the cultural value of the Brazilian distilled drink. For Freyre, cachaca is one of Brazil’s trademarks, together with samba, feijoada and “caressing expressions”: such as sinhazinha e iaiá. In all these examples, their value reside in cultural blends and demonstrations of intimacy: traces, according to Freyre, that denounce “everything truly Brazilian”. Nonetheless, Freyre’s digression at the end of the essay on how drink affects the conversations of authors or celebrities he had met with, Brazilians or not, classifying some as being rhythmic, and others arrhythmic, reveals an essayist concerned with general human matters. In Freyre’s words:

Rhythmic characters are those whom batidas [or destilled drinks] animate with a calm excitement. Thus animated, they become communicative. Expressive. Lively, but never overflowing. Their understanding is enlivened, inspired, gently excited by the drink’s kick. Whenever telling an anecdote or making a comment on some well-known personality, their sense of humour becomes sparkling, almost genius. Their smiles are Giocondesque, such is the slyness they imply. They laugh with pleasure. They gesture with ease, free from the excesses of Apollonian elegance that turn, among the so-called well-educated people, every gesture into lack of indecorum (...).

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124 Idem, p. 38.
125 Idem, p. 37.
126 Idem, p. 138.
129 Idem, p. 97.
As for the arrhythmic characters, after one drink or another, they overflow in words and gestures. Instead of becoming excited, they either talk in excess or recoil themselves in a non-communicative silence.

This connection between the essays of Freyre and Hazlitt is not a random one, for Freyre declared himself to be a diligent reader of Lamb and English essayism in general: “it is from the English language”, says he, “that it has sprung, since the literary essay was created, a greater number of masterpieces in this genre. It is enough to recall (...) the essays by Lamb, De Quincey, Walter Pater…” However, and whether Freyre was conscious of it or not, hospitality and cordiality, which in “A Propósito de Cachaças e de Batidas” he assumes as characteristically from Brazilian forms of expression, correspond precisely to that mental attitude I have been pursuing in this chapter in connection with the essayist as a friend; namely, the writer of familiar essays (a British genre par excellence). Next, I will speak about one of the familiar essay’s key figures: Samuel Johnson; not about Johnson in public (the author), but Johnson in private (the man), as captured by his friend and biographer, James Boswell, and according to Hazlitt’s interpretation of such a character in “On the Periodical Essayists”.

5. Conversations and the Art of Listening

It has often been said that the art of conversation is one of the eighteenth century’s major legacies. Such an art is at the centre of that refined form of sociability which has never in history been so fully developed, whether in coffee-shops, clubs or salons; through which the meanest subjects were examined and put to test, whereas intricate ones were dipped in new, interesting and surprising colours, never leaden or tiresome. Through which, philosophy wore the garb of literature; and poetry and literary prose wore the garb of philosophy. In a word, the esprit géométrique and the esprit de finesse have never been so intertwined. It was in the eighteenth century, for example, that the epistolary novel best flourished. And what is a letter but conversation at a distance in which intimacies are confided to the reader, as to an old friend? According to Hazlitt, Sterne’s The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy,

130 Idem, p. 100 (author’s emphasis).
131 Idem, p. 9.
132 It is true, however, that epistolary methods in eighteenth-century novels were often used as a “claim to historicity” and “self-reflexive effect”, “in order to insinuate the documentary objecthood of his material”, as Michael McKeon argues respecting Richardson’s novel, Pamela. See “The
one of the century’s most popular novels, “is the pure essence of English conversational style”\(^{133}\). While engaged in its reading, Hazlitt continues, “you fancy that you hear people talking”\(^{134}\). After the King George II bestowed on Samuel Johnson a life pension for his *The Dictionary of English Language*, Johnson committed himself, though not exclusively, to his most beloved art and one which few have ever practiced with equal freedom: conversation. Though hard-faced, good-humour is the tone to most of his “table-talks”\(^{135}\), and because Johnson was never blinded by stingy prejudices, he heartily welcomed the libertine Boswell. The young man devoted constant friendship with him. It was due to this and to his literary talent that Boswell left for posterity the long-length *Life of Samuel Johnson*, a work which while talking idly on every subject “discloses the everlasting hidden within the ephemeral”\(^{136}\) and overcomes the biographical, the “mere dry narrative of facts”\(^{137}\).

Among the century’s most famous philosophers, Hume, Diderot and Voltaire were then admired or feared mainly because of their *style* and the glow that sparkled from their conversation. Even Rousseau, whose extreme shyness led him to confess his incapability of talking fluently in society or in a *tête-à-tête*\(^{138}\), was skilful in imitating the improvising effect produced by a conversation on paper. Construing the differences of style between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’ philosophical and literary works, the Brazilian scholar Franklin de Mattos observes:

> The seventeenth century relies mainly on precise expressions. This style corresponds to an ideal of knowledge that values solid structures and the catenation of ideas. The eighteenth century’s style, although it does not deny

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\(^{133}\) CWH, “On the English Novelist”, 6, p. 121.

\(^{134}\) CWH, “On the Conversation of Authors”, 12, p. 41.

\(^{135}\) Part of Boswell’s purpose in writing *Life of Samuel Johnson* was to highlight Johnson’s table-talks: “Of one thing I am certain, that considering how highly the small portion which we have of the table-talk and other anecdotes of our celebrated writers is valued, and how earnestly it is regretted that we have no more, I am justified in preserving rather too many Johnson’s sayings, than too few”. James Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 26.


\(^{138}\) In Rousseau’s *Confessions*, Book III, he dwells on his awkwardness in society and goes to say: “Since I am so little in possession of my wits when I am on my own, it is easy enough to judge what I must be like in conversation, where if you are to say something suitable you must be able to call to mind, instantaneously and simultaneously, a thousand things (…). I know no constraint more terrible than that of having to go on conversing, on the spur of the moment and for ever”. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, pp. 112-3.
logical framings, rather wishes them to remain in secret (...); *delicacy not clarity* is what is mostly valued here.\(^{139}\)

From the examples above, possibly no one better embodies the conversational style than Boswell in his *Life of Samuel Johnson*. Perhaps this is precisely due to its frequent sacrifices of delicacy on behalf of the protagonist’s *sense of humour*, his spontaneous and cordial flow of sensibility. From Boswell’s unique ways of revealing himself and conversing with readers, and from his talent of concealing every trace of authorship and of devoting himself to his subject, which has been praised, among others, by George Bernard Shaw, Jorge Luis Borges\(^{140}\) and Hazlitt, I will say a few words on *Life of Samuel Johnson*. Primarily, my intention here is to focus on the kind of conversation it professes, which was of immense importance to the history of essay writing, and specially to Hazlitt’s essays – it is worth remembering one of the Hazlitt’s last published work is *Conversations of James Northcote, or Boswell Redivivus*\(^{141}\).

In addition to Johnson’s intolerable and even laughable manners in dressing, eating and walking, his “picturesque resentments, his obsession for judging everything, his unappealing statements, and extraordinary vitality (...), made of glowing sympathy and intellectual manliness”\(^{142}\), were also responsible for arousing attention in the profitable *gossip* book market – “that kind of pleasantly expatiating on various topics, without wearing the listeners”\(^{143}\) – even before his old friends John Hawkins, Mrs Thrale (later Mrs Piozzi) and Boswell launched into a battle of books to publish the first and best biography on Johnson.

On a Saturday morning, the 16\(^{th}\) of March 1776, a day after arriving in London for another law vacation, Boswell joined his friends at Mrs Thrale’s. On that


\(^{140}\) For George Bernard Shaw’s reading of Boswell, see for example his “Epistle Dedicatory to Arthur Bingham Walkley”, in *Man and Superman: a Comedy and a Philosophy*. In Shaw’s words: “Plato and Boswell, as the dramatists who invented Socrates and Dr Johnson” (London: The Floating Press, 2012), p. 27. Borges 1966’s *Course of Lectures on English Literature*, only recently published in English, has one of the finest essays on *Life of Samuel Johnson* from which we extracted some of the main ideas for the following analysis (New York: New Direction Books, 2013), pp. 88-107.

\(^{141}\) In the introductory note to *Conversations of James Northcote*, Hazlitt wrote: “I differ from my great original and predecessor (James Boswell, Esq., of Auchinleck), in this, that whereas he is supposed to have invented nothing, I have feigned whatever I pleased. I have forgotten, mistaken, mis-stated, altered transported a number of things”, CWH, 11, p. 350).

\(^{142}\) Lucia Miguel Pereira, “Dr. Johnson, Boswell e as Convenções”, *Escritos da Maturidade*. p. 138.

\(^{143}\) Idem, “Gossip”, p. 162.
morning, Johnson, exceptionally good-humoured, amused the company with a lengthy and delicious conversation. “I felt myself elevated”, said Boswell, “as if brought into another state of being. Mrs Thrale and I looked to each other while he talked, and our looks expressed our congenial admiration and affection for him”. Soon after taking leave, as both men moved along the Thames towards Blackfriars, Boswell, who always followed Johnson closely, “with ready questions on his tongue and pencil at his wrist”, introduced the topic of a recent publication: Johnsoniana, or Bont-Mots of Dr. Johnson. It was part of Boswell’s strategy to challenge his friend in the most unexpected situations. Incensed because its author was altogether unknown to both of them, Boswell suggested the publisher should be prosecuted and the false sentences ascribed to Johnson withheld. After all, such a work would inevitably receive a multitude of mock judgments and “stupid nonsense” that would only contribute to affix on him the image of a stout man who speaks openly and profanely on everything. Johnson, however, startled his friend with his usual practical wisdom and baffling paradox saying: “No, Sir; there will always be some truth mixed with falsehood, and how can it be ascertained how much is true and how much is false? (...) A story is a picture either of an individual or of human nature in general: if it be false, it is a picture of nothing.

Whether true or false, Boswell’s full-length portrait wins over other Johnson’s biographies. Life of Samuel Johnson entertains readers either with the protagonist’s ready words, its rich anecdotes made up of swathes of idle talk always in a familiar tone, or with the privileged way in which the biographer listened to his subject, as if installing himself in someone else’s conscience. Thence both names became inseparable. Perhaps, in relationships between writers there has never been a similar friendship or mutual recognition between two selves. Johnson was not the first public figure or man of letters whom Boswell “persisted in laying on his oars without caring to be felt inappropriate”. Back in the 1760’s, during his grand tour, he corresponded with the Italian general Pasquale di Paoli, later a major figure in the Corsica’s independence movement, and with two of the most popular writers of his time: Voltaire and Rousseau. He befriended the latter; and the friendship dragged on

144 James Boswell, Life of Samuel Johnson, p. 680.
146 James Boswell, Life of Samuel Johnson, p. 685.
147 Idem, ibidem.
for long fifteen days, for “Rousseau was a very ill-tempered man”\textsuperscript{149}, said Borges. With his muddling up of revolt and introspection and his urge for solitude, he never learned the art of living, even less so the art of living together. The witty Voltaire, who judged everything from gesture and frequently dehumanized himself in laughter, could only take the trouble of answering the young libertine’s missives after much insistence. Eventually the two met in Bern, and while Boswell delighted in his conversation, “\textit{la plus brillant que j’ai jamais entendu}”\textsuperscript{150}, the French philosophe probably took him as a mere “catalogue of bohemia”, as Lytton Strachey later wrote about him\textsuperscript{151}. Paoli’s friendship was more successful. If the same reciprocity between Johnson and Boswell are not there to be found, the writing of \textit{An Account of Corsica} (1768), Boswell’s first major work, was assisted by the Italian general. However, neither Paoli nor Voltaire nor Rousseau would have been a good model for Boswell’s biography. They would have hardly dropped attire of the general, the philosopher, the poet or the novelist; in short, they would not so willingly be disposed to share their great achievements or findings with someone else. As Hazlitt observes, the intimacy and familiarity of Boswell and Johnson “would hardly agree with the prudery, and somewhat ostentatious claim of authorship”\textsuperscript{152}.

Thus, Johnson’s mostly best-known and admired traits of character, as portrayed by Boswell, are revealed with no professional allure; not even that of a “layman as a writer”\textsuperscript{153}, as Erich Auerbach said of Montaigne. While alone, during his frequent nightly and melancholic inquisitions, he would gulp immense quantities of black tea, gaze at the fireside, and cultivate thoughts about ghosts. “Horrible hypochondria” and “morbid melancholy”\textsuperscript{154} lurked in his constitution. He was terrified of living on his own. By contrast, during his “idle hours”, Montaigne had a watchful eye on his reveries; and after digesting them he would commit them to paper. Therefore, said the French writer: “I have no more made my book than my book has made me”\textsuperscript{155}. As for Johnson, said Hazlitt: “The man was superior to the author”\textsuperscript{156}.

\textsuperscript{149} Jorge Luis Borges, \textit{A Course on English Literature}, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{150} Quoted from Maurice Lévy, \textit{Boswell: un Libertin Mélancolique: Sa Vie, ses Voyages, ses Amours et ses Opinions} (Grenoble: Université Stendhal, 2001) p. 102.
\textsuperscript{151} Lucia Miguel-Pereira, “Dr. Johnson, Boswell e as Convenções”, In. \textit{Escritos da Maturidade}, p. 135.
\textsuperscript{152} \textit{CWH}, “On the Conversation of Authors”, 12, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{154} James Boswell, \textit{Life of Samuel Johnson}, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{156} \textit{CWH}, “On the Periodical Essayists”, 6, p. 103.
If the Johnson captured by his biographer is remembered for any occupation is that shameless one of speaking his mind on every topic, of living in *viva-voce*: “that was his trade; *l’esprit du corps*”\(^{157}\). As such, and in contrast with some major figures appearing in this work, Boswell draws the reader’s attention to the protagonist’s sayings. *Life of Samuel Johnson*, in the words of Borges, “is a drama, with several characters”\(^{158}\) who move, think, speak and live before the readers’ eyes. Some of the most eminent public men and women of his time, who distinguished themselves by unequivocal artistic or literary talents, took part in his select *coterie*. There was the painter Joshua Reynolds, founder and first president of the Royal Academy; the Irish poet and playwright Oliver Goldsmith; the influential literary critic and hostess of many of the group’s meetings, Elizabeth Montagu; the famed Shakespearian actor David Garrick; the politician and philosopher, Edmund Burke, among others. However, each one of them, including the author, the notable attorney and biographer, are not depicted as a caste of public figures, artists or literati\(^{159}\). They are nothing but good fellows, sitting round the table, claiming sympathetic connections. Nothing can be less pedagogical, less pedantic, than the plain prose Boswell records from these gatherings.

What did they talk about? In Thomas De Quincey’s essay, *On Conversation* (1847), the author expresses his dissatisfaction for the lack of inventiveness in conversations of such a privileged circle, namely, the “*specific* power lying hid in conversation”\(^{160}\), that heuristic principle which is not to be found in books. According to him, the true or the false philosophy of his day were not properly weighed and quite frequently treated with careless disdain or shallowness, for Johnson’s “views of all things tended to negation, never to the positive and the creative”\(^{161}\). That Johnson assumed the spirit of contradiction is something that neither he nor Boswell would deny: “he appeared to have a pleasure in contradiction, especially when any opinion

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\(^{158}\) Jorge Luis Borges, *A Course on English Literature*, 95.

\(^{159}\) For the domestication of Johnson’s coterie, which is not understood as a retreat into a privatized world, see Jon Mee, “Proliferating Words, 1762-1797”, In. *Conversable Worlds*, pp. 81-133.


\(^{161}\) Idem, p. 143. To a further discussion on the topic, see the chapter: “Conversation in Decline: from raillery to reverie”, in Stephen Miller’s *Conversation: a history of a declining art*. In Miller’s words: “The second half of De Quincey’s essays is mainly an attack on Johnson’s conversation, which he thinks is widely overrated”, p. 178.
whatever was delivered with an air of confidence.” But perhaps we should enquire why even with such an excess of snappy words and with the protagonist’s antic and clumsy appearance he still appeals to the reader as an enjoyable character, something like the Falstaff of writers, as Hazlitt suggests.

“The best conversation – muttered Johnson, and loyal Boswell scrupulously committed to writing – is that of which nothing is distinctly remembered but a general effect of pleasing impression.” Now, if we grant the faithfulness of Boswell’s portrait, Johnson’s conversation was not among the best. Indeed the author did not intend it to be so. It lacks, for example, that “constant stream of conversation” which is one of the distinct traits of Elizabeth Montagu or Edmund Burke. As Hazlitt observed: “Burke seems to have been the only person who had a chance with him: and it is the unpardonable sin of Boswell’s work, that he has purposely omitted their combats of strength and skill.” Again on Burke, said Boswell, no matter who by chance he would bump into on the street (regardless of social rank, as Burke could equally ascend or descend), if they struck a conversation it would flow and enliven, as if both were thinking aloud. After bidding farewell, one would say: “this is an extraordinary man.” In contrast, Johnson’s conversation, “for his bow-wow-way,” was uncouth, wanting elegance or beauty. The general effect it left on his listeners was comparable, said Boswell, to “mustard in a young child’s mouth.”

The date of publication (1791) of Life of Samuel Johnson and its immense popularity, which persisted steadily from then until at least the first half of the twentieth century, gives us pause for thoughts. Similar to Burke’s Reflection on the Revolution in France, this voluminous biography is at once a monument and demolition tool of an era whose first signs of ruin became manifest in the late eighteenth century. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Boswell chose to perform his talks with an author as important as Johnson and whose manners clashed with the

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162 James Boswell, Life of Samuel Johnson, p. 734.
163 “On the Periodical Essayists”, says Hazlitt on Johnson: “His domestic habits, his tenderness to servants, and readiness to oblige his friends; the quantity of strong tea that he drunk to keep down sad thoughts; his many labours reluctantly begun, and irresolutely laid aside; his honest acknowledgment of his own, and indulgence to the weakness of others (...); his sitting with young ladies on his knee at the Mitre, to give them good advice, in which situation, if not explained he might be taken for Falstaff”, CWH, 6, p. 103.
164 Idem, p. 1278.
166 Idem, p. 1102.
167 Boswell, p. 1279.
168 Idem, p. 599.
169 Idem, p. 1154.
sense of order and delicacy of the classic model argued for and displayed in Johnson’s own writings.

From the easy flow of conversation stamped on early periodicals (The Tatler and The Spectator) to Johnson’s rough and untameable speech, as recorded by Boswell, there is no retrocession but rather an addition. Thus contended Hazlitt and some of the most important early nineteenth century essayists: the first generation of writers who openly engaged in a comprehensive reading of Life of Samuel Johnson. Johnson’s character, his sense of humour, and the freedom he displayed while discoursing offer a counterpoint to the solid, equally balanced style that prevailed in eighteenth century essay prose. To a greater or lesser extent, this style can be found in authors as dissimilar as Shaftesbury, Hume and Johnson. Part of its mannerism or its “strict laws”, as Hazlitt contends, consists in the copious use of Latin words with mere English terminations: hard words (as they were called) which produced a sounding impression, because they are distant from the people’s common diction. On Johnson’s written style, wrote Hazlitt, “there is no discrimination, no selection, no variety in it. He uses none but ‘tall, opaque words’”. And: “[in this style] there is the alternate roll of his cumbrous cargo of words; his periods complete their revolution at a certain stated intervals, let the matter be longer or shorter, rough or smooth, round or square”. Nothing can be the reverse of the familiar style. Taking up an important trope in Montaigne’s essays, according to Hazlitt, the familiar style, by linking objects to feelings, makes “for words to serve and follow” upon the matter, instead of twisting “the thread of thought to go in quest of [words]”. Johnson’s brisk, crude and “deep and sonorous voice”, on the other hand, like mustard in a young child’s mouth, sharpened the senses (of talented listeners such as Boswell) to those forms of popular expressions condemned by him as impolite.

To the new generation of periodical essayists, like Hazlitt and Hunt, Johnson’s harsh but likeable and cordial language and manners pointed to the familiar style’s imperishable capacity of renewing itself and to a greater harmony and accord

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170 Besides Hazlitt and De Quincey, many other English romantic writers expatiated on Boswell’s work. On Life of Johnson, wrote Coleridge: “Dr. Johnson’s fame now rests principally upon Boswell. It is impossible not to be amused with such a book”. In. Passages from The Prose and Table Talk of Coleridge (London: Walter Scott, LTD, 1894), p. 246.


172 CWH, “On Familiar Style”, 8, p. 243


175 James Boswell, Life of Samuel Johnson, 1387.
which should subsist between civic virtues and those formed and required in fireside sociability. The excessively polished forms of expression and moral conduct shared by authors such as Addison and Hume, for example, as well as the belief in the supremacy of one aesthetic model over others, deepened the intellectual elite’s antipathy to the people and hardened their senses to that ragged human cry made sublime for the first time at the end of the eighteenth century. In the next chapter of this thesis, I will dwell at large on this topic.

The Round Table’s authors, Hazlitt and Hunt, not only acknowledged their debt to Steele and Addison – as we have seen – but endeavoured to imitate that instructive and pleasant way of talking about vain things. If Mr Spectator was successful in his goal to reform manners, educate society and bring philosophy to the public sphere, should we conclude, asks Hunt in the “Introduction” to The Round Table, that society marches with uniform and triumphant steps? By no means, argues the author: “every general advantage (...) of this kind has a tendency to overdo itself”. Similarly, says Hazlitt in a passage where he evokes Rousseau’s Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, “excessive refinement tends to produce equal grossness”. Like coins or clothing, style and manners, which are “the surface of society”, have their edges cut from time to time. One of its consequences, according to Hazlitt’s sarcasm in the opening line to “Character of Mr Coleridge”, is that: “the present is an age of talkers”. In order to reconcile themselves to a new reading public and counterbalance the presumption and insipidity which often spring from an excess of taste held by people of fashion, the early nineteenth century essayists declared their humble origins and rough manners and confessed their

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176 On the concord between civic and domestic virtues, see Hunt’s XXXIX essay to The Round Table: “A day by the fire”. According to Hunt, the English contribution to civilization will be that intimate and democratic sociability which the English have for centuries cultivated by the fireside against the winter. Commenting on this essay, the important English Romantic Scholar, Gregory Dart, emphasizes the many classical references imbued in this essay (for instance, the tea-kettle mutated into a Greek urn by corrosion), and whose aim, says Dart: “is to turn one of the commonest and most ubiquitous of household spots into a little link with past greatness, with the daring suggestion being that merely to sit by one’s fire, whether one is aware of it or not, is to take part in a rich cultural history”, Metropolitan Art and Literature, p. 3.

177 For Addison and Steele’s dialogue form and proximity with the spoken world as a means of prompting the public sphere, see Jürgen Habermas, “Social Structures of the Public Sphere”, In. The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, pp. 27-56:42.


179 CWH, “On the Literary Character”, 4, p. 136. In the follow up to of Hazlitt’s argument, says the author: “Opposite reasons and consequences balance one another, while appetite or interest turns the scale. Hence the severe sarcasm of Rousseau, “Tout homme réfléchi est méchant”, CWH, 4, p. 136.


181 CWH, “Mr Coleridge”, 11, p. 28.
writers’ vanity – leaving aside Montaigne’s false humility of “nobiliary pride”\textsuperscript{182}. At the same time, Hunt reminds his readers that \textit{The Round Table} intends not “to set men upon disliking smoothness”\textsuperscript{183}.

“On the Literary Character”, \textit{The Round Table}’s XLV essay, Hazlitt mocks the flimsy fraternity between writers. Its jocular and reproachful tone can be read throughout, as in the very first paragraphs where the author quotes a long passage from a newly issued review of the famed Baron Grimm’s \textit{Correspondence}, written by his future employer and leading editor of \textit{Edinburgh Review}, Francis Jeffrey. In Hazlitt’s selected excerpt, Jeffrey draws attention to \textit{wit} and \textit{heartlessness} as the main ingredients of polished society: “the same impatience of uniformity, and passion for variety, which give so much grace to their conversation, by excluding all tediousness and pertinacious wrangling, make them incapable of dwelling for many minutes on the feeling and concerns of any one individual (...), and render them equally averse from serious sympathy and deep thought”\textsuperscript{184}.

In Hazlitt’s own words:

> Literary men are not attached to the persons of their friends, but to their minds. They look upon them in the same light as on the books in their library, and read them till they are tired. In casual acquaintances friendship grows out of habit. Mutual kindness beget mutual attachment; and numberless little local occurrences in the course of a long intimacy, furnish agreeable topics of recollection, and are almost the only source of conversation among such persons. They have an immediate pleasure in each other’s company. But in literature nothing of this kind takes place. Petty and local circumstances are beneath the dignity of philosophy. Nothing will go down but wit and wisdom (...). When we are tired of a book we can lay it down, but we cannot so easily put our friends on the shelf when we grow weary of their society. The necessity of keeping up appearances, therefore, adds to the dissatisfaction on both asides, and at length irritates indifference into contempt\textsuperscript{185}.

The modern essayist should be able to recognize and put him or herself in the place of others without the gentlemen’s slightly superior but charming statues. He or she does not appeal exclusively to private and domestic circles (as did Montaigne),

\textsuperscript{183} Leigh Hunt & William Hazlitt, \textit{The Round Table 1817}, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{184} CWH, “On the Literary Character”, 4, p. 132.
\textsuperscript{185} Idem, p. 134.
neither to elegant readers (as did Steele and Addison), but washerwomen and hard-working mantua-makers, as described in Hunt and Charles Lamb’s essays respectively, are equally welcomed.\footnote{186}

On the other hand, says Hazlitt, “there is nothing so pedantic as pretending not to be pedantic.”\footnote{187} Those who write want to plunge the reader “into the endless labyrinths of imagination.”\footnote{188} Commenting on this essay, Hazlitt scholar Uttara Natarajan emphasizes the author’s excessive solipsism and points out how he exposes and criticizes himself while profiling the literary character.\footnote{189} The frequent use of the collective pronoun (“when we are tired of a book”) strengthens his bond to a class of writers; that is to say, to a specific class of writers. Hazlitt did not assume the lord-like book-maker’s stance,\footnote{190} but rather the gypsy-like newspaper essayist’s: “who sets up his tent during the night, takes it down in the morning, and leaves.”\footnote{191} Almost every essay in The Round Table was first printed in periodical presses (The Examiner, Morning Chronicle, etc.) before being collected in book form. Amid poetical and inventive moments, which “create a fictitious world around us”, and trite truisms, The Round Table’s readers are frequently dragged into the author’s swift movements of thoughts. The power of style and the honesty of reflection require an active involvement from the reader. Thus, as Hunt calls to mind, the round table is an expression borrowed from both “the long train of romantic associations” which evoke King Arthur’s Round Table, where one must “have beaten the captain” before being

\footnote{186} See Hunt’s XLIV essay to The Round Table, “On Washerwomen”, pp. 177-188. As for Lamb account on hard-working mantua-makers, see note 78 above.
\footnote{187} CWH, “On the Conversation of Authors”, 12, pp. 34-5.
\footnote{188} CWH, “On the Literary Character”, 4, p. 133.
\footnote{190} The expression “book-maker” is derived from Montaigne. For his words: “I am less a maker of books than of anything else”, Selected Essays, p. 261. Commenting on it, says Hazlitt: “[Montaigne] was, in a word, the first author who was not a book-maker, and who wrote not to make converts of others to established creeds and prejudices, but to satisfy his own mind of the truth of things”, CWH, 6, p. 93. In this sense, Montaigne’s passage and Hazlitt’s comment on it clash with Auerbach’s interpretation: “he [Montaigne] was the first faiseur de livres in the current meaning – neither poet, nor scholar, but a book maker: a writer”, Ensaios de Literatura Ocidental, p. 151.
\footnote{191} The gypsy-like image of the periodical writer is one taken from Ruben Braga, one of twentieth century’s best-known chroniclers from Brazil, who wrote almost exclusively for the press. Contrary to those “men who are writers and make books that are truly houses, where they dwell”, the chronicler (or the essayist) are more like a gypsy. Crônicas Escolhidas, p. 263.
\footnote{192} CWH, “On the Literary Character”, 4, p. 133.
admitted into the company, as well as ordinary relations, laid on a plain-ground; in a word, the everyday “dining table”\textsuperscript{193}. Thus their commitment to the familiar style which the above quoted passage bears witness to. “As an author”, says Hazlitt, “I endeavoured to employ plain words and popular modes of expressions”\textsuperscript{194}. Countless examples of these could be gathered, as seen in the excerpt above: (they look upon; friendship grows out; nothing will go down, etc). The uncomplicated and straightforward syntax, wrought with simple sentences and a minimum amount of subordination, also adds to its sense of familiarity. From one personal statement to another, the reader feels the spontaneous effect intended by the author; as if one: “could hear him speak and see his gesture”\textsuperscript{195}. Coordinating conjunctions are often omitted; leaving the reader to deduce what is only suggested. In other words, says Hazlitt, “something is left to the understanding of the reader”\textsuperscript{196} — running against the grain of Coleridge’s thesis, reset by the Romantic scholar Jon Klancher, who claims the freedom from connections of logic is a mere relief from “all the hooks and eyes of intellectual memory”\textsuperscript{197}.

Accordingly, the sentence: nothing will go down but wit and wisdom (to the taste of the author for aphorisms), mitigates the comic and quasi-sadistic image of the writer who engages in people’s company as if they were his own private books, until he wears them out. However, because the familiar essay is always reinventing its subject, which serves to “give a fillip to the readers attention (...) as the handling round of a snuff-box may do in the middle of a conversation”\textsuperscript{198}, the image of the book/friend badly placed on the shelf returns at the end of the paragraph and gives a new inflection to the argument. What is stated here is that a comprehensive friendship, where each other’s sense of humour is not forfeited, is untenable between writers – at least while they affect that air of supremacy which is one of their most common and mean vices. “Authors in general are not good listeners”, says Hazlitt: “Some of the best talkers are, on this account, the worst company”\textsuperscript{199}.

\textsuperscript{193} Leigh Hunt & William Hazlitt, \textit{The Round Table 1817}, p. 8-9.
\textsuperscript{194} CWH, “On Familiar Style”, 8, p. 244.
\textsuperscript{195} Erich Auerbach, “L’Humaine Condition” In. \textit{Mimesis: the representation of reality in western literature}, p. 290.
\textsuperscript{198} Leigh Hunt & William Hazlitt, \textit{The Round Table 1817}, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{199} CWH, “On the Conversation of Authors”, 12, p. 39. In “Hazlitt’s Rhetorical Style”, Ian Patel argues that for Hazlitt the basis of conversational style is openness, a means by which the writer strives to promote a democratic common area with his hearers or readers. The core of Hazlitt’s critique of
By contrast, as in the relationship between the biographer and subject in *Life of Samuel Johnson*, or Montaigne’s relationship with his posthumous readers, Hazlitt’s familiar essays (especially those written in partnership with Hunt) appeal to the common understanding of readers with intimacy and cordiality\(^{200}\). Perhaps no other adjective occurs more often in Boswell’s work than *cordial*. Its sense is the same etymological one, which Sérgio Buarque de Holanda finely reconstructed in “The Cordial Man” – it’s no coincidence that the Johnson portrayed by Boswell is mentioned in this seminal essay on Brazilian anthropology. Among Johnson’s many idiosyncrasies, he nourished strong feelings against the Scottish\(^{201}\), with the astonishing exception of his biographer. His prejudices sprung from the heart. To him, observes Boswell, “friendship is the *cordial* drop, ‘to make the nauseous draught of life go down’”?\(^{202}\). “Enmity can be just as cordial as friendship, in the sense that both come from the heart and thus proceed from the sphere of the intimate, the familiar, or the private”?\(^{203}\). Hazlitt and Hunt included in their practice of “popular” periodical essayists this ethos of emotion to tune their ears to the interests and needs of others. “I look upon a periodical essayist”, wrote Hunt, “as a writer who claims a peculiar intimacy with the public”?\(^{204}\). However, they gave to this ethos a subtle but decisive change. Against tyranny and social oppression that were alarmingly on the increase in the aftermath of the Battle of Waterloo and The Congress of Vienna, the humanist ideal of intimate liberty and generous understanding – printed in essay form – was domesticated, served up at the table, shaded by the blazing fire. Familiarity was turned into a political weapon.


Chapter 3

The Streets of the Metropolis: *streams of human life…*

“To and from the heart of this great change, all day and night, throbbing currents rushed and returned incessantly like its life’s blood”.

*Charles Dickens, ‘Dombey and Son’*.1

1. The Adversary

“*Et voila la Table Rounde dissoûte*”2. Napoleon’s defeat at the Battle of Waterloo crushed Hazlitt to the ground! The account of friends who saw him, in the aftermath of Waterloo, walking in the streets with circumspect mien, eyes on the ground, drunk, sad smile and slow footsteps3, is well-known. This event, which has a constant but concealed presence in his essays – “the name of it I wish never to mention”4 –, made a decisive impact on his personal life and the form that his writings henceforth acquired. It represented the end of a cycle that began with the French Revolution and the author’s early childhood, “in which the hopes and expectations of the human race seemed opening in the same gay career with our own”5; it also represented the disruption with the circle of writers, mainly poets, to whom Waterloo meant the safeguard of national sovereignties, although, to Hazlitt, what was underway was precisely “the triumph of the despot and the slave throughout the world”6; and it represented still a gradual opening and approach to the common people, “with wants and appetites, and passions and anxious cares”7, as well as to their forms of expression.

All these contributed to the shaping of a smooth and argumentative prose, a flowing style, a taste for controversy and defiance, an ironic (also self-ironic) tone, and a decisive embodiment of colloquial English speech that distinguishes Hazlitt’s

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2 *CWH*, 4, p. xii.
3 His friend and painter Benjamin Haydon wrote in his *Autobiography* about Hazlitt: “As for Hazlitt, it is not believed how the destruction of Napoleon affected him; he seemed prostrated in mind and body: he walked about, unwashed, unshaved, hardly sober by day, and always intoxicated by night, literally, without exaggeration, for weeks; until at length wakening as it were from his stupor, he at once left all stimulating liquors, and never touched them again”. The quotation is from Duncan Wu’s *The First Modern Man*, p. 180. According to Wu, Haydon’s assumption that Hazlitt never touched alcoholic drink again is questionable.
4 *CWH*, “On the Conversation of Authors”, 12, p. 38.
7 *CWH*, “What is the People?”, 7, p. 259.
essays in his mature phase. I need not to explore here his boundless passion for Bonaparte. Let me only highlight the meaning this event had for Hazlitt; namely, the reversal of the current and the breach with revolutionary aspirations. The new context required from him a gesture not akin to attitudes of the portraitist or the friend, of which I spoke at large in the preceding chapters. In a word, the resistance to the conservative tide needed the stiff and exact opposition of a well-armed adversary.

For a clearer understanding of the conflicting tone and political resonances even in Hazlitt’s most personal essays, mainly those from The Plain Speaker’s era, which interest me particularly here, I shall begin, in general terms, from the plain and sober ground of history in which they are firmly placed. For what and against whom he was fighting?

In economic and social terms, the Napoleonic Wars left England in shreds. In those years, according to Hazlitt’s biographer, Duncan Wu, “the national debt stood at £84 million”. Bad harvests and The Corn Law boosted a great migratory flow to urban centres. There, with the introduction of new technologies, this mass of people, devoid of rights, was further oppressed by “indirect taxation, which fell disproportionately upon the poor”. “These conditions”, continues Wu, “created two million paupers in a country of nineteen million”\(^8\). As E. P. Thompson reminds us, the two sectors mostly hit by the crisis were basic markets: “the watch and clock trade, and the silk industry”\(^9\). In the country and in the city, unemployment and hunger gave the general tone that shaped English society during most of nineteenth century. In such a context, wrote Hazlitt, it was impossible for one to “pretend to be neutral”\(^10\). However, this was exactly the attitude of those who supported the legitimacy of national governments, that is to say, of both, liberals and conservatives, whose senses, numb to the ubiquitous presence of people’s misery, would only be awakened with much ado.

The years following Waterloo became known, according to Thompson’s renowned sentence, “the heroic age of popular radicalism”\(^11\). Contrary to the 1790’s, when poets and revolutionary partisans “conceived the idea of Pantisocracy as a free, egalitarian, communistic society”\(^12\), the new context demanded an impulse closer to the ground, and one that firmly responded to every state’s manoeuvre to crush to dust

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\(^10\) *CWH*, “On the Clerical Character (concluded)”, 7, p. 255.
the exiguous conditions of the “labouring classes”\textsuperscript{13}. It was they, says Thompson, who were behind the parliamentary reform movement: the immediate solution sought in those days. However fragmentary and even fragile, the movement gained strength in the hands of the writers in periodicals, among them, William Cobbett, “who created this Radical intellectual culture”\textsuperscript{14}. His instrument was the Political Register, the journalistic innovation Cobbett launched after being released from prison in 1812. Sold weekly at a very low price, the two-penny trash, the baptismal name given by its enemies, informed in rich and plain language readers and listeners (for pamphlets were read loud and clear in taverns) about “taxes, fiscal abuses, corruption, sinecures, clerical pluralism”\textsuperscript{15}, etc., and calling them to action.

Two of the main popular manifestations for better working conditions and political representation, Spa Fields and Peterloo, were directly or indirectly prompted by Cobbett, as well as, of course, by Henry Hunt, “the foremost public orator of reform movement”\textsuperscript{16}. If the latter manifestation, Peterloo, made clear that aristocracy did not fool around in Britain – at the end of the protest, eleven people were killed, and four hundred were wounded –, it “established (by a paradox of sentiments) the right of public demonstration”\textsuperscript{17}, stimulated the fight for democracy and strengthened the ties between intellectual and popular life; for, says Hazlitt, “[Cobbett] is not only unquestionably the most powerful political writer of the present day, but one of the best writers in the language”\textsuperscript{18}. It was this last effort that made the radical periodical press as well as Hazlitt, in his own and unique ways.

In this chapter, I shall speak of Hazlitt’s essayism from its boundaries with radical movements, highlighting, nevertheless, what is unique about it. Hazlitt was against all commonplaces, either from liberal, conservative, or radical presses: freedom of spirit was the watchword in those days against oppressive powers. At the same time, I shall follow the essayist “walking the streets of London”\textsuperscript{19}, slipping through an anonymous crowd. Intoxication or the alchemy of the streets\textsuperscript{20}, to borrow

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Common expression in those days, which occurs throughout Hazlitt’s writings, for instance, in “Project for a New Theory of Civil and Criminal Legislation”, CWH, 19, p. 319.
\item \textsuperscript{14} E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, p. 820.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Idem, p. 660.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Idem, p. 682.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Idem, p. 791.
\item \textsuperscript{18} CWH, “Character of William Cobbett”, 8, p. 50.
\item \textsuperscript{19} CWH, “On the Look of a Gentleman”, 12, p. 217.
\end{itemize}
from Charles Lamb’s expression, was the fuel to move ahead at time when poets and former Hazlitt’s mentors (Coleridge, Wordsworth and Southey) forsook their faith in the people, “throwing cold water” on his “public hopes”\textsuperscript{21}.

2. ‘Good Hater’: resistance to the ‘infuriate tide’\textsuperscript{22}

Henry Crabb Robinson, possibly the chief moderator in the endless disputes between English Romantic writers, synthesized the spring of hazlittian thoughts in the following passage from his Diary:

He [Hazlitt] mixes passion and ill-humour and personal feelings in his judgment on public events and characters more than any man I know, and this infinitely detracts from the value of his opinion, which, possessing as he does rare talents, would be otherwise very valuable. He always vindicates Bonaparte not because he is insensible to his enormous crimes, but out of spite to the Tories of this country and the friends of the war of 1792\textsuperscript{23}.

The excerpt reflects Robinson’s incomprehension, shared among old friends, towards Hazlitt when he became aware of the devastating effect Bonaparte’s defeat had on the essayist. Crabb Robinson, Hazlitt’s former boon companion in social gatherings\textsuperscript{24}, thus identified the cardinal function of spite, or hate, in the making of his opinions, mostly those on the grounds of public events. His perception, at least initially, matches Hazlitt’s own: “to be a true Jacobin, a man must be a good hater”\textsuperscript{25}. However, as we shall see in the sequence, hate, for Hazlitt, rather played the role of resistance and had, as it were, the effect to purge or to detoxify.

It is well-known that the paradoxical and provocative expression, good hater, was not Hazlitt’s invention. It was rather borrowed from Samuel Johnson, who coined it within a context equally moral and political, however distinct its sense is to our author. In conversation with Mrs. Piozzi about a friend who lately passed away, Richard Barthrust, Johnson said of him: “he [Barthrust] hated a fool, and he hated a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Idem, ibidem.
\item \textsuperscript{25} CWH, “The Times Newspaper: on the Connection Between Toad-Eaters and Tyrants”, 7, p. 151.
\end{itemize}
rogue, and he hated a *whig*; he was a very good *hater*\(^{26}\). In the preceding chapter, I spoke more broadly on the feelings of love and hate Hazlitt nourished towards Johnson: the love *for the man*, for the “dramatic play of his conversation”, for his honesty, cordiality and determination; and the hate *for the author*, for his scholastic thesis, for “the pomp and uniformity of his style”\(^{27}\), and his melancholic and debilitating morality. Among the many dissonances between Hazlitt and Johnson was politics. Johnson was a stony conservative, a *tory*; thus, his respect for someone as Barthrust who hated the liberals, the *whigs*. Hazlitt was neither a *whig*; therefore, what he intends is not simply an inversion of Johnson’s formula, as Crabb Robinson’s excerpt could suggest. A *good hater* consists of a stance against the grain of both existing political parties, conservative and liberal, and, to an extent, against the reformers.

Following the critical trend discussing the cultural, political and historical background of English Romanticism studies, Kevin Gilmartin offers, in my view, an important analysis, for he connects the points between artistic invention and the essay of intervention. Both in his recently published book, *William Hazlitt: Political Essayist* (2015), or in earlier studies, particularly the equally brilliant “Afterwords: William Hazlitt – a radical critique of radical opposition”, from *Print Politics* (1996), Gilmartin points out the endurance of popular radical rhetoric conventions, of William Cobbett, for instance, in Hazlitt’s essays: “the combative, vernacular, topical, and even apocalyptic rhythms”\(^{28}\). This is the case of the series “Illustrations of *The Times* Newspaper”. Published originally in Leigh Hunt’s periodical, *The Examiner*, between 1st December, 1816, and 12th January, 1817, and later gathered together in his book, *Political Essays* (1819), there are three essays that make up the series: “On Modern Apostates”, “On Modern Lawyers and Poets”, and “On the Connection Between Toad-Eaters and Tyrants”. It is from this last essay that I quoted a passage about, in Gilmartin’s words, “Hazlitt’s Jacobinized version of the ‘good hater’”. The series also belongs to “a longer sequence of attacks” on the conservative press and, thus expresses Hazlitt’s “committed resistance to established power, and to affiliations with the radical reform movement”. This is confirmed, according to Gilmartin, by a “critical method that exploited paradoxical and contradiction”,


“shared principles, animosities, and styles of expression” common to “the prevailing spirit of popular radical journalism”\textsuperscript{29}.

Nevertheless, if we read the expression, \textit{good hater}, in light of what is nowadays deemed a classic Hazlitt’s essay, “On the Pleasure of Hating”, as Gilmartin suggests, we shall see that, contrary to what the scholar has affirmed, the essay in The Plain Speaker does belong, in its own way, to the “special domain of politics”\textsuperscript{30}, the opinions there stated are less “inflexible” and less leaning to the “prejudiced side” as they seem at first, and hate can only be converted into a good to those capable of digesting their own poison.

Halfway through, the essayist, inquisitor of the human soul, unravels “the threads of meanness” in four specific circumstances: “we hate old friends: we hate old books: we hate old opinions; and at last we come to hate ourselves”\textsuperscript{31}. As for his old opinions, it is the political ones that he puts on the hot spot, as we can read in the following passage from the closing paragraph:

\begin{quote}

Instead of patriots and friends of freedom, I see nothing but the tyrant and the slave, the people linked with kings to rivet on the chains of despotism and superstition. I see folly join with knavery, and together make up public spirit and public opinions. I see the insolent Tory, the blind Reformer, the coward Whig! If mankind had wished for what is right, they might have had it long ago. The theory is plain enough; but they are prone to mischief, ‘to every work reprobate’. I have seen all that had been done by the mighty yearnings of the spirit and intellect of men, ‘of whom the world was not worth’, and that promising a proud opening to truth and good through the vista of future years, undone by one man, with just glimmering of understanding enough to feel that he was a king, but not to comprehend how he could be king of a free people! I have seen this triumph celebrated by poets, the friends of my youth and the friends of man, but who were carried away by the \textit{infuriated tide} that, setting in from a throne, bore down every distinction of right reason before it; and I have seen all those who did not join in applauding this insult and outrage on humanity proscribed, hunted down (they and their friends made a by-word of), so that it has become an understood thing that no one can live by his talents or knowledge who is not ready to prostitute those talents and that knowledge to betray his species, and prey upon his fellow-man (…). And England, that arch-reformer, that heroic deliverer, that mouther about
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{29} Idem, pp. 17, 15, 47 e 23.
\textsuperscript{30} Idem, p. 16.
liberty and tool of power, stands gaping by, not feeling the blight and mildew coming over it, nor its bones crack and turn to paste under the gasp and circling folds of this new monster, Legitimacy! (…). Seeing all this as I do, and unravelling the web of human life into its various threads of meanness, spite, cowardice, want of feeling, and want of understanding, of indifference towards others and ignorance of ourselves – seeing custom prevail over all excellence, itself giving way to infamy – mistaken as I have been in my public and private hopes, calculating others from myself, and calculating wrong; always disappointed where I placed most of my reliance; the dupe of friendship, and the fool of love; have I not reason to hate and to despise myself? Indeed I do; and chiefly for not having hated and despised to world enough.

Before I move on to a close reading, or rather an aesthetic reading, of this passage, and particularly to the image of the adversary who resists the infuriate tide with a vivacious and scathing critique, “seeing custom prevail over all excellences”, I shall speak, in general terms, of this essay, which is one of the most read and controversial he ever penned.

First of all, it is important to state that “On the Pleasure of Hating” is not an apology to hate. As has been observed by a leading figure in North-American essayism, Phillip Lopate, Hazlitt here assumes the role of an observer who takes notes of “its [hate] ubiquitous presence in our lives and tries to account for that fact”\(^{32}\). However, it should be stressed that his observations are anything but impartial. From beginning to end, Hazlitt mixes the intimate prose of familiar essay with the detective’s expertise; events from his personal life, his opinions and feelings (as Crabb Robinson had noted), with the anthropologist’s disinterested observation.

The essay opens with a description in narrative tone of his room in Winterslow (where he wrote this and countless others essays from The Plain Speaker’s phase), when a spider of some “edifying breed” crawled Hazlitt’s way. “He [the spider] runs with heedless, hurried haste, he hobbles awkwardly towards me, he stops”\(^{33}\). According to Lopate, Hazlitt, in this excerpt, “mimics the spider’s hesitant, shutter-step movement”\(^{34}\). Whether from its poison, its evil intent towards other creatures and its mingled feelings of “cunning, impudence, and fear”, the spider is turned into an epitome or allegory of wickedness. There is, at first, a clear contrast between the

\(^{32}\) Philip Lopate, “Hazlitt on Hating”, In. To Show and to Tell, p. 147.


\(^{34}\) Lopate, To Show and to Tell, p. 148.
spider and the essayist, which can be observed, for instance, in the indecisive and shutter-step movements of the first and the smooth prose and easy gesture of the latter: “as he passes me, I lift up the matting to assist his escape, am glad to get rid of the unwelcoming intruder”. Hazlitt does not crush it, as “a child, a woman, a clown, or a moralist a century ago” would have done; instead he complies with it and observes it with certain sympathy. Nonetheless, the very sight of it rouses in him “horror and superstitious loathing”. By some kind of mystic bond, the essayist – a well-read man, a child of civilizing progress – becomes part of an “ill-omened tribe” that transcends the barriers of time, culture and even of species; all in all, this happens without any external demonstration of violence, for, says he, “the spirit of malevolence survives the practical exertion of it”\(^35\).

Thence follows a flash flood of examples of this “perverse, but fortunate delight in mischief”, taken from observations of nature, culture, ephemery of everyday life, and from literature: “animals torment and worry one another” for sport; in opening a newspaper, we turn first to stories of “accidents and offences”; spectators would rather leave the theatre empty to witness a public execution; an idiot or crazy woman are the laughing stock of a community; effigies of Guy Fawkes are hooted at and burned yearly in every English town; bigoted preachers speak more of hell-fires and the devil than the blessings of heaven; “cannibals burn their enemies and eat them, in good-fellowship with one another”; Christian divines cast, “body and soul, into hell-fire”, whoever disagrees “a hair’s-breath” with them; the secret of Walter Scott novel’s popularity comes from “the rooted prejudices and deadly animosities” there narrated, “as we read, we throw aside the trammels of civilisation, the flimsy veil of humanity”; and many others similar examples. “What a strange being man is!”\(^36\)

In the second half of the essay, when Hazlitt turns to his own feelings – his hate towards old friends, old books and himself –, the general dismay and sourness become even more obvious. However, from time to time, it wears the garb of humour; for instance, in the following passages: “old friendships are like meats served up repeatedly, cold, comfortless, and distasteful. The stomach turns against them”; a beautiful passage “leaves a taste on the palate like nectar (…), but if we repeat it often in ordinary moods, it loses its flavour, becomes vapid, ‘the wine of poetry is drank,\(^35\)


\(^{36}\) Idem, pp. 128, 130 and 129.
but the lees remain’’; “as to my old opinions, I am heartily sick of them”37. What humour evinces in these passages, according to the interpretation I propound here, is that the process of resistance begins deep down. If “the essay is a judgment”38, the stomach, to the adversary essayist, is its tribune. It is only after having “spit [his] spite”, having examined every “source of dissatisfaction”, and responded to aggressions “with the worst venom of [his] pen”39, that is to say, it is only after Hazlitt has proved the world’s and his own venom that he can arm himself against the infuriate tide. In short, “On the Pleasure of Hating” is less the point of arrival of a left-wing intellectual disappointed with life than a reflection on a necessary stoppage, which I called, in previous chapters, the state of fermentation.

Hence the constant recurrence of digestive images; hence, again, the corrosive humour and self-irony, which precludes every insipidity and inflexible disposition. I shall now examine closely this perverse principle from the philosophical arguments, which, so to say, scaffold them.

Invested with an inquisitive impulse proper to essay writing and in a first attempt to understand the origins of “unrestrained impulses”, says Hazlitt: “without something to hate, we should lose the very spring of thought and action. Life would turn to a stagnate pool”40. It seems to me no mere coincidence the resonance of this argument with another we read in John Locke’s Essay of Human Understanding: “the chief if not the only spur to human industry and action, is uneasiness”41. There is, in fact, a consensus among English Romantic scholars that no other writer of the period was more attuned to eighteenth century philosophical debate than Hazlitt42. This does not make him an empiricist stricto senso. In his Lectures on English Philosophy (1812), Hazlitt dwells upon and rebuts Locke’s thesis that the faculty of understanding, as well as its objects, the ideas, lay down an “affective circle”43 according to which one would not subsist without the other; that is to say, that the

37 Idem, pp. 131, 134 and 135.
40 Idem, pp. 129, 128.
42 In her seminal work, Elizabeth Schneider, The Aesthetic of William Hazlitt: A Study of the Philosophical Basis of his Criticism (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1933), underlines how Hazlitt’s philosophical thoughts were closer to eighteenth century philosophers, such as Burke, Hume, Smith, among others) than to the philosophers of his own century, whether British or German.
mind is nothing but a white sheet of paper whose form, together with its ideas, are built from an overlap of different sensible impressions. For, says Hazlitt, “all nature, all objects, all parts of objects would be equally ‘without form and void’. The mind alone is formative, to use the expression of a great German writer [Kant]”\(^{44}\). However, “On the Pleasure of Hating”, without descending into the minuteness of philosophical disquisitions, Hazlitt resumes one of the eighteenth-century cornerstone theses, according to which, every pain or uneasiness, because it removes us from a comfort zone, puts body and mind into action in such a way that agreeable sensations would be incapable of. However, this is not simple and unmixed pain; but one magnetized by a feeling of pleasure.

Echoes of eighteenth century philosophy are confirmed in the passage below, when Hazlitt makes use of examples taken from Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Idea of the Sublime and Beautiful*:

A whole town runs to be present at a fire, and the spectator by no means exults to see it extinguished. It is better to have it so, but it diminishes the interest; and our feelings take part with our passions, rather than with our understandings. Men assemble in crowds, with eager enthusiasm, to witness a tragedy: but if there were an execution going forward in the next street, as Mr. Burke observes, the theatre would be left empty\(^{45}\).

In Burke’s *Enquiry of the Sublime and Beautiful*, this example fulfils the purpose of defining the singularity of sublime feelings as opposed to beautiful ones. No author before him best unravelled in the human soul a species of pleasure in things “which so far from doing, our heartiest wishes would be to see redressed”; but were it to happen, there would be a delight in seeing it; a pleasure, continues Burke, is distinct from happy feelings in beholding beauty, for “shadowed with horror”\(^{46}\). As it is known, Burke’s example of spectators, whose minds are “erected with expectations”, running forward in the next street to witness an execution, is a deployment from a lockean theme of pain’s supremacy over pleasure – “pleasure


\(^{45}\) *CWH*, “On the Pleasure of Hating”, 12, p. 128.

operates not so strongly in us, as pain”[^47] – and came to him after reading one of the main diffusers of Locke’s philosophy on the continent, Abbé Dubos. Thus, the sublime, for Burke, “the strongest emotion the mind is capable of feeling”[^48], bears a resemblance to what became known as “a poetics of uneasiness”[^49], namely, the idea that the urge of strong emotions is prompted by an escape from boredom – it is worth remembering that beauty, to Burke, “is in fact nearer to a species of melancholy”[^50] and languor.

Does the same happen to the pleasure of hating in Hazlitt’s essay, namely, that his arguments and examples serve rather to understand why the stillness of a “stagnant pool” is so terrifying? Yes, according to Lopate. “In fact”, “after its initial setup, the essay does not seem to be about hating at all, but rather about our inability to sustain enthusiasm”; or, in another passage, “from the psychological standpoint, he seems to be saying that the happiness we seek is not arrived at through a cessation in tension but through the proper amount of stimulation, which must be endlessly recalibrated”[^51].

Lopate’s hypothesis is the more effective if we read “On the Pleasure of Hating” side by side with another essay from The Plain Speaker, “On Depth and Superficiality”. Here Hazlitt dives deeply into the human soul, and his own, from a less detached standpoint; at the same time, he speaks more openly about the connection between the pleasure of hating and the escape from boredom: “it is the hankering after mischievous and violent excitement that leads to this result, that causes that indifference to good and proneness to evil (…). We incur or inflict [griefs], not to avert other impeding evils, but to drive off ennui”[^52]. Even when acting as remedy to the soul, escape from boredom, however, does not seem to be at the heart of wickedness, neither to Hazlitt nor to Burke. In explaining why we delight in seeing the ruins of a mighty city or public executions, says Burke, it is because we then strengthen our “active purpose (…), prompting us to relieve ourselves in

[^50]: Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 123.
[^51]: Lopate, *To Show and to Tell*, pp. 156 e 150.
relieving those who suffer”\textsuperscript{53}. In other words, pleasure in pain is capable of repealing indifference towards other people’s misfortunes. Hazlitt, who studied Burke’s thoughts in every meandering, holds on to this suggestion in order to develop the thesis, in “On Depth and Superficiality”, that hate and enmity gives “an additional sense of power”\textsuperscript{54}. The endless search for enthusiasm can be, and in fact it is so, an offset to ennui. However, not for those who take part of social reality with an aim to transforming it. In short, it is not for a good hater.

That said, it now remains to come back to the above quoted passage about the hate of old opinions, as well as its unrelenting and bilious conclusion about the hate towards us. Hazlitt qualifies his political opinions as old and mildewed, and, thus steps back from them, as he would do from one who hurt his feelings in a deadly way. This can be noticed in the way he personifies them: “they have deceived me sadly”. Therefore, Hazlitt looks cold and askance on them, “without the warmth of attachment”, as old friends “who pass one another in the streets like strangers; or if they stop to speak, do it as cooly and try to cut one another as soon as possible”\textsuperscript{55}. The very act of observing them, the disinterested standpoint of an anthropologist, expresses a necessary but strategic retreat – it is not shooting into the infuriate tide that one intends to overcome it; therefore the appeal to the figure of speech anaphora: the verb see – “I see”, “I have seen” – marks the beginning of every sentence, of every old opinion that parades before his eyes. “The emphatic patterns of repetition”, as Northrop Frye observes, are characteristically peculiar to “the rhetoric of attack or invective”\textsuperscript{56}. Thus, Hazlitt shows himself at once a shrewd and abrasive observer; while the choice of the verb see together with its sharp change of verb aspect, in the middle of the paragraph – from simple to present perfect –, makes him a species of visionary or prophet, for, seeing the unmerciful flow of history, a future announces itself, and, due to the general tone of the essay, it takes on an apocalyptic air. As Gilmartin observes, this is one of the central rhetorical traits of the popular radical press, through which journalists expounded either “the catastrophic fulfilment of a grotesque system of corruption and exploitation” or “a more static vision of a sudden

\textsuperscript{53} Burke, \textit{A Philosophical Enquiry}, p. 46. The whole of this Section, “The effects of Sympathy in the distress of others”, is significant to the argument in hand.

\textsuperscript{54} CWH, “On Depth and Superficiality”, 12, p. 349.


\textsuperscript{56} Northrop Frye, \textit{Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays}, p. 327.
popular release from tyranny and dispossession”\(^{57}\). In Hazlitt’s passage, biblical quotations, *Paul’s Letter to Titus* and *Hebrews*, respectively, and the comparison of Legitimacy to a monster – almost the apocalyptic beast, with its “grasp and circling folds” – confirms Hazlitt’s adherence to radical rhetoric strategies. The same does not occur, however, in the final answer to a question earlier stated: has he not reason to despise himself? yes, “for not having hated and despised the world enough”.

We are left without grounds! The spider now crawls in the demeanour of the essayist “unravelling the web of human life”. Could it be a resigned and melancholic upshot? The spider, as Starobinski reminds us, in respect of Baudelaire, belongs to the bestiary of melancholy\(^{58}\). However, for Hazlitt, it has another sense. In the “Preface” to *Political Essays*, the spider is the very symbol of what is the most maleficent of things, Legitimacy: “I am not leprous all over”, says he, “the lies of Legitimacy does not fix its mortal sting in my inmost soul, nor, like an ugly spider, entangle me in its slimy folds; but is kept off from me, and broods over its own poison”\(^{59}\).

Had Hazlitt allowed himself a “quantity of superfluous bile upon the stomach”, hence the recurrence of intoxicating metaphors, which, according to Frye, “is often employed for the breakdown of rhetorical control”?\(^{60}\) One of the aspects that distinguishes Hazlitt from other radical journalists, as Gilmartin frequently reveals in his studies, is the fact that “the critic manages to cross political battle lines, borrowing from the language of the enemy”\(^{61}\). Thus, the adversary essayist, the *good hater*, is also one who had to learn to swim “in the middle of the stream”\(^{62}\).


Of Hazlitt’s old friendships, one of the few that has not “scattered, like last’s year snow”\(^{63}\), was the painter James Northcote, a former pupil of Joshua Reynolds, who in youth befriended Johnson and his circle and whose anecdotes exerted immense fascination on Hazlitt from their first encounter, in 1802\(^{64}\). Northcote became a kind of mentor or counsellor to Hazlitt. For years, Hazlitt attended his

\(^{59}\)*CWH*, “Preface”, 7, p. 10.
\(^{64}\) Wu, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man*, p. 79.
atelier, took notes of their interviews, and, at the end of his life, gathered them in book form, *Conversations of James Northcote* (1830), a work that mimics Boswell’s *Life of Samuel Johnson*, as we saw in the previous chapter. Conversations revolved around the most diversified topics; however, now and then, some turn up recurrently, such as art, the life of painters, application to studies, the differences between genius and talent. In “Conversation The Eleventh”, there is a valuable passage, the rare moment when Hazlitt defines the way he conceives the act of writing essays. Northcote was telling him about the craft of painting: when a canvas was commissioned to him, he must, says he, “begin at once or I can do nothing (...). Half the things that people do not succeed in, are through fear of making the attempt (...). When you *must* do a thing, you feel in some measure that you *can* do”. To which Hazlitt answers:

I found nearly the same thing that you describe when I first began to write for the newspapers. I had not till then been in the habit of writing at all, or had been a long time about it; but I perceived that with necessity, the fluency came. Something I did, *took*; and was called upon to do a number of things at once. *I was in the middle of the stream, and must sink or swim*65.

In this excerpt, the craft of a work of art and the craft of essay writing meet at two crucial points: 1. without devotion and a vigorous drive, nothing is done; 2. dexterity comes with habit and repetitions: “the more we do, the more we *can* do”66. But the comparison stops here. In the sequence to the argument, says Hazlitt, his essays were nothing but writings “on the spot”. Closer to “*extempore* speaking”67, they would barely stand up alone on the shelf. At best, the periodical essayist’s proficiency matches that of a craftsman. Like “the glass-blower [who] rapidly shapes the vitreous fluid”; or, “like *bubbles on an agitated stream*”, “proper expressions rise to the surface from the heat and fermentation of the mind”68. *Table Talk* and *The Plain Speaker* are fraught with examples of the ephemeral aspect of this species of writing: “I have not much pleasure in writing these Essays (...). But after I begin them, I am only anxious to get to the end of them”69; “What abortions are these

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65 *CWH*, “Conversation the Eighteenth”, 11, p. 288.
66 *CWH*, “On Application to Study”, 12, p. 60.
67 *CWH*, “Conversation the Eighteenth”, 11, p. 289.
Essays! What errors, what ill-pieced transitions, what crooked reasons, what lame conclusions!” Is it mock humility? Yes, to a certain extent. But that does not seem to be the point here. Hazlitt is fully aware that essay involves contingency, especially as a piece of paper of a major dissemination tool. Born with the newspaper and the machine era, periodical essays were not meant to last.

A hundred years after literature had dug deeply, for the first time, into the periodical press, namely, with The Tatler and The Spectator, it became, argues Hazlitt, more popular and more democratic. A lot has been discussed by Hazlitt’s scholars about his ambivalence towards the phenomenon of the massification of the arts. On the one hand, there is an elitist rapture in this excerpt: “the principle of universal suffrage, however applicable to matters of government (…), is by no means applicable to matters of taste”; on the other, says he, “all the greatest poets, sages, heroes, are [the people’s] originally, and by right.” Far from looking for a definite solution to the problem, I intend to show here how it translates the anxieties of a never gratifying longing of those, like Hazlitt, who recognized that it was mandatory to swim to avoid sinking.

In the Edinburgh Review in 1823, Hazlitt’s “The Periodical Press”, provides an overall view of Britain’s leading newspaper and literary magazines, “the great opprobrium of our periodical literature”. But the general tone of the essay is less of censorship than the passage suggests. Hazlitt opens the essay mocking those who ask: “Whether Periodical criticism is, upon the whole, beneficial to the cause of literature”; or, whether Shakespeare and other great men of the past could have written at a time when everything is scrutinized by the press, this “hotbed of criticism”. It is not thus that one comes to the solution to the problem. After all, asks Hazlitt, are not Lord Byron and Walter Scott exceptions to the rule, because they are both popular writers and authors whose works bear immense literary values? If in five or ten years time their works are still read, of it they acquire the musty air of antiqueness, which people return to only to gratify their historical curiosity, “time

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70 CWH, “The Indian Jugglers”, 8, p. 79.
72 CWH, “Why the Arts are not Progressive – A Fragment”, 4, p. 164.
alone can show”. Invested with an ironic tone, Hazlitt concludes, “that periodical criticism is favourable – to periodical criticism”\(^{74}\). From thence onwards, there follows a long discussion of one of Hazlitt’s core critical stances, as David Bromwich observes, namely, that arts are not progressive\(^{75}\).

There is nothing new to this thesis; neither did Hazlitt intend it to be new. It echoes preceding critical grounds, mainly from the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the metaphor of currents, which I have been pursuing here, applied to the press, captures a characteristic trait of literature in the age of the machine: the muddied waters of a crowd of anonymous writers and readers.

Hazlitt’s motto can be summarized in the following formula: the more society progresses in knowledge and refinement, the more it loses in terms of sublime and creative powers. In The Round Table essay, “Why Arts are not Progressive?”, he says: “the greatest poets, the ablest orators, the best painters, and the finest sculptors that the world ever saw, appeared soon after the birth of these arts, and lived in a state of society which was, in other respects, comparatively barbarous”\(^{76}\). This model of perfection, like any other, implies flourishing, decay and “the assumption of a highest point art can achieve”\(^{77}\), as Márcio Suzuki observes in respect to David Hume.

According to Hazlitt’s specific standpoint, it is an irony of the historical process that art generally arrives too early for this model of perfection. The world will never witness another Homer, another Aeschylus, another Sappho; not only because they were the first, but because they brought to perfection an art that, though they did not invent it, they contributed to the material finishing of its respective poetic genres: epic, dramatic and lyric. Every alternative would be cut off but decay and even the end of art if Hazlitt did not include two other variants: an art flourishes from the dead matters of that which preceded it; and, “each age or nation has a standard of its own”\(^{78}\).

To begin with the last argument, a commonplace in the poetics of Romanticism, what Hazlitt says, on the one hand, is that we can only judge the merits of a work of art from values confined “within local and temporary limits”\(^{79}\); on the


\(^{76}\) CWH, “Why the Arts are not Progressive – A Fragment”, 4, p. 161.

\(^{77}\) Suzuki, A Forma e o Sentimento do Mundo, p. 20.


\(^{79}\) Idem, p. 216.
other, because no nation subsists in isolation, at least not in modern times, the contact with what is different stimulates a spirit of emulation; created vigour grows in vacancy. Dante is not superior to Milton, or Milton to Dante; each one of them had rather achieved a state of perfection in epic poetry in their respective languages because they knew how to farm on a ground not yet fully cropped. In addition to this, the barbarity of their ages, with the countless difficulties that stood in the way between the will and the action, required a more firm and expressive gesture. Nothing is more congenial to the nature of poetry than, in Hazlitt’s definition, “the language of the imagination and the passions, of fancy and will”\textsuperscript{80}. It is impossible not to recognize in this argument the legacy of Rousseau and Burke, on which I discourse in the first chapter. For Rousseau, the expressive energy of words, proper to the ancient world, was replaced by the need for clarity in modern civilisation, hence the present decline of eloquence\textsuperscript{81}; for Burke, ancient or oriental tongues were the more sublime because they were possessed of “a great force and energy of expression”, and because, in them, imagination prevails over judgment, that is to say, over the “critical distinguishing” of things\textsuperscript{82}.

Hazlitt also found in modernity a gradual diminishing of the power of imagination, which gave way to precision of understanding. As a consequence, which I will talk about below, this does not necessarily imply a nullification of enthusiasm, but rather a search for other qualities, however transient and unquenchable: the daily facts, devoid of greatness, conveyed by the periodical press.

The first variation on the motto above stated (that an artistic genre flourishes from the decaying matters of a preceding one), is intimately connected with the second, as can be deduced. “Tragedy was at its height in France, when it was on the decline with us”; similarly, “Comedy rose as Tragedy fell”\textsuperscript{83}. The explanation for this, of course, does not presuppose an absolute vision of history, for its march does not follow the same steps in every nation. The fierce fight for an ideal, which raises some men above others with the embodiment of greatness of character, was followed by non-dignified “images of grace, of gaiety, and pleasure double, and completes the

\textsuperscript{82} Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry, p.176.
perspective of human life”\textsuperscript{84}. With the rise of comedy, literature acquired some worldliness; new paths were opened, “cultivating some neglected plots of ground”. It is true the now wilder and better-distributed soil is also less rich in precious stones. In other words, literature and the world became more prosaic. “So”, says Hazlitt, “the Periodical Essayists, Steele and Addison, succeeded to our great Comic writers, and the Novelists, Fielding, Sterne, Smollett, to these; and each left works superior to any thing of the kind before and unrivalled in their way by any thing since”\textsuperscript{85} – Hazlitt, however, could not predict the rich culture of novels that would flourish in his own nation and century in the pen, for instance, of Charles Dickens. In any case, the conditions necessary to the birth of novel and essay writing – diffusion of knowledge, the reading public, “the approximation and amalgamation of different ranks”, among others – were fully analysed in “The Periodical Press”. Seeing the tide of history pouring over broader, flattened grounds, assembled in urban centres, here Hazlitt hits the bull’s eye in his prognosis: “the Monarchism in literature is at an end”\textsuperscript{86}.

If “the highest places have been occupied”, what else is left but a low form of literature? However, it is one closer to us and to every day life. If there is a class of “writers who can keep their reputation above water are anonymous critics”. The present is an age of criticism. “Be it so (...): let us be critical, or we shall be nothing”\textsuperscript{87}.

Hazlitt’s conclusion becomes the more concrete from an analysis of a particular feature to English literature in those days, namely, anonymity. This is one of the central themes to the second half of “The Periodical Press”. I come now to speak of it in connection with the birth of the first modern metropolis, London, and together with Hazlitt’s attitude as a writer towards the sea of periodicals.

“There are more people in London than any where else”\textsuperscript{88}, says Hazlitt. As a matter of fact, around 1800, according to a leading scholar in English Romanticism, James Chandler, “with nearly a million inhabitants, no European capital surpassed London’s size, and in the wider world (according to best estimates) only Edo (Tokyo) and Peking were larger. London’s long time cultural rival, Paris, had a population only about half as large”. “Between 1800 and 1850”, continues Chandler, “London’s

\textsuperscript{84} CWH, “On Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar”, 6, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{86} Idem, pp. 218, 220.
\textsuperscript{87} Idem, pp. 215, 221, 213.
\textsuperscript{88} CWH, “On Londoners and Country People”, 12, p. 68.
population had doubled, sustaining its growth in spite of the fact its crude death rate exceeded its crude birth rate”⁸⁸⁹.

With this rapid growth, and favoured by the expansion of the reading public, tens of Newspapers, Magazines and Reviews were popping up year after year within a metropolis in the full steam of the Industrial Revolution. In his accomplished study on the topic, Las Mesas de Plomo, Alfonso Reyes provides the figures: in 1821, in England “one periodical was published for each ninety thousand inhabitants; by 1832, it was one for each fifty five thousand”⁹⁰. John Walter II, owner of The Times, introduced the technological innovation; steam engines were introduced into printing works⁹¹. Large-scale printing and a greater readiness in distributing methods allowed regular stipends to writers; some were very well paid. Editorial innovations came from monthly magazines like the Gentleman’s Magazine, the London Magazine, the New Monthly, and Blackwood’s, which used miscellaneous literary material such as critical reviews, travel narratives, urban sketches, personal essays, analytical essays, short horror stories, accounts of murders, poems, etc. In short, they were truly literary magazines, in the primeval sense of the word⁹².

Alongside salaries, technological and formal innovations there emerged a class until then inexistent, professional free-lance writers. Hazlitt was at the very centre of this process, because few others were so devoted to the literary form of great prestige in England in those days: the essay. In the words of the Romantic scholar Lee Erickson: “as the market for the form reflects, essay writers were at the centre of public attention in the 1810’s and 1820’s in a way they never were before or have been since”⁹³. Likewise, for economic reasons, Hazlitt reflects the profile of the new writer. As he used to say about the labouring classes, his living was a constant struggle “from hand to mouth”⁹⁴. In this context, how could he be a breadwinner with his talents and knowledge and not be “ready to prostitute those talents and that

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knowledge to betray his species”, as we have read in the above-mentioned passage from “On the Pleasure of Hating”? One among others alternatives was anonymity.

In the extensive study on the topic, The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832 (1987), Jon Klancher argues that anonymity was a means by which middle-class writers sought to detach themselves from the political and class positions they and the press belonged to, and thus forming a class of readers capable of similar abstraction. In the sequence to the argument, Klancher exposes what was the intention hidden behind this practice, namely, a project to disseminate middle-class values. In other words, the bourgeois writers or readers’ identities were defined by an ability to abstract themselves from society, as if they hovered above the social fabric, and this social fabric was then transformed into an object of knowledge. However, consent with the pertinent observations of Gregory Dart and Erickson, Klancher’s argument fails in a crucial point. By insisting exclusively in one side of the equation, the making of reading audiences, Klancher overlooks the fact that the professional writers’ situation was also going through profound changes and it was less unambiguous than the scholar implies. In practice, this meant that not only could there be differences in political and social classes between editors and writers but anonymity also allowed other roles. On the topic, in the telling words of Alfonso Reyes:

Anonymity had become a general rule in English periodicals; allowing a greater freedom to writers either to tell the truth or to make transactions between their personal criteria and that of the periodical, although the greatest power was on the side of a collective responsibility. In addition, seeing things from outside, anonymity granted periodicals an immense unity of coordinated combat, a “tank.”

It is true this “coordinated combat” was shared alike by conservative, liberal and radical presses; and, says Hazlitt, “where victory, not truth, was the object”, mutual assistance was offered between adversaries. But the battle was tough and

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95 Jon Klancher, “Reading the Social Text”, In. The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832, pp. 47-75.
97 Reyes, Las Mesas de Plomo, p. 346.
unequal. Popular disturbances in favour of parliamentary reform were followed by
drastic measures that hampered, when they did not prohibit, the circulation of papers
expressing political opinions contrary to the established power. Among them, perhaps
the most significant was The Newspaper Stamp Duties Act (1819): from then on,
every periodical conveying essentially opinions rather than news, if it did not bear a
four penny stamp, was prohibited. “The Act”, says Aspinall, “constitutes the high-
water mark of legislation restricting the freedom of the press (...), and put an end to
Cobbett’s cheap Political Register [the two-penny-trash] and similar Radical
prints”99.

As a general rule, the periodicals to which Hazlitt contributed were not the
target of similar reprisals, even less anonymous writers (in passing, it should be said
that anonymity was not so common a practice in radical presses). However, if
newspaper serial literature was here to stay, its detached sheets were either plunged
into the currents or moved into the waters of “the city roar”, the voice of the people.
According to Hazlitt’s metaphorical definition in “The Periodical Press”, “The Times
(...) floats with the tide: it sails with the stream (...). ‘Ever strong upon the stronger
side’”. This major newspaper “is the lungs of the British metropolis”100. Thus Hazlitt,
the good hater, when there infiltrated, brought readers closer to spleen: intimate but
corrosive.

Contrary to writers associated with the conservative presses, as we shall see,
Hazlitt’s anonymous essays bore the author’s imprint: they spoke openly about his
tastes, political opinions, even when they differed from the editorial line – one of the
reasons why he never settled in this or that journal –; narrated everyday anecdotes,
personal or those of friends; made references to other publications, either in papers or
book forms; even his weaknesses and prejudices were stamped on its pages. Glancing
through them, Hazlitt’s most diligent readers would readily recognize him.
Anonymity, therefore, was not a common disguise or an editorial strategy to attract
readers. It was rather a sympathetic identification with the public, also anonymous,
and the way Hazlitt found to imprint upon the text the persona of a writer who walks
about the streets of the metropolis.

99 A. Aspinall, Politics and the Press, 1780-1850, p. 59. See also, William H. Wickwar, “The Press and
the Reform Crisis, 1819”, In. The Struggle for the Freedom of the Press, 1819-1832, pp. 49-81.
4. In the Streets, with Other Men: cockneyism and shallow waters.

Hazlitt’s delusion when old friends betrayed the cause of the people, “turned-coats”\(^{101}\), to use his own expression, was immeasurable! It hurt like a penknife on the flesh to witness them giving laurels to British monarchy. All in all, he found antidote either in a way of thinking for which discussion was a form of combat or in a gradual approach to ordinary English people, mainly from London, which is reflected in his essays by a refined stylization of popular language. Both alternatives converged so he would not be mistaken with the recluse lost in the big city. The essays from his mature phase, strongly inspired by The Tatler, are filled with witty observations, gossip, visions and London’s characters from the Regency period: walls of advertisements, traffic of stage-coaches, shops, dandies, footmen, sportsmen, street jugglers, among others. In them, Hazlitt is frequently found in the streets, with other men, or in coffee shops table talks amidst the vapours of “Virginia or Oronooko” that curl up “the huge dense cloud that hangs over the metropolis”\(^{102}\). In this man-about-town, observer of human and London’s nature, there can be noticed an approach to a daily life that, if it does not exactly belongs to him, in terms of social class, it does so in cultural terms; a cockney culture, so to speak, as Hazlitt defined in The Plain Speaker essay I shall now discuss: “On Londoners and Country People”.

Hazlitt, like other writers at the time, absorbed the English metropolis in his texts making the modern city as a literary object, guided mainly by a perception whereby reality and fancy are blended: “a real cockney is (…) the most mechanical of all [creatures], and yet he too lives in a world of romance – a fairy tale of his own”\(^{103}\).

To a certain extent, Hazlitt was called upon to take the side of the city when the conservative press, more specifically the Scottish periodical Blackwood’s Magazine, unleashed a battle to restrain the radical and popular impulses in those years of resistance. This was when the expression cockney school first came out, in 1817.

In that year, the Magazine published a series of essays, which continued for nearly seven years, with the title: “On the Cockney School of Poetry”. Its aim was to expound what the author, Z. (anonymity, as we have seen, was a common practice in the British periodical press), named “the moral depravity” and the artistic and


\(^{103}\) Idem, p. 68.
intellectual inconsistencies of writers “of low birth and low habits”\textsuperscript{104}, hence the epithet \textit{cockney}.

According to the minute historical studies of Gregory Dart\textsuperscript{105}, as well as the seminal work of Jeffrey N. Cox\textsuperscript{106}, for nearly four hundred years, the cockney had been a comic type and, therefore, mainly of low social status in English culture. Its presence is notable in such authors as Chaucer and Shakespeare. No one knows for certain the etymology of the word. According to some, it derives from \textit{Cocagne}, an imaginary place of abundance, freedom and extreme pleasures (Z., for instance, uses the term \textit{cockaigne} to mock libertarians, or libertines, aspirations of a group of “plebeian origin”\textsuperscript{107}); to others, from \textit{coken-ey}, misspelling of \textit{cock’s egg}; to a third, it derives from the old French word, \textit{coqueline}, namely, a spoiled and effeminate child\textsuperscript{108}. In any case, the term was handed down in English literature and culture in reference to a social type, a species of uncultivated yokel from the city. In \textit{King Lear} (Act II, Scene IV), as Dart reminds us, the Fool interrupts one of Lear’s fits of insanity to recall the story of a cockney who was completely ignorant in practical matters, particularly related to the country. In other words, urban life made the cockney a paradoxical character, quintessentially shallow and satirical. “His pertness”, says Hazlitt, “keeps exact pace with his dullness”\textsuperscript{109}. Thus, Z. defines the cockney writer, more specifically the editor, essayist and poet Leigh Hunt, whom he christened “the king of the cockneys”\textsuperscript{110}, as someone of poor education and extravagant pretensions:

He [Hunt] knows absolutely nothing of Greek, almost nothing of Latin, and his knowledge of Italian literature is confined to a few of the most popular of Petrarch’s sonnets, and an imperfect acquaintance with Ariosto, through the medium of Mr. Hoole. As to the French poets, he dismisses them in the mass as a


\textsuperscript{107} \textit{The Blackwood’s Magazine}, p. 196.

\textsuperscript{108} For a discussion on the etymology of the word cockney, see Jeffrey Cox, \textit{Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School}, Chapter I “The Cockney School attacks: or, the antiromantic ideology”, pp. 16-37; and Gregory Dart, \textit{Metropolitan Art and Literature, 1810-1840}, “Introduction”, pp. 1-29.


\textsuperscript{110} \textit{The Blackwood’s Magazine}, p. 38.
set of prim, precise, unnatural pretenders (...). To those great German poets who have illuminated the last fifty years with a splendour to which this country has, for a long time, seen nothing comparable, Mr. Hunt is an absolute stranger. Of Spanish books, he has read Don Quixote (in the translation of Motteux), and some poems of Lope de Vega\(^\text{111}\).

The satirical tone is evident in this character of the cockney writer. As well as Hazlitt and Hunt, the young poet Keats was also on the target in the series “On the Cockney School of Poetry” – “Poor Keats!” says Hazlitt, “what was sport to the town was death to him”\(^\text{112}\). The assumption that Hazlitt, Keats and Hunt did not have the same formal education nor partook of the same aristocratic ethos of editor William Blackwood, and most of the Magazine’s readers, is something they would not be ashamed of. But Z.’s indictments were false, and he was aware of it.

In those years, Hazlitt gave three lecture courses on English literature and in each one of them the training in comparative literature is one of their most distinct traits – for instance, between Don Quixote, Gil Blas and eighteenth century English novels; between Montaigne and the English periodical essay; between German and Elizabethan drama. Keats had published poems, such as Endymion, where he displays a solid knowledge of Greek mythology; and Hunt’s poem The Story of Rimini reworks the incestuous love of Paolo and Francesca, taken from Dante’s “Hell”, Divine Comedy, as well as from other sources, like Decameron and The Canterbury Tales. There were, however, other reasons to assemble these writers as all were flawed with cockneyism, a political reason.

The aristocratic ethos, as I mentioned above, was part of the editorial line of Blackwood’s Magazine, by means of which, in the words of Klancher, it involved the “task of moulding of a ‘reflecting’ readership for its Tory politics and High Church”\(^\text{113}\). Although the term cockney, as Dart and Cox remind us, preserved in the early nineteenth century more of satirical flavour than a political or class distinction, that is to say, although it was not yet used in reference to London’s salt-of-the-earth, labouring class, Blackwood’s attack on cockney’s aesthetics partly contributed to absorb political and class meanings into the term. The cockney’s patriotic feelings, says Z. in the first series of essays, is “a crude, vague, ineffectual, and sour

\(^{111}\) Idem ibidem.

\(^{112}\) CWH, “On Living to One’s Self”, 8, p. 99.

\(^{113}\) Jon Klancher, The Making of the English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832, p. 52.
Jacobinism”\textsuperscript{114}. In the list of accusations of the school, Z. includes: “a want of respect to the Christian religion; a contempt for kingly power, and indecent mode of attacking the government of your country”\textsuperscript{115}. Thus, it was sealed the alliance between cockney, at least among cockney writers, and radical political positions.

Surely it was not with charges of differences in political creed that Z. intended to smite cockneyism. Here he was only clearing up things of what was already known to both groups: Blackwood’s spoke on behalf of the Church and State, the Cockney writer, on behalf of the people. Attacks and challenges went well beyond a satirical portrait of a writer who affected an air of importance or who employed vulgar language (\textit{The Story of Rimini}, says Z., is “a good glossary of the cockney dialect”\textsuperscript{116}). Z. also complains, for instance, of Hunt’s presumption for dedicating \textit{The Story of Rimini} to Byron, in spite of the known bond of friendship between them; of “the indecent and immoral tendency of his poem Rimini”\textsuperscript{117}, the incestuous passion; of having chosen a passage from \textit{The Divine Comedy}, and the alleged filiation the authors of \textit{The Round Table}, Hazlitt and Hunt, with \textit{The Tatler} and \textit{The Spectator}. “Do you [really] think \textit{The Round Table} worthy of standing on the same shelf with \textit{The Spectator}, and Rimini of being bound up with the \textit{Inferno}?”\textsuperscript{118} Hunt, who was elected the group’s pivot, answered such attacks immediately, giving tit for tat. In Hunt’s published article on \textit{The Examiner} (16\textsuperscript{th} November 1817)\textsuperscript{119} he demanded a public retraction from the author of “On the Cockney School of Poetry” and, first of all, that he revealed his identity. Who is Z.?

For now, I shall leave the question in the air to deal with another matter connected therewith, namely, “the spirit of Cockneyism”\textsuperscript{120} or the metropolitan mental life, a life, according to Hazlitt, of shallow waters. The usual prestige of London’s men and women is more like an image of greatness reflected in the gutter.

In no other place is the faculty of understanding raised above other mental faculties than in big cities. It was the understanding that brought literature closer to the common people, either by the employment of colloquial rhythms, by narrating

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{114} \textit{The Blackwood’s Magazine}, p. 39.
    \item \textsuperscript{115} Idem, p. 415.
    \item \textsuperscript{116} \textit{The Blackwood’s Magazine}, p. 198.
    \item \textsuperscript{117} Idem, p. 194.
    \item \textsuperscript{118} Idem, p. 415.
    \item \textsuperscript{120} \textit{CWH}, “On Londoners and Country People”, 12, p. 72.
\end{itemize}
unexceptional facts of every day life, or by a mode of thinking closer to the chit-chat of the tea table. Nothing is more proper to it than periodical essays, for, as we have seen, they require from both, writers and readers, a critical exercise. In big cities the faculty of understanding prevails over the imagination, for, says Hazlitt, “it judges of things not according to their immediate impression on the mind, but according to their relations on one another”. In other words, the understanding “is a distributive faculty”, or, in a famous passage from the Hazlitt’s essay “Coriolanus”, is a “republican faculty”. Imagination, by contrast, is aristocratic. It is “a monopolizing faculty”\(^{121}\), oppressive, to a certain extent, because its acting principle implies the exclusion of everything that does not contribute to “embodying and turning to shape” the excesses of passion and the “indistinct and importunate cravings of the will”\(^{122}\).

This does not imply that imagination should be discredited in a democratic society, nor that Hazlitt, an empiricist radical, to borrow Terry Eagleton’s expression, wished things to be so. Again, according to Eagleton, he rather fought a battle on two fronts: against those who negate or atrophy imagination, liberal and utilitarian thoughts of minds like Jeremy Bentham, for example, or “those who would fancifully inflate them”\(^{123}\), the conservatism of Lake Poets, mainly of Wordsworth.

There is yet a third alternative to the imagination peculiar to life in the metropolis. Even if it does not correspond entirely to Hazlitt’s imagination, he comes close to it either with a view to disinterestedly comprehend it, or to habituate himself to something he, the man-about-town, also partakes in. This form of imagination is stamped on people’s faces, their ways of walking and the bodily constitution of modern and metropolitan men and women. In a word, it is a phantasmagorical imagination\(^{124}\).

He [the cockney] is a shopman, and nailed all day behind the counter: but he sees hundreds and thousands of gay, well-dressed people pass – an endless phantasmagoria – and enjoys their liberty and gaudy fluttering pride. He is a footman – but rides behind beauty, though a crowd of carriages, and visits a thousand shops. Is he a tailor – that last infirmity of human nature? The stigma on his profession is lost in the elegance of the patterns he provides, and of the

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\(^{121}\) CWH, “Coriolanus”, 4, p. 214.


persons he adorns; and he is something very different from a mere country botcher. Nay, the very scavenger and nightman thinks the dirt in the streets has something precious in it, and his employment is solemn, silent, sacred, peculiar to London! A barker in Monmouth Street, a slop-seller in Radcliff Highway, a tapster at a night-cellar, a beggar in St. Giles’s, a drab in Fleet-Ditch, live in the eyes of millions, and eke out a dreary, wretched, scanty, or loathsome existence from the gorgeous, busy, glowing scene around them. It is a common saying among such persons that “they had rather be hanged in London than die a natural death out of it anywhere else” – such is the force of habit and imagination.

Although, as we have seen, cockney culture was not then limited to a social class, it presupposes it, as well as the division of labour. In “The Periodical Press”, Hazlitt says that in earlier stages of society “all the greatest things are done by the division of labour – by the intense concentration of a number of minds, each on a single and chosen object”. As society progresses, he continues, different occupations, now often imposed outwards, “stretch out their arms to impede, not to assist one another”. The excerpt above is a curious example of how the identity moulded by the division of labour – permeated by the eyes of an anonymous crowd and in a space where differences allegedly dilute itself, the streets of the metropolis –, is, to a certain extent, imaginary or fictitious.

In this stage of my research, I have benefited from the German sociologist Georg Simmel’s detailed analysis on the psychological or mental consequences that the accumulation of people in modern metropolis has created. Following James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin’s valuable observations, this was also a core theme not only to Hazlitt, but also to other writes at the time. According to Simmel, there are two “psychic phenomena” which are so unconditionally reserved to the city. The first, and most well known, is “the blasé outlook”. The excess of shifting stimulations of the nerves in urban centres, together with “the intensification of metropolitan intellectuality”, or in hazlittian terms, the raising of the understanding and critical disposition in literature and society, ensued “an indifference toward the distinction between things. Not in a sense that they are not perceived”, but in a sense in which its meanings and values “are experienced as meaningless”. The second phenomenon,

which is obviously a result of the first, is a tendency toward a “narrower type of intellectual individuation of mental qualities”, giving rise to “the strangest eccentricities”, extravagances of caprice, of fastidiousness as a way of “making oneself noticeable”. Otherwise, his or her personal existence would be dissolved in a thick crowd of people; nothing is more contrary, continues Simmel, to the propensity to “distinguish themselves from one another”\(^{128}\), proper to modern men, than impersonality.

It is this last psychic phenomenon, of a mental individuation pleading for distinction, which is at the core of the cockney’s imaginary in the above quoted passage. This does not happen consciously or according to an individuality that is proper to one’s own: “though a dwarf in stature, his person swells out and expands into ideal importance and borrowed magnitude”\(^{129}\). Between the footman and the young aristocrat, says Hazlitt in the essay “On Footmen”, “there are perhaps seven or eight classes of society”. Nevertheless, by some spell of phantasmagoria, they are neutralized and “changed into a romance, a summer’s dream”\(^{130}\). This “romantic eye”\(^{131}\) toward oneself, the world of labour and the metropolitan’s landscape is the background to the second part of “On Londoners and Country People”, the part of the essay when the Cockney extravagances of caprice and fastidiousness become “more concrete, more humane”\(^{132}\).

“On Londoners and Country People” has a similar structure to other essays of the period, a dialectic or “tripartite structure”\(^{133}\), according to Dart. As in “On the Pleasure of Hating”, Hazlitt also begins here from a general reflection on a common trait in men – in this particular case, the fluctuation between dullness and pertness proper to mental life in the metropolis –; next, he descends into particular examples of concrete individuals, ordinary people from everyday life he was acquainted with; finally, he concludes, going back to the point of departure – that a true cockney is someone “who has got all his ideas”\(^{134}\) from the metropolis – from another key, and this time, as we shall see at the end of this chapter, washed by a sublime, metropolitan and democratic metaphor: stream of human life.

\(^{133}\) Gregory Dart, “Introduction” to William Hazlitt, Metropolitan Writings, p. x.
By a “significant shift in tone” and analytical focus, Hazlitt introduces the story of Dr. Goodman, followed by those of Mr. Pinch and Mr. Dunster. As Dart observed, at this moment of the essay, Hazlitt “lowers the critical temperature” and “acknowledges his own familiarity – and sympathy – with the cockney milieu he describes”\(^\text{135}\). Thus, we find him in company of concrete and idiosyncratic individuals. If we are told about their professional occupations – Dr. Goodman is “a private gentleman in town, and a medical dilettante in the country”; Mr. Pinch, a sportsman who aspires to be a singer; and Mr. Dunster, the fishmonger who bragged of being a champion at marbles in his youth –, what stand out in their stories are their “idle veins” and the “ground of native shallowness mounted with pertness and conceit”\(^\text{136}\).

In these three stories, which occupy half of the essay (in narrative and dialogical tone), the simplicity of the metropolitan men is brought “to a pinch of unheard-of extravagance”. In the first of them, Dr. Goodman, a man “great in little things, and inveterate in petty warfare”, held Hazlitt in the street, “while I held an umbrella over his head”\(^\text{137}\), and asked him about Mr. Pinch, a friend of both, for he wished to know whether the essayist’s opinion matched his, namely, that Pinch was bad as a fives player\(^\text{138}\) and worse still as a singer. After listening to Dr. Goodman’s argument, Hazlitt concludes: “Pinch is in one respect a complete specimen of a Cockney. He never has anything to say, and yet is never at a loss for an answer”. Whenever someone contradicted him, he would say: “the same to you, sir”\(^\text{139}\).

But Dr. Goodman is not lagging behind. Reader as he might have been of Hazlitt’s periodical essays, he knew about the reputation of the essayist’s theatrical reviews, where the examination of singing and beauty in voices is one of its most distinct traits\(^\text{140}\), and probably read an essay Hazlitt had recently published in *The


\(^{136}\) *CWH*, “On Londoners and Country People”, 12, pp. 72, 74.

\(^{137}\) Idem, pp. 73, 71.

\(^{138}\) A game of fives is a game somewhat similar to squash but the ball is hit by the hand, covered by a glove, was very popular in Hazlitt’s time. The essayist was passionate about the sport and himself an ardent player. On Hazlitt’s enthusiasm for games of fives, see Ralph M. Wardle, “Good Hater”, In. *Hazlitt* (University of Nebraska Press, 1971), pp. 157-180. Again, on the sport, wrote Hazlitt, “it is the finest exercise of the body, and the best relaxation for the mind (…). He who takes to playing at fives is twice young”, “The Indian Jugglers”, *CWH*, 8, p. 87.


\(^{140}\) See, for instance, the essay from *The Examiner*, “Miss Merry’s Mandane”, In. *A View of the English Stage*, *CWH*, 5, pp.320-1.
Examiner, “written apparently between jest and earnest”\(^{141}\), about the sportsman John Cavanagh\(^{142}\). It mattered little whether Dr. Goodman’s knowledge was borrowed from someone else; he inflates himself and assumes the air of a critic. To a certain extent, Dr. Goodman is to the essayist as a footman is to the aristocrat he rides behind in the stagecoach. But what does Hazlitt, a man from the press, know about sports or singing? Is not his also a second-hand knowledge? In big cities, it is better to show off knowledge and social status than having them in earnest. This is what Hazlitt communicates to his readers when he removes the garb of anonymity and reveals himself to be a true Cockney.

Hazlitt’s sympathy and identity with other men from the metropolis set the difference between the literary persona of his essays and that of writers from conservative presses. That said, I shall return now to the real identity of Z.

If many editors and readers of the most prestigious literary magazines, like Blackwood’s, were members of the economic and intellectual elite, the same did not always apply to writers. Hence there was a need to disguise their names and personalities. As Dart reminds us, “in print they liked to cut the figure for themselves as leisureed gentlemen”, as if they were on the same footing of readers, “whereas in reality they were often all too conscious of being little better than hacks living from hand-to-mouth”\(^{143}\). Disguise was then an efficient device for writers such as Z. Born in a middle class family, Z., or better saying, John Gibson Lockhart, was from an early age a prodigy in classical languages, especially Greek. At the age of fourteen, he was transferred from the University of Glasgow to Balliol College, Oxford. He then returned to Scotland and graduated in law in the University of Edinburgh in 1816. The following year, he made a tour of the continent, became acquainted with Goethe and improved his knowledge in the German language, from which he translated to English Friedrich Schlegel’s Lectures on the History of Literature. His greatest achievement as a writer was Life of Sir. Walter Scott, in seven volumes, 1837-8. Another of his achievements, in his personal life, was to marry Scott’s sister, Sophia\(^{144}\). However, in those days when he wrote monthly papers in Blackwood’s, Lockhart was Z., a hack writer who assumed an air of importance. In short, Lockhart’s description of

\(^{141}\) CWH, “The Indian Jugglers”, 8, p. 86.

\(^{142}\) John Cavanagh was one of the most acclaimed players at games of fives in Regency era, and Hazlitt praised him in his famous essay “The Indian Jugglers”, CWH, 8, pp. 86-89.


\(^{144}\) For biographical contents on John Gibson Lockhart, see Stanley Jones, Hazlitt: A Life, from Winterslow to Frith Street, pp. 288-9; and Duncan Wu, William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man, p. 253.
Cockney’s conceit was more like a description of himself. In Hazlitt’s words, he was nothing but a “Cockney of the North”\textsuperscript{145}. Even without realizing it, metropolitan life and culture ran through his veins.

5. *A Bird in the Crowd: ‘overflowing streets’*\textsuperscript{146}.

There was yet another reasons, mainly on aesthetic grounds, for Blackwood’s attack on the “Cockney School”. In 1814, after Wordsworth’s long narrative poem, *The Excursion*, came out, Hazlitt wrote a critical review that did not please much either Wordsworth or his friend, John Wilson, a writer for *Blackwood’s*. From an internal reading of the poem, Hazlitt subtly reworks on “all of Wordsworth’s poetry leading up to it [*The Excursion*]”\textsuperscript{147}: from his youthful dream, “the day-star of liberty; that spring-time of the world”\textsuperscript{148}, to a melancholic and resigned tone. Under the figure of *The Solitary*, Wordsworth was now seeing liberty, formerly glorified, as nothing but a shadow\textsuperscript{149}. By this time, for personal and political reasons, the friendly conviviality between Hazlitt and Wordsworth had long waned. Once, as the biographer Stanley Jones recalls, Wordsworth expressly asked Lamb not to invite him to his social gatherings in the presence of Hazlitt\textsuperscript{150}. The story of when Wordsworth found a critical review of *The Excursion* in *The Examiner* is well-known. The incident became known to Hazlitt, who narrates it in *A Reply to Z.*, written in September 1818 and unpublished, “his friends counselled caution”\textsuperscript{151}.

Sometime in the latter end of the year 1814, Mr. Wordsworth received an *Examiner* by the post, which annoyed him exceedingly both on account of the expense and the paper. ‘Why did they send that rascal paper to him, and make him pay for it?’. Mr. Wordsworth is tenacious of his principles and not less so of his purse. ‘Oh’, said Wilson, ‘let us see what there is in it. I dare say the y did not send it to you for nothing. Why here, there’s a criticism upon the Excursion in it’. This made the poet (par excellence) rage and fret the more. ‘What did they know about his poetry? What could they know about it? It was a presumption in the

\textsuperscript{145} CWH, “On Londoners and Country People”, 12, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{147} David Bromwich, *Hazlitt: the Mind of a Critic*, p. 162.
\textsuperscript{148} CWH, “Character of Mr. Wordsworth New Poem, *The Excursion*”, 19, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{151} Wu, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man*, p. 246.
highest degree for these cockney writers to pretend to criticize a Lake poet’. ‘Well’, says the other, ‘at any rate let us read it’. So he began. The article was much in favour of the poet and the poem. As the reading proceeded, ‘Ha’, said Mr. Wordsworth, somewhat appeased, ‘there’s some sense in this fellow too: the Dog writes strong (…). Very well indeed, Sir, I did not expect a thing of this kind’, and strutting up and down the room in high good humour kept every now and then wondering who could be the author (…). When Mr. Wilson interrupted him with saying, ‘Oh don’t you know; it’s Hazlitt, to be sure, there are his initials to it’, threw our poor philosopher into a greater rage than ever\textsuperscript{152}.

After having smote the editor of \textit{The Examiner} as much as he could, Leigh Hunt, Z. changed his target. Hazlitt came to the centre of attentions when \textit{Blackwood’s} published the paper “Hazlitt Cross-Questioned”. In a conversational tone between Z. and the editor of the magazine, the former proposes a questionnaire, of eight queries; in hope Hazlitt (“ex-painter, theatrical critic, review, essay, and lecture manufacturer, London”\textsuperscript{153}) explained himself or simply admitted his errors and inconsistencies. The two first queries hinge on the relations between Hazlitt and Wordsworth, on how much the essayist owed his literary training and his own life to the poet. Z. alludes to a controversial episode, when Hazlitt was chased away from Keswick after a supposed rape attempt\textsuperscript{154}. If the case was never confirmed, Wordsworth and \textit{Blackwood’s} did not hesitate to broadcast it in every nook and corner. As for the first theme, Wordsworth’s influence on his thoughts on poetry, Hazlitt never denied it, which can be seen in the constant presence of twilight images in Hazlitt’s essays, a revolutionary symbol, which I described in the first chapter of this thesis. This is precisely the reason why, after having forsaken his faith in the people, Wordsworth, from being a mentor became an enemy. For a broader understanding on the topic, I shall recur again to the series “Illustrations of \textit{The Times} Newspaper” and to the passage on the \textit{good hater}.

We formerly gave the Editor of \textit{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’. The city-politician laughed this pastoral definition to scorn (…). Since that time our imagination has grown a little less romantic: so we will give him another, which he may chew the cud upon his

\textsuperscript{152} CWH, “A Reply to ‘Z’”, 9, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{153} \textit{The Blackwood’s Magazine}, p. 550.
\textsuperscript{154} Wu, \textit{William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man}, p. 98.
leisure. A true Jacobin, then, is one who does not believe in the divine right of kings, or in any other alias for it, which implies that they reign ‘in contempt of the will of the people’; and he holds all such kings to be tyrants, and their subjects slaves. To be a true Jacobin, a man must be a good hater; but this is the most difficult and least amiable of all other virtues.\footnote{CWH, “The Times Newspaper: on the Connection Between Toad-Eaters and Tyrants”, 7, p 151.}

The twilight image, the evening star, captures nostalgia of the past, which, in the hands of Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Hazlitt, among others, was made into a political and aesthetic stance. More specifically, in this excerpt, Hazlitt alludes to Wordsworth’s Michael, a Pastoral Poem (1802), in which the poet speaks openly about revolutionary aspirations among the poorest, the country peasants. However, the times have changed. While Wordsworth saw the transition from rural to industrial society as sheer decadence, which he simply regrets or invests himself in the figure of a reclusive Lake Poet, Hazlitt did not avoid the jostles in the streets. It is precisely in this context that he coined one of the most remarkable allegories from his century: the poet, or the bird, amidst an incomprehensible hooting crowd.

The whole passage above, about the true Jacobin, is structured according to an opposition between the country and the city: a pastoral definition of the good hater versus another, less idyllic and akin to the city politician; a countryman and the solitary star versus the corporate body of periodical press. Its meaning, however, “is very far from the traditional way of seeing innocence in the country, vice in the city”; but rather another, more complex, namely, “a loss of connection (...), a failure of identity in the crowd of others which worked back to a loss of identity in the self”\footnote{Idem, pp. 148, 150.}. One of the ways in which this loss of identity manifested itself, as we have seen, was by a phantasmagoria of individuals who projected onto themselves an ideal importance, traversed by the stare of a thousand anonymous eyes – a phenomenon proper to the life of the metropolis. Another way that it manifested itself was by an “unending stream of urban sensations”\footnote{Gilmartin, William Hazlitt: Political Essayist, p. 245.} of men and women who are “dazzled with noise, show, and appearance”\footnote{CWH, “On Londoners and Country People”, 12, p. 68.}.

According to Raymond Williams, few writers were so sensitive to a new mental life that “has since become a dominant experience of the city”\footnote{161} than Wordsworth. He describes it with precision in the seventh book of *The Prelude* [Residence in London]. The passage below is a good illustration:

\begin{quote}
How often in the overflowing streets
Have I gone forward with the crowd, and said
Unto myself: ‘The face of every one
That pass by me is a mystery!’
Thus have I looked, nor ceased to look, oppressed
By thoughts of what or whither, when and how,
Until the shades before my eyes became
A second-sight procession such as glides
Over still mountains, or appear in dreams,
And all the ballast of familiar life\footnote{162}.
\end{quote}

In this “great epic of human consciousness”\footnote{163}, written in the course of a life and published posthumously in 1850, Wordsworth narrates the formative years of his mind, from early childhood to the climatic and metaphorical ascendance of *Snowdon*. For my critical reading, I will use the 1805 version, for it is historically closer to the London life I am dealing with here.

In the first few lines of the passage above quoted, the poet plunges into the streets without knowing whither he will be carried. The sound materiality of the expression, “overflowing streets”, if we listen to the play of sound and sense in words, suggests fluidity and dubious but uniform course. *Overflowing* is rhythmically balanced by the phoneme /ə/. As it is well known, this is one of the most common vowel sounds in English language. The repetition of what is trivial is significant here, for it embodies the city as a milieu of loss of identity and sameness. The vulgar distractions that infiltrate the poet’s eyes and ears vainly seek to break through triviality: in one street, “a raree-show”; another street, “a minstrel band”; another, yet, “some female vendor’s scream (…), (the very shrillest of London cries)”. The fricative consonants /v/ and /f/, already present in *often*, and which show up again in *forward*, join in the hissing sound of *streets* forming on the poet’s mind a sonorous

\footnote{161} Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 150.
\footnote{162} Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, p. 286.
\footnote{163} Idem, p. xxv.
suggestion of the “endless stream of men and moving things!” Anonymous faces and commodities produce an uncanny feeling of the sublime (sublimed by awe). The poet stops to behold them and is stunned. Without knowing where to fix his eyes, because the overall view is oppressed to his thoughts – which can be noticed in the coming and going rhythm in the sequence of conjunctions “what, whither, when or how” –, he finally resorts to his mind’s eye. A second-sight, a reverie consoles him: “the spirit of nature was upon me here”. In the final lines, still mountains become a metonymic bond between the perennial, quiet and familiar nature and the poet’s mind that craves for the same qualities, namely, for anything capable of hoisting him above the overflowing streets.

Book Seven of *The Prelude*, “Residence in London”, concludes with one of nineteenth century’s most “devastating attacks on the city”\(^{165}\): the artificiality and sense of alienation of the popular attractions, mainly those he found at Bartholomew Fair. There, “all movable wonders”, “all freaks of nature”, a true paradise of misfits dazzles the eyes of millions; and also, in its own way, the poet’s. But it is from the height, “above the press and danger of the crowd” and with the help of his Muse’s wings, that he observes this “blank confusion”\(^{166}\). What would have happened to both, to Wordsworth and his Muse, if they had put down their wings and dwelt there?

Hazlitt never had access to *The Prelude*. However, and without affirming with certainty, it is Wordsworth that the hazlittian allegory of the bird or the poet in the crowd refers to. Not exclusively for him, of course, for the terms of the allegory are abstract and imagetically describe what happens to the spirit of poetry amidst overflowing streets, parks or fairs. I come now to the passage at hand, published originally in the second series of “Illustrations of *The Times* Newspaper: On Modern Lawyers and Poets”, and later in *The Round Table*, under the title: “On Poetical Versatility”.

[Poetry] has the range of the universe; it traverses the empyrean, and looks down on nature from a higher sphere. When it lights upon the earth, it loses some of its dignity and its use. Its strength is in the wings; its element the air. Standing on its feet, jostling with the crowd, it is liable to be overthrown, trampled on, and defaced; for its wings are of a dazzling brightness, ‘heaven’s own tinct’, and the

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\(^{164}\) Idem, pp. 260, 258, 292.
\(^{165}\) Dart, *Metropolitan Art and Literature*, p. 139.
least soil upon them shews to disadvantages. Sunk, degraded as we have seen it, we shall not insult over it, but leave it to time to take out the stains, seeing it as a thing immortal as itself⁶⁶⁷.

Looking at the surroundings where this excerpt was taken from, there are a few allusions that directly and indirectly refer to Wordsworth. A few lines above, Hazlitt quotes the poet twice: first the famous lines from Ode: The Morning of the Day Appointed for a General Thanksgiving: “carnage is thy daughter”; secondly, a misquotation from The Excursion: “constrained by mastery”¹⁶⁸. In the first, within the mode of the irregular or Pindaric ode, Wordsworth “expresses his feelings on Waterloo with fervour and impetuosity”¹⁶⁹, that is to say, his repugnancy towards Jacobins and his antipathy for Napoleon; in the second, the irregularity of nature’s poesy, not constrained by external laws, is what distinguishes modern poets from modern lawyers, according to Hazlitt, allowing the first to “soar above all obstacles”¹⁷⁰. In the essay’s concluding paragraph, on the former alliance between poetry and the spirit of Jacobinism, the allusion to Wordsworth is even more explicit. Even without mentioning the poet’s name, and by comparing the paragraph with another of Hazlitt’s writing, “On the Living Poets”¹⁷¹, it is Wordsworth who is called into question; or rather, Wordsworth’s youthful years, when, by means of a revolutionary poetry, he “levelled all distinctions of art and nature”¹⁷².

According to external evidence, Sainte-Beuve’s essay L. Borne; Lettres Écrites de Paris Pendant les Années 1830 et 1831 confirms the figure of Wordsworth as the bird in the crowd. After comparing the nature of Mr. Boerne’s imagination with a skylark, “which, in sun’s twilight, raises in a gay circle”, Sainte-Beuve recalls that a similar comparison was earlier made by “a renowned English critic, Hazlitt, happily applied to the poet Wordsworth”¹⁷³.

¹⁶⁸ Idem, ibidem.
¹⁶⁹ Simon Baimbridge, Napoleon and English Romanticism, pp. 170-1.
¹⁷¹ The final paragraph of “On the Living Poets”, in Lectures on the English Poets, deals directly with Wordsworth, and almost all of it was taken from Hazlitt’s review in The Examiner. CWH, 5, pp. 161-164.
¹⁷³ Sainte-Beuve, Oeuvres I (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p. 439. Given the immense influence Sainte-Beuve had on French literature in his time, it would not be surprising to find Baudelaire acquainted with Hazlitt’s image of the bird-poet in crowd, the very same he used in his famous poem “The Albatross”.
More importantly, however, than knowing whether Wordsworth is the bird in the crowd *par excellence* are the meanings pertaining the allegory. As is well-known, the comparison between the poet and the bird is an old one, dating back at least to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*\(^{174}\). In early nineteenth-century, following the Hellenistic trend in English Romantic poetry\(^{175}\), many were those who resorted to this comparison, as can be noticed from Keats’s *Ode to a Nightingale*, or Shelley’s *To a Skylark*. Limiting my analysis to Hazlitt, in “On Poetry in General”, “his best theoretical essay”\(^{176}\), according to Harold Bloom, he explores the secret alliance between certain thoughts and feelings with modulations of sounds as the feature that distinguishes poetry from prose. If words in prose are nothing but arbitrary signs, for here there is not “any principle of natural imitation, or correspondence to the individual ideas, or to the tone of feeling with which they are conveyed to others”\(^{177}\); in poetry, on the other hand, the meanings of a term, by its sonority, length, and visual aspects, are merged into the word. Historically and poetically, the image that best describes poetry’s attitude towards words, freeing them from the ambiguity of signs, is that between the poet and the bird. It is poetry, says Hazlitt, “that takes the language of the imagination off the ground, and enables it to spread its wings where it may indulge its own impulses”\(^{178}\).

The air of poetry as opposed to the ground of prose is a very significant opposition, even more so when this air is deepened by fog from factories, and the ground with the tumultuous sea of human heads. It is worth examining this idea in greater depth.

In 1802, two distinct, if not antagonistic, writings on the metropolitan’s streets and air were published: one, Wordsworth’s poem, *Composed upon Westminster Bridge, Sept. 3, 1802*; the other, *The Londoner*, a short essay Lamb committed to the editor of *The Reflector*, Hunt.

Wordsworth’s argument that poetry, “that spontaneous flow of powerful feelings (...) modified and directed by our thoughts”, withers away in modern cities is one of his main flagships. “The uniformity of occupations [and] a craving for

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\(^{178}\) Idem, ibid.
extraordinary incident which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies” constantly compel “men in cities”¹⁷⁹, according to Wordsworth, to everything new. As a consequence, “the ability to observe with accuracy things as they are in themselves” has been lost¹⁸⁰. However, in *Composed upon Westminster Bridge*, the urban landscape mixes with aspects of nature to bring forth a new visage of the world¹⁸¹. “Earth has not anything to show more fair”, says the poet, than the sun rising in the metropolis. “Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples”, along with “valley, rock, or hill” seen from the distance, comfort his soul. Contrary to the passage from *The Prelude* quoted above; here Wordsworth never touches the ground. He rather soars in the air; his vision of the metropolis is more like a panorama or a photograph: “the very houses seem asleep”, the streets are empty and everything else, including his own heart, “lying still”. The clean and “smokeless air”¹⁸² of that morning adds up to this “naturalized image of the metropolis”¹⁸³.

Lamb’s vision of London in *The Londoner* is thoroughly distinct from Wordsworth’s. His “passion for crowd” is “a rare recipe”¹⁸⁴ for his “maniac-lyric-depressive state of mind”¹⁸⁵: “I am naturally inclined to hypochondria, but in London it vanishes, like all other ills”¹⁸⁶. Thus, Lamb, “the prose poet of London”¹⁸⁷, leaves his “curtained world”¹⁸⁸ and throws himself, from head to foot, into the streets of the metropolis. “Full-time worker and part-time flâneur”¹⁸⁹, he walks with his feet firm “in the dirty ring”, in a crowd of consumers, vendors, pick-pockets, beggars, and chimney cleaners; “the very deformity of London, which give distaste to others, from

¹⁸³ James Chandler, *Romantic Metropolis*, p. 12. For a similar image, see also Wordsworth’s *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798*. I wish to register here my sincere gratitude to Prof. Dr. John Milton for having brought my attention to this passage.
¹⁸⁸ Vinícius de Moraes, *Para uma Menina com uma Flor*, p. 54.
habit do not displease me”\textsuperscript{190}. Lamb has in mind here precisely Wordsworth. In a 1801 letter to the poet, he apologizes to his friend for declining the “kind invitation into Cumberland”: “I don’t much care if I never see a mountain in my life”. Wild nature is to him a “dead nature”; the metropolis, by contrast, is permeated, day and night, with life and romantic recollections: “the lighted shops of the Strand and Fleet-Street (…), all the bustle and wickedness round about Covent Garden, the very women of the Town, the Watchmen, drunken scenes, rattles”. “All these emotions”, concludes Lamb, “must be strange to you [Wordsworth]. So are your rural emotions to me”\textsuperscript{191}. The metropolitan air is as dense as the streets: “there is something substantial and satisfying [in the Metropolitan Fog] – you can feel what you breath, and see it too”\textsuperscript{192}. These crude and more prosaic elements mix themselves to his shifting “allegiance from verse to prose”\textsuperscript{193}. They make up an alchemy of a mind reverse to excesses of purity; a mind that does not approach his readers from above, but from an equal footing, on the plain-ground. In the words of Dart, “there is [here] a Romantic Metropolitanism to counter Romantic Primitivism and it was born at the same time”\textsuperscript{194}.

Amidst overflowing streets, according to Hazlitt’s allegory, the imagination of Romantic Primitivism is inflated, intoxicated with illusions of power. To avoid its wings, “of a dazzling brightness”, to be covered in mud, it, along with The Times newspaper, “sails with the stream, [instead of] striving against it”.\textsuperscript{195} There is in both an aristocratic and a proud attitude. The imagination of Romantic Metropolitanism, by contrast, as in Lamb’s example, says Hazlitt, “takes an underground course (…), through old-fashioned conduit-pipes”; and sails between poetry and prose, “between egotism and disinterested humanity”\textsuperscript{196}. “The streets are a huge stage set for the incitement of [his] imagination”\textsuperscript{197}. At the core of modern life, it is its duty, or rather

\textsuperscript{194} Dart, \textit{Metropolitan Art and Literature}, p. 143. 
\textsuperscript{195} \textit{CWH}, “Illustrations of The Times Newspaper: on Modern Lawyers and Poets”, 7, p. 137. 
\textsuperscript{196} \textit{CWH}, “Elia, and Geoffrey Crayon”, 11, p. 179-180. 
\textsuperscript{197} Phillip Lopate, “Bachelorhood and its Literature”, In. \textit{Bachelorhood: Tales of the Metropolis} (New York: Poseidon Press, 1981), p. 261. On the essayist as the flâneur and also in connection with Lamb and Hazlitt, Lopate says: “The bachelor narrator is an urban creature: first, because only in the city are all these bail-out diversions within easy reach; second, because the city offers him a perceptual field uncannily suited to his quick-scanning temperament; and third, because the city gives him
his duty, the essayist on a plain-ground, to realize the amalgamation of the city and the natural world by a sublime, metropolitan and democratic imagination.

6. The ‘Stream of Human Life’\textsuperscript{198}: a sublime, metropolitan and democratic imagination.

Hazlitt’s review of *The Excursion* was originally published in three parts. Half way through the last part, there is a long paragraph in which he opposes not only to Wordsworth’s rural emotions, but also to the alleged rural virtues. The opening sentence, in proverbial tone, announces the combative, controversial and facetious attitude of the essayist as an adversary: “all country people hate each other”\textsuperscript{199}. Below, as an explanation for the pernicious morality that rusticity exerts on men, it follows “a serial and morally ambiguous catalogue of deprivation”\textsuperscript{200}:

[In the country] there are no shops, no taverns, no theatres, no opera, no concerts, no pictures, no public-buildings, no crowded streets, no noise of coaches, or of courts of law, – neither courtiers nor courtesans, no literary parties, no fashionable routs, no society, no books, or knowledge of books. Vanity and luxury are the civilisers of the world, and sweetens of human life. Without objects either of pleasure or action, it grows harsh and crabbed: the mind becomes stagnant, the affections callous, and the eye dull. Man left to himself soon degenerate into a very disagreeable person\textsuperscript{201}.

There is something of a surly caricature in this excerpt. Hazlitt’s hostility towards the country is invested with rhetorical figures, which can be noticed by the emphatic repetition of the determiner *no*, to paint a null landscape, a wasteland, especially when it is contrasted with the city. The excerpt asks readers to make such a comparison, for it is in the city where everything the country lacks can be found. Civility and civic life walk hand in hand. Connected to it, there is an ethics of pleasure: recreations, luxury and beauty. Humanity is the offspring of superfluous things. “In the country”, says Hazlitt in “On Londoners and Country People”, “men

\begin{footnotes}
\item[201] *CWH*, “Character of Mr. Wordsworth New Poem, *The Excursion*”, 19, p. 22.
\end{footnotes}
Community there is devoid of abstracting principle; understanding is ineffective. It is knowledge, says Hazlitt, which enlarges the mind with “liberal ideas”, that is to say, with ideas that “are constantly carried out of themselves”, and it is only by it that men can develop a sense of otherness. This is the utility of theatrical plays, concerts, pictures and books. They make mankind familiar with “fictitious characters and imaginary situations”, of everything unrelated to their own beings. In the want of them, men “make themselves a bug-bear of their own (...), they vent their whole stock of spleen, malice, and invention, on their friends and next-door neighbours”. In short, the imagination in the country does not correspond to that “mental activity capable of transforming reality into an awareness of reality”.

Now, is not this the precise meaning imagination had for Wordsworth, Coleridge and the Lake Poets in general? Yes. However, according to Hazlitt, when this imagination lights on political grounds its consequences can be catastrophic; as it were, in the 1790’s, with Burke’s reactionary rhetoric, and as it was then with the Lake Poets’ conservative poetry. For a broader understanding of this topic, I shall resort to Hazlitt’s ambiguous relation with Burke, on which I dwelt on in the first chapter of this thesis.

Burke was the progenitor of modern apostasy. Once a leading opposition figure in Parliament, a member of the more progressive wing of the Whigs, for decades he led the main political agenda of his party as a true “hero to radicals”. Similarly, he then employed a clean and persuasive language – that is the reason why James Barry, in the painting *Ulysses and Companion Fleeing from the Cave of Polyphemus* (1776), depicts Burke as the cunning warrior. The French Revolution was a turning point in his career. His speeches and anti-revolutionary writings acquired a hyperbolic, passionate and sublime language. In other words, “the light of his imagination, sportive, dazzling, beauteous as it seemed, was followed by the stroke of death”. He became an “eloquent apostate”, the “most accomplished

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rhetorician that the world ever saw”; and thus reversed the revolutionary current, “putting a spoke in the wheels of knowledge and progressive civilization, and throwing them back for a century and a half at least”\textsuperscript{207}. Such is the power of modern imagination. If, in the ancient world, “ideas were kept too confined and distinct by the material form or vehicle in which they were conveyed”\textsuperscript{208}, modern imagination “glances from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven”\textsuperscript{209} promoting extremes to meet. In this “liberal age”, the counterpart to the argument exposed above, there is a license for political apostasy, for to everyone is allowed to “change sides (…), from one extreme to another”\textsuperscript{210}. Nevertheless, the way this took place in Burke and the Lake Poets was not the same, constrained as they were to “the logic of form”\textsuperscript{211}. In “On the Prose-Style of Poets”, Hazlitt expressed this contrast by two distinct, though equally rustic and sublime images: the eagle and the chamois.

\textit{The Plain-Speaker}, Hazlitt’s last collection of essays, opens with the seminal essay “On the Prose-Style of Poets”. In Tom Paulin’s words, “it concentrates a lifetime’s meditation on the nature of prose and sets out what is in effect a poetics of prose”\textsuperscript{212}. The opening paragraph resorts to the image of the bird/poet with its feet haltering and tottering in the hard ground of prose: “Poets are winged animals, and cleave the air, like birds, with ease to themselves and delight to the beholder; but like those ‘feathered, two-legged things’, when it lights upon the ground of prose and matter-of-facts, they seem not to have the same use of their feet”\textsuperscript{213}.

The first half of the essay describes what is the singularity in matter, rhythm and task of non-fiction prose writing (the essay) as opposed to poetry and in its relation to everyday language and table talks among friends. In the second half, the explanation of “these remarks (…) by a few instances in point”\textsuperscript{214}, Hazlitt descends into a comparative analysis of Burke’s style from a passage in \textit{Letter to a Noble Lord} with a newspaper article on the death of Lord Castlereagh (British diplomat at the Congress of Vienna), followed by a discussion on the prose styles of Coleridge,

\textsuperscript{207} \textit{CWH}, “Arguing in a Circle”, 19, pp. 271, 273.
\textsuperscript{208} \textit{CWH}, “Character of Mr. Burke”, 7, p. 312.
\textsuperscript{210} \textit{CWH}, “Illustrations of The Times Newspaper: on Modern Apostates”, 7, p. 131.
\textsuperscript{211} William Hazlitt \textit{on The Elgin Marbles} (London: Hesperus Press Limited, 2008), p. 34.
\textsuperscript{212} Tom Paulin, “Introduction” to William Hazlitt, \textit{The Plain Speaker: The Key Essays}, p. vii.
\textsuperscript{213} \textit{CWH}, “On the Prose-Style of Poets”, 12, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{214} Idem, p. 10.
Southey, Hunt, Byron and Scott. The threads that bind both parts of the essay are the image “the ground of prose” and the argument “that good prose has shape, form, pattern, beauty or, in Hazlitt’s term, momentum”\(^{215}\).

In the first of these examples, on Burke’s prose style, it is when Hazlitt makes use of the images of the eagle and the chamois as symbols of sublime poetry and prose, respectively:

> It has always appeared to me that the most perfect prose-style, the most powerful, the most dazzling, the most daring, that which went the nearest to the verge of poetry, and yet never fell over, was Burke’s. It has the solidity, and sparkling effect of the diamond (...). Burke’s style is airy, flighty, adventurous, but it never loses sight of the subject; nay, is always in contact with, and derives its increased or varying impulses from it. It may be said to pass yawning gulfs ‘on the unsteadfast footing of a spear’: still it has an actual resting-place and tangible support under it – it is not suspended on nothing. It differs from poetry, as I conceive, like the chamois from the eagle: it climbs to an almost equal height, touches upon a cloud, overlooks a precipice, is picturesque, sublime – but all the while, instead of soaring through the air, it stands upon a rocky cliff, clammers up by abrupt and intricate ways, and browses on the roughest bark, or crops the tender flower. The principle which guides his pen is truth, not beauty – not pleasure, but power.

Initially, it strikes us as strange to see Burke, Hazlitt’s arch rival in the revolutionary cause, chosen as the most perfect example of prose-style. The choice of Burke, however, in addition to the crude sublime landscape described above, establishes, allusively, a bond between counterrevolution and Burke’s *Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*; or, for John Whale, between power and imagination \(^{216}\).

There are a few passages in *The Plain Speaker* where Hazlitt refers readers to Burke’s youthful philosophical work. Before entering politics, says Hazlitt in “On Differences Between Writing and Speaking”, Burke “spent part of his life (…) in writing a treatise on the Sublime and Beautiful”\(^{217}\). In this work, which is a watershed in the topic, “a diligent examination of our passions in our own breast”\(^{218}\), Burke crystalized the differences between the sublime and the beautiful. On the whole, while

\(^{215}\) Paulin, “Introduction” to *The Plain Speaker: The Key Essays*, p. vii.


\(^{217}\) *CWH*, “On the Difference Between Writing and Speaking”, 12, p. 269.

\(^{218}\) Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry, p. 1.
beauty stands for a pleasurable feeling resulting from a resignation of sense perception to representations of the external world, in the presence of the sublime, the senses and imagination are incapable of forming a clear and distinct image. A tension to encompass the whole results in a pleasurable-painful feeling in the mind and body, which is projected onto the summit of tension only to plummet into a void of non-representative images. Spaciously and metaphorically, the precipices of yawning gulfs together with its rugged surface form sublime landscapes par excellence, as the passage below testifies:

Extension is either in length, height, or depth. Of these the length strikes least; an hundred yards of even ground will never work such an effect as a tower an hundred yards high, or a rock or mountain of that altitude. I am apt to imagine likewise, that height is less grand than depth; and that we are more struck at looking down from a precipice, than looking up at an object of equal height (...). A perpendicular has more force in forming the sublime, than an inclined plane; and the effect of a rugged and broken surface seem stronger than where it is smooth and polished

Thus, the antelope is a symbol of resistance to a threatening scene. Without denying the ground, nor, like an eagle, trying to escape from it, it reaches an immense height. Indeed, this does not occur with the same ease or beauty, for it “works the most striking effects out of the most unpromising materials” and deals with “dry matters of fact or close reasoning”\(^\text{220}\). If the eagle flies to Parnassus, the chamois, with its strong legs, earthly bound and solid, stands upon a rocky cliff. The sonorous materiality of this excerpt is meaningful. The sequence of monosyllabic words, rhythmically stressed by unvoiced consonants /t/, /p/ and /k/, mimics the chamois’ hard and gradual ascendance.

The chamois is also a symbol of that act of imagination that works itself up from what is already given, and inherited from tradition. Analysing a passage from Letter to a Noble Lord (“the most rapid, impetuous, glancing, and sportive of all [Burke’s] works”\(^\text{221}\)), Hazlitt asks: how are the British Constitution and Bedford level plain are “embodied in one”\(^\text{222}\) if not by the work of imagination? Either in

\(^{219}\) Idem, p. 72.
poetry or in impassioned prose writing, although through different ways, it is imagination that coalesces one idea into another. However, because in essay prose “the general subject and the particular image, are so far incompatible”\textsuperscript{223}, or, because of “the non-identity between presentation and presented material”\textsuperscript{224}, in order that its tropes and figures occupy the place of arguments, the imagination is artificially and violently wrought with materials, “instead of growing naturally out of them”\textsuperscript{225}. In other words, the tasks involved in the making of the prose essay are toilsome and require a hard and muscular energy, a sublime force, such as the chamois climbing the mountain.

This sense of imagination has some similarity with Coleridge’s more famous definition of it in his \textit{Biographia Literaria}. Working on from Kant’s observations about productive and reproductive imagination\textsuperscript{226}, Coleridge developed the important distinction between imagination and fancy. While fancy consists of the mere modification of materials ready made and provided by empirical phenomenon, imagination is, at first, “a living power and prime agent of all human perception”, and, secondly, “the conscious will” that “dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create”. For this second moment of imagination, Coleridge coined a specific term, \textit{esemplastic} (“to shape into one”\textsuperscript{227}), or, according to Davi Arrigucci’s definition, “an organic way to mould multiple materials into a unity”\textsuperscript{228}.

Hazlitt, the essayist – a pedestrian animal, devoid of the wings of sophisticated theories – never dressed in the garb of philosophical cant. Thus, in his writings, imagination, fancy and poetry are, strictly speaking, indistinguishable terms. Coleridge himself, says Hazlitt in jest, “suppressed his disquisition on the imagination as unintelligible”\textsuperscript{229}, or was unable to explain it to the rest of the world, which amounts to the same thing\textsuperscript{230}. To some extent, this is owed to his poetical

\textsuperscript{223} Idem, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{224} Theodore Adorno, \textit{The Essay as a Form}, \url{www.artsites.ucsc.edu}, p. 165.
\textsuperscript{225} \textit{CWH}, “On the Prose-Style of Poets”, 12, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{228} Arrigucci’s definition is based on Chapter X from \textit{Biographia Literaria}, which he refers to in reference to Drummond’s reflective poetry, and where he frequently resorts to concepts and images coined by English and German romantic writers, \textit{Coração Partido}, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{229} \textit{CWH}, “Coleridge’s Literary Life”, 16, p. 136.
\textsuperscript{230} In “Letter to a Young Man whose education has been neglected”, Thomas De Quincey expresses a similar opinion. If Coleridge comprehended Kant’s philosophy better than any other Englishmen of his
soul; and “his metaphysics have been a dead weight on the wings of his imagination”. Since then, Coleridge, once a great poet, “has chosen to be a bad philosopher and a worse politician”. If his juvenile poetry, like that of Wordsworth and Southey’s, freed words from traditional ties and reacted against every oppression and narrowness of taste, his prose writings spoke for the ruling powers. On the plain ground of prose writing, his flights start spinning, “they oscillate, with a giddy and sickening motion”\textsuperscript{231}, or, to use another of Hazlitt’s simile: it “is always getting into a balloon, and mounting into the air, above the plain ground of prose”\textsuperscript{232}.

Besides, Hazlitt’s final product contradicts in all the patterns of organic forms. Its materials are \textit{ready made} and rather make up, according to Paulin’s analogy, “a piece of \textit{bricolage}”\textsuperscript{233}. Implicit is the idea that, at the end, the prose essay refuses the assumptions of an art separated from practical life. This does not mean that it necessarily aspires to social changes. On the contrary, Burke’s sublime prose reinforces “the cause of despotism”; “it is the excess of individual power, that strikes and gains over [men’s] imagination”. Would it be possible to bring to bear the same imaginative force for contrary means, that is to say, to an art form that is at the service of the people, “the cause of liberty”\textsuperscript{234}?

This is what Hazlitt’s visionary London seems to suggest, according to a metropolitan and democratic version of another sublime image: the \textit{stream of human life}, which can be seen in the concluding paragraph of “On Londoners and Country People”:

Man in London becomes, as Mr. Burke has it, a sort of ‘public creature’. He lives in the eye of the world, and the world in his. If he witnesses less of the details of private life, he has better opportunities of observing its larger masses and varied movements. He sees the stream of human life pouring along the streets – its comforts and embellishments piled up in the shops – the houses are proofs of the industry, the public buildings of the art and magnificence of man; while the public

\textsuperscript{231} CWH, “Coleridge’s Literary Life”, 16, p. 137.
\textsuperscript{232} CWH, “On the Prose-Style of Poets”, 12, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{233} Paulin, “Introduction” to The Plain Speaker, p. xv. It worth remembering that Montaigne once said that the actions brought together in the making of his essays are “only pieces patched together”. Similarly, his essays, which “I presented myself to myself for argument and subject”, resembles more of a \textit{mosaic}. Montaigne, Selected Essays, pp. 113, 129.
\textsuperscript{234} CWH, “The Times Newspaper: on the Connection Between Toad-Eaters and Tyrants”, 7, p. 149.
amusements and places of resort are centre and support for social feelings. A playhouse alone is a school of humanity, where all eyes are fixed on the same gay or solemn scene, where smiles or tears are spread from face to face, and where a thousand hearts beat in unison! (...) In London there is a public; and each man is part of it. We are gregarious, and affect the kind. We have a sort of abstract existence; and a community of ideas and knowledge (rather than local proximity) is the bond of society and good-fellowship. This is one great cause of the tone of political feelings in large and populous cities. There is here a visible body-politic, a type and image of that huge Leviathan the State. We comprehend that vast denomination, the People, of which we see a tenth part daily moving before us; and by having our imaginations emancipated from petty interests and personal dependence, we learn to venerate ourselves as men, and to respect the rights of human nature.

In comparing the landscape this excerpt describes with the one above, about Burke’s prose-style, it is worth noting, to begin with, the classical opposition between the country and the city; or, in specific terms, between mountain gorges, of yawning gulfs, and the metropolitan’s plentiful and overflowing surface. In both cases, the terms at hand are of a sublime nature—it is no coincidence that this last passage opens with a quotation from Burke, approaching readers, by an association of ideas, to his *Enquiry on the Sublime and Beautiful*. Masses of human life are *large*; public-buildings are *magnificent*; the State is a *huge* Leviathan; the people are a *vast* denomination; that is to say, every adjective Burke uses to define the sublime landscape – vastness, infinity, magnitude and power – reappear in the excerpt, with the exception of two of them: *obscurity* and *privation*. Now, obscurity and privation according to Hazlitt’s review of Wordsworth’s poem are among the distinct traits of the country and country people. Hence, for example, their hate towards one another, a hate, it should be recalled in passing, that makes their affections callous, and their eyes dull. Obviously, hate has a different consequence for the *good hater*. A civic virtue par excellence, a good hate involves abstraction; it requires knowledge to hate what must be hated: “tyrants (...) , the enemies of liberty (...) and injury done to the people” 236. But this is the hardest virtue to attain, says Hazlitt, for it does not develop without “having emancipated our imaginations from petty interest and

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personal dependence”. “Reason and imagination are both excellent things”\textsuperscript{237}, even more so when they join hands to foster the breakdown of oppressive obscurity, filling the void with a light of a new collective life. The metropolitan sublime, as the passage suggests, ensures this unity.

To proceed in my comparative analysis of both passages, from “On the Prose-Style of Poets” and “On Londoners and Country People” – between the rustic and metropolitan sublime –, in the former, concepts of truth and power are so engraved in images that they produce a sort of dazzling effect on the imagination; in the latter, the reader never forgets the abstract nature of such concepts as public, State and people. Nevertheless, concepts here are also embodied into images, which are, so to speak, visible. Vision is the organ of the senses that runs through the whole passage: the Londoner lives in the eye of the world; sees the stream of human life; at playhouses, all eyes are fixed on the scene; the State is a visible body-politic; we see the people moving before us. In a long tradition of western philosophy and arts, vision, among all other organs of the senses, is closer to knowledge, establishing a bond between body and mind\textsuperscript{238}. Thus, however abstract or idealized Hazlitt’s vision of London is, the concepts of the understanding, shaped in the river image, are those that give dynamic form to an immense political movement; and this movement is the expression of an emancipated and collective imagination. In the excerpt above, this is also shown by a subtle transition in the use of pronouns: from the impersonal pronoun he (men and women of cities) to the majestic plural we. We, who? The people.

The heart of London is crossed by an immense river, along which nature, now humanized, transmuted into the people, sneaks into the urban landscape. In Hazlitt’s political lexicon, power and people are antipodes to one another. This is a central theme of Hazlitt’s essay “What is the People?”, “one of the most magnificent pieces of political discourse ever penned in England”\textsuperscript{239}, according to Terry Eagleton. The form of a question in the title is a rhetorical gesture, a presumptuous query of an imaginary and conservative interlocutor. To which, Hazlitt answers back, “and who are you that ask the question? One of the people. And yet you would be something! Then you would not have the people nothing”. Then follows blow after blow against

\textsuperscript{237} CWH, “Coleridge’s Literary Life”, 16, p. 137.
the idea that the people are nothing but a mere gathering of human atoms. The people are rather identified with the poorest, “the tears, the sweat, and blood of millions”\textsuperscript{240} that uphold the State.

In this sense, it is surprising to find in the streets of London “a type and image of that huge Leviathan the State”. But the people measure their strength against it. If the State is \textit{huge} (a word that denotes concentrated energy and evokes mountain summits), the people are “a \textit{vast} denomination”. Its sublimity lies in “the stream of human life pouring along the streets”; it is quantitative and conscious of its direction. This does not mean that Hazlitt hoists the flag in favour of this or that political system, for he believes the cause of the people is \textit{militant}, never \textit{triumphant}\textsuperscript{241}. These senses of the people and confrontation were the emancipating twist Hazlitt, the essayist as an adversary, gave to the radical English press in these years of resistance. After all, an essay is a combat!

\textsuperscript{240} C\textit{WH}, “What is the People?”, 7, pp. 259 e 265.

\textsuperscript{241} “So, should the cause of liberty and mankind ever become triumphant, instead of militant, may we not heave a sigh of regret over the past, and think that poor suffering human nature, with all its wrongs and insults, trodden into the earth like a vile weed, was a more interesting topic for reflection? We need not be much alarmed for the event, even if this should be so; for the way to Utopia is not ‘the primrose path of dalliance’; and at the rate we have hitherto gone on, it must be many thousand years off!” \textit{C\textit{WH}}, “Common Places”, 20, p. 138. For a discussion on this passage, as well as others where Hazlitt works on the opposition between militant and triumphant causes, see Kevin Gilmartin, “Afterwords: William Hazlitt – a radical critique of radical opposition?”, In. \textit{Print Politics}, pp. 232-233.
Eccentric and concentric

In some ways the novel is literature’s prodigal son. It refuses the homely warmth, a pleasing and mild place, to venture into the world and to live a life of passion and dangers. It departs to faraway places; discovers lost kingdoms; wages war against ferocious enemies; lives and dies of love; climbs to the zenith, descends to the vilest depths; roams over deserts, seas, villages and cities. Thus wandering, it never settles down. Differently from the biblical character, however, when it returns to its father’s home, by a deviation of route, and is welcomed and feasted by him and his servants, it does not conceal to everyone that it is there only in passing. It is not rare to find in the early origins of novel writing subheadings such as adventures, fortunes and misfortunes, traces of which still appear to this day. Moved by yearnings for novelty and an aversion to ease, it strives for great achievements. This constant search for novelty and adventure is the thread that weaved the plots of two examples of novels that shaped this literary genre: Don Quixote and Robinson Crusoe. In the first, intoxicated by readings, Don Quixote thought he should also profess knight-errantry “redressing all manners of grievances and courting all occasions of expounding himself to dangers”\(^2\). In the latter, Robinson Crusoe went out off the common road, renouncing his father’s counsels, to choose a life of distresses instead of “the middle State”\(^3\), more akin to happiness. Perhaps, the reason for the novels constant search for novelty (which is imprinted in the very word) is due to one of its most distinct traits, its fictitious nature, by means of which it disentangles from itself and “creeps into

\(^1\) Alfonso Reyes, Obras Completas de Alfonso Reyes, IX (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1952), p. 403. I wish to register here my sincere gratitude to the Mexican Latinist and good friend Claudio GH for having brought my attention to this passage.


foreign bodies”. As José Paulo Paes masterly defined, “the novel is the place of otherness”.

The essay, which may be compared to the prodigal son’s brother – on the account of having been a secondary character in studies of literary genres, differs from it in everything. Both an offspring of an artistic and intellectual experiment, halfway between invention and epiphenomena, for over four centuries the essay has rambled carefree and unnoticed in the literary world. When crossing it on the street, during its frequent rambles, we can hardly find any distinguishing trait. Yet, a small familiarity reveals, on the one hand, a fine gentleman – in Hume’s sense of the word, namely, a man whose charms are greater when least suspected, on the other, a whimsical and idiosyncratic character. Learned but not supercilious; fanciful but judiciously realistic; personal and egotistic but respectful and concerned with the differences between men, the essay is always making a gesture to its readers, a friendly invitation to welcome them home and together exchange conversations with an open heart. “An essay is a fireside thing”, says Cynthia Ozick; that is to say, it a place where the “I” and “the other” live together.

It is precisely with this gesture and image of warming welcome, added to the details of simplicity of garments, that Hazlitt describes the persona of Montaigne, “the first among the moderns”, says he, who “led the way” to a kind of writing that intends to be a familiar conversation with the reader. “He does not converse with us like a pedagogue with his pupil, whom he wishes to make as great a blockhead as himself, but like a philosopher and friend”. To this gesture and image, let me add

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4 Cynthia Ozick, “She: Portrait of the Essay as a Warm Body”, In. Essayists on the Essay: Montaigne to Our Time, p. 168. I borrowed from the author the idea to take the essay and the novel as literary characters. For the relation between the novel and the prodigal son the reading of Michael McKeon’s “Parables of the Younger Son (I): Defoe and the Naturalization of Desire” was also inspirational to me. In. The Origins of the English Novel, pp. 315-37.


6 As Carl H. Klaus observed: “despite the extraordinary growth of interest in the essay during the past twenty-five years (…), the essay has largely been ignored in the world of criticism and theory”, “Preface”, In Essayists on the Essay, p. xi.

7 Max Bense, one of the leading German intellectual figures of his time, conceptually defined the essay in terms similar to those exposed here. For him, the essay “is about writing experimentally”; a literature in between creation and conviction. See “On the Essay and its Prose”, In. Essayists on the Essay, pp. 71-74.

8 For this topic, see Márcio Suzuki “O Ensaio e a Arte de Conversar”, In. A Forma e o Sentimento do Mundo: jogo, humor e arte de viver na filosofia do século XVIII. In Suzuki’s words: “Different from the French (who, among other things, have a foible to irritating jabs, puns and witticisms), a gentleman has a manner of acting where no specific civilizing gesture is emphasized”, p. 55.


another, also taken from Hazlitt, about the homeless condition of essayists, “looked upon as foreigners, who are not naturalized even in their native soil”\(^\text{11}\).

That essay writing has refused its homeland and place of origin to settle down on the other side of the English Channel is as certain as its birth with Montaigne. From Hugo Friedrich to Jean Starobinski, Cynthia Ozick to John Jeremiah Sulivan, and Alfonso Reyes to Lucia Miguel Pereira, essayists and scholars all agree that nowhere else did the essay flourish as in England – after its title and style was happily admitted into its adoptive country, as Starobinski approvingly mentions\(^\text{12}\). Lucia Miguel Pereira, herself a handy essay writer, and to whom we owe one of the most thoughtful reflections on the essay in Portuguese, has defined the genre in a single word: *eccentric*. It is worth remembering she uses the term in its primitive sense; namely, someone or something that lacks rigorously a centre. The adjective, according to her, explains what she calls the *nature* of essay writing and the English *character*. In her words, “the essayist writes as an Englishman travels: for the sake of adventure and to discover new horizons”\(^\text{13}\); yet, in another illustrative passage, she claims that the essay, at least that essayism developed in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, seems to “escape from its earthy influences”\(^\text{14}\).

*Home is home, be it never so homely*, says an old English proverb, which suggests, according to Pereira, that the snugness of home may sometimes result in an embittered *ennui*. Now, was it not true that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries many foreigners described England as a place where people hung themselves to pass time? and that “the wisest Englishman”, wrote Stendhal, “is a perfect fool for one hour of the day; he is possessed with mania for suicide, which is the god of that country”\(^\text{15}\). Thus, the British (children of Pluto, according to Heine\(^\text{16}\)), if essay writers, express themselves by antinomies: between a solitary home and an attention to the world seen through the window; an attachment to daily routines and the need to live new experiences; a practical spirit and a restless imagination; a

\(^{11}\) *CWH*, “On the Conversation of Authors”, 12, p. 42.


\(^{16}\) Heinrich Heine, “Gods in Exile”, In. *The Prose Writings of Henrich Heine* (London: Read Books Ltd, 2013). In Heine’s words: “The White Island is occasionally also called Brea, or Britannia. Does this perhaps refer to White Albion, to the chalky cliffs of the English coast? It would be a very humorous idea if England was designated as the land of the dead, as the Plutonian realm, as hell. In such a form, in truth, England has appeared to many as stranger.”
gloomy melancholy and a sporting attitude towards life. And it is from this conflict, when the essayist fathoms the human soul and struggles with idea that the island of Britain, or the essay, is turned into a ship.

If, on the one hand, as John Jeremiah Sullivan has it, “The modern essay – the form we continue to play with – develops not in any one country but within a transnational vibrational field that spans the English channel”\textsuperscript{17}; on the other, Sullivan reminds us of a curious fact: “the word essayist showed up in England before it existed in French (…), not just years but a couple of centuries”\textsuperscript{18}. Montaigne never claimed to be an essayist, and the essay in France after him, continues Sullivan, is “turned into something less intimate, or at least less confiding, becoming Descartes’s meditations and Pascal’s thoughts”\textsuperscript{19}. In a Ben Jonson play, \textit{Epicoene, or The Silent Woman}, first staged at Whitefriars Theatre in December 1609 or January 1610, the character Jack Daw is forced by his listeners “to recite some of his work”. But Jack Daw is at once conceited and a terrible poet. They knew it and started flattering him “to draw him into further clownishness”, saying, “it possesses ‘something in’t like rare wit and sense (…). ‘tis Seneca…’tis Plutarch’. ‘I wonder’, he says, that ‘those fellows have much credit with gentlemen’. ‘They are very grave authors’, his little crowd assures him. ‘Grave asses’!, he says, ‘Mere essayists, a few loose sentences, and that’s all’“\textsuperscript{20}. \textit{Et voila!}, the word essayist enters the world for the first time, not without a pejorative tinge.

Francis Bacon, who probably was in the parterre, had just published a first version of his \textit{Essays} (1597). Before him, King James I, a serious man of letters, published \textit{Essayes of a Prentise} (1584), that is to say, at the same time Montaigne was preparing a second volume of his \textit{Essais}. It is impossible to know whether James I was acquainted with Montaigne’s book: nevertheless, there is evidence that he was, for his tutor George Buchannan, “a Renaissance giant”, taught for several years in Bordeaux, and one of his students was “a local boy named Michel Eyquem”\textsuperscript{21}. In any case, in England, both the essay and the essayist were born at the same time, and both

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18} Idem, p. xvii.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Idem, ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Idem, pp. xxvii-viii. For Ben Jonson’s play, see \textit{Epicoene or the Silent Woman} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 32.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Idem, pp. xxi-ii.
\end{itemize}
“wearing such a cauld of ambiguity”\(^{22}\). Or, in Sullivan’s telling remark, “the essay is French, but essayists are English”\(^{23}\).

As for the etymological origin of the word essay, Sullivan relates to its Latin roots: *exagere, exagium, exigo…* \(^{24}\); that is to say, words that give “a sense of ‘drive out’ or ‘swarm’”; in Starobinski’s definition, “to push out, to chase, then to demand”\(^{25}\). In other words, and according to the hypothesis I have been pursuing here, the essay, shaped like a curve and centripetal, lacks a centre. In this way, the essay shares something of the novel’s prowess, but without ever forfeiting its “meditative temperateness”\(^{26}\). The variety of subjects it deals with is as great, or perhaps greater, than those of novels. In John Gross’ words, “There are essays on Human Understanding, and essays on What I Did in the Holidays; essays on Truth, and essays on potato crisps; essays that start out as book reviews, and essays that end up as sermons”\(^{27}\). However, the main distinction between one and the other – the novel and the essay – lies not in the matter, but in the manner. If the novel, as I have said above, never returns home but stays as an illustrious guest, the essay, which I have compared to the prodigal son’s older brother, swaying back and forth from submission to disallowance, has discovered under the manor house of its family a place of its own.

It was only later in life, shortly after his father’s death, and after holding many public offices, such as that of counsellor in the parliament of Bordeaux, that Montaigne withdrew to his inherited property, more specifically, to the tower where he built up a library, to thinking and writing his essays. Montaigne, as is well known, is not Michel’s family name, but the name of his property. It was thus he wished to be remembered – he was the first in his lineage to drop his surname (Eyquem) –, precisely because there he found safe harbour for the “floating tides”\(^{28}\) of a fertile and restless mind. We know from Montaigne’s own words the moment he first conceived of writing essays, which deserves to be read in its entirety:

\(^{22}\) Idem, p. xxviii.
\(^{23}\) Idem, p. xviii.
\(^{24}\) Idem, p. xxiii.
\(^{25}\) Jean Starobinski, “Can One Define the Essay?”, p. 111.
When I lately retired to my own house, determined as far as possible to concern myself with nothing else than spending in privacy and repose the little remainder of time I have to live, I fancied I could not more oblige my mind than to permit it a full leisure to entertain itself and come to rest in itself, which I hoped it might now the more easily do, having with time become more settled and mature; but I find, ‘Idleness produces ever-changing thoughts’, that, quite the contrary, like a runaway horse it gives itself a hundred times more trouble than it used to take for others, and creates me so many chimeras and fantastic monsters, one upon another, without order or design, that, the better at leisure to contemplate their strangeness and absurdity, I have begun to record them, hoping in time to make it ashamed of them.29

In a commentary to this passage, the last paragraph of the essay “Of Idleness”, the important North-American philologist and Romanist, Blanchard Bates, recalls that this “pleasant and comfortable”30 place, as Montaigne describes his own house, is not to be confused with “an ivory tower”31. When removing his eyes from books and casting out a glance through the large tower’s windows, “he could see all the work on the estate, and he could easily step out when anything required his personal attention”32. Montaigne’s solitude, argues Erich Auerbach, was something to which no name had yet been given, a means by which he gave “free rein”33 to the inner forces of his mind and body. Bates’ observations interest me particularly because of the mention of a project idealized by Hazlitt and implemented by his grandson, William Carew Hazlitt, a notable biographer of the Victorian era, namely, the edition of Charles Cotton’s seventeenth century translations of Montaigne. Moreover, they interest me, together with Montaigne’s passage above quoted, because they capture the eccentric and concentric movements I have put forward in this reflection on the essay. In a snug and restful room, the mind mimics a runaway horse, escapes from itself, “travels a hundred millions of leagues in a moment of time”34. If one cannot define the essay, as I believe is the case, I hoped, at least, and following Starobinski’s valuable observations35, to show that more than in any other literary genre – or,

30 Idem, p. 488.
32 Idem, ibid.
33 Erich Auerbach, Ensaios de Literatura Ocidental, p. 148.
according to Lucia Miguel Pereira, more than in any other “mental attitude”\textsuperscript{36} –, the exercise of inner reflection, the awareness of self and the attainment of a room of one’s own, which are all inherent aspects of the essay, are inseparable from the inquiry into the outer reality, the recognition of others and the consciousness that the work of a writer’s imagination would be incomplete without an active involvement of readers.

\textsuperscript{36} Lucia Miguel Pereira, “Sobre os Ensaístas Ingleses”, p. 17.
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